



<https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2025-24-2-161-172>

EDN: GXCHVN


Research article / Научная статья

Armenian Pilots' Contribution to the Victory in the Great Patriotic War

Kliment A. Harutyunyan^a , Ashot A. Melkonyan^{a, b}  ,
Edita V. Dadayan^a 

^a Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia,
Yerevan, Armenia

^b Yerevan State University, Yerevan, Armenia

 ashamelk@yahoo.com

Abstract: The authors present for the first time the contribution of Armenian pilots to the common victory in the Great Patriotic War and is based mainly on the basis of newly discovered archival documents. Along with representatives of other peoples of the Soviet Union, thousands of Armenian pilots fought in the Red Army Air Force. More than a thousand of them distinguished themselves in the air battles for the Baltics, the Black Sea region, and other regions of the USSR and were awarded orders and medals. Many Armenians held high positions in various units of the Red Army Air Force. Sergei Khudyakov (Armenak Khanferyants, the Hero of the Soviet Union) was the commander of the 1st, then 12th Air Army, Sergei Sardarov was the commander of the 123rd Air Division, Rafael Kaprelyan was the commander of the 89th Air Transport Regiment (the Hero of the Soviet Union). In total, 14 Armenian pilots were awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union, and Nelson Stepanyan was awarded twice hero of the Soviet Union.

Keywords: National composition of the Red Army, Armenian people in the Great Patriotic War, Armenian national rifle divisions, Armenian soldiers, Armenian naval pilots

Authors' contributions: All authors contributed equally to the research and writing of the article, reviewed the final text and bear equal responsibility.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

For citation: Arutyunyan K.A., Melkonyan A.A., Dadayan E.V. "Armenian pilots' contribution to the victory in the Great Patriotic War." *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 24, no. 2 (May 2025): 161–172. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2025-24-2-161-172>



Вклад летчиков-армян в победу над фашизмом в Великой Отечественной войне


Климент Амасиевич Арутюнян^a ,

Ашот Агасиевич Мелконян^{a, b}  ,

Эдита Варужановна Дадаян^a 

^a Институт истории Национальной академии наук Республики Армения,
Ереван, Армения

^b Ереванский государственный университет, Ереван, Армения

 ashamelk@yahoo.com

Аннотация: В статье в контексте истории участия армянского народа в борьбе против фашизма на основе новых, ранее не публиковавшихся архивных документов, представлен вклад летчиков-армян в общую победу над фашизмом в Великой Отечественной войне. Вместе с представителями других народов Советского Союза тысячи летчиков-армян сражались в рядах Военно-воздушных сил Красной армии. Из них более тысячи отличились в воздушных боях за Прибалтику, Причерноморье и другие регионы СССР и были награждены орденами и медалями. Многие сыны армянского народа занимали высокие посты в разных подразделениях ВВС Красной Армии. Сергей Худяков (Арменак Ханферянц, Герой Советского Союза) был командующим Первой, затем 12-й Воздушной армией, Сергей Сардаров – командиром 123-й авиадивизии, Рафаел Капрелян (Герой Советского Союза) – командиром 89-го авиатранспортного полка. В целом 14 летчикам-армянам было присвоено звание Героя Советского Союза. Нельсон Степanian это высокое звание получил дважды.

Ключевые слова: Национальный состав Красной армии, армянский народ в Великой Отечественной войне, армянские национальные стрелковые дивизии, воины-армяне, морские летчики-армяне

Вклад авторов: Все авторы внесли равный вклад в исследование и написание статьи, ознакомились с окончательным текстом и несут равную ответственность.

Заявление о конфликте интересов: Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Для цитирования: Арутюнян К.А., Мелконян А.А., Дадаян Э.В. Вклад летчиков-армян в победу над фашизмом в Великой Отечественной войне // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: История России. 2025. Т. 24. № 2. С. 161–172. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2025-24-2-161-172>

Introduction

Relevance. In the context of the current complex geopolitical processes, the study of the history of World War II and the Great Patriotic War, in particular, is not only of scientific, but also of great educational value.

Along with other nations of the USSR, the Armenian people made a significant contribution to the historic victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War. In total, about 600 thousand Armenians fought in the war, 300 thousand from Soviet Armenia, more than 200 thousand from other republics of the Soviet Union, and about 100 thousand from foreign countries. More than 200 thousand Armenians lost their lives in the war¹. During the war, 11,635 soldiers were awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union, 106 of them were Armenians². Both Marshal of the Soviet Union Ivan Khristoforovich Bagramyan and naval pilot, Guards Lieutenant Colonel Nelson Georgievich Stepanyan became Heroes of the Soviet Union twice over. We should remind that only 115 people became double Heroes of

¹ *Istoriia Armenii. Noveishii period (1918–1945 gg.)* [History of Armenia. The Newest Period (1918–1945)] (Yerevan: [N.s.], 2010), 577.

² K.A. Arutyunyan, *Armianskii narod v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine 1941–1945 gg.* [Armenian people in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945] (Yerevan: Zangak-97 Publ., 2018), 679–790.

the Soviet Union for their courage in the Great Patriotic War³. 26 Armenians became Full Cavaliers of the Order of Glory⁴.

As of December 31, 1945, through the Great Patriotic War, 68 ethnically Armenian generals, one Admiral of the Fleet (Ivan Stepanovich Isakov-Ter Isahakyan), and one Marshal of Aviation (Sergey Aleksandrovich Khudyakov (Armenak Artemovich Khanfer-yants)) participated. In the post-war period, another 89 Armenians who had participated in the war were awarded the rank of general, and 9 Armenians were awarded the rank of admiral. Thus, 157 Armenians who participated in the war were awarded the rank of general or equivalent. On March 11, 1955, I.Kh. Bagramyan became Marshal of the Soviet Union (from November 20, 1935 to May 7, 1976) and only 33 other outstanding Soviet military figures were awarded this rank⁵.

On March 3, 1955, I.S. Isakov was awarded the rank of Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union. Two more people were awarded this rank – N.G. Kuznetsov (March 3, 1955) and S.G. Gorshkov (October 28, 1967)⁶. On April 29, 1975, Hamazasp Khachaturovich Babadzhanyan was awarded the rank of Chief Marshal of Armored Forces. Earlier P.A. Rotmistrov had been awarded this rank (on April 28, 1962)⁷. On May 7, 1980, Sergei Khristoforovich Aganov, a participant in the Soviet-Finnish War and the Great Patriotic War was also awarded the rank of Marshal of Engineering Troops⁸.

During the Great Patriotic War, among ethnically Armenian military leaders, Admiral I.S. Isakov held the post of First Deputy People's Commissar of the USSR Navy and Chief of the Main Naval Staff. Marshal of Aviation S.A. Khudyakov was First Deputy Commander of the Red Army Air Forces and Chief of Staff of the Air Force. General of the Army I.Kh. Bagramyan was the commander of the 1st Baltic Fleet, and in total, three Armenians were army commanders, 8 were corps commanders, 28 were division commanders, and about 100 were brigade and regiment commanders⁹.

The Red Army included 6 Armenian national rifle divisions. The 89th Armenian Taman three-time decorated Rifle Division had a glorious combat path from the Caucasus Mountains through: Kuban, Taman, Kerch, Crimea, Poland, and Germany. The 409th Armenian Rifle Division began its combat path from the foothills of the Caucasus; it took an active part in the battles for the liberation of: Kuban, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Austria and Czechoslovakia and received the honorary name of the Kirovograd-Bratislava division. It was awarded the Order of Bogdan Khmel'nitsky, second degree. The 390th Armenian Rifle Division took part in the fierce and bloody battles in Kerch (March-May 1942). In September-October 1942, at great cost of life, the 408th Armenian Division was among the military units that blocked the Germans' way to Transcaucasia. From Iran through Ukraine, Stalingrad, Belarus, and to Baltics, was the glorious combat path of the 51st Guards (former 76th Armenian Mountain Rifle) Division, which was awarded the Order of Lenin and the Order of the Red Banner. During the war the 261st Rifle Division remained on the territory of Soviet Armenia, it defended the state border with Turkey and

³ *Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuzu. Istoriko-statisticheskii ocherk* [Heroes of the Soviet Union. Historical and statistical essay] (Moscow: Voenizdat Publ., 1987), 245.

⁴ *Kavaleriy ordena Slavy trekh stepenei, biograficheskii ocherk* [Cavaliers of the Order of Glory of three degrees, biographical sketch] (Moscow: Voenizdat Publ., 2000), 17–657.

⁵ *Sovetskaya voennaya entsiklopediia* [Soviet Military Encyclopedia] (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo ministerstva oborony SSSR Publ., 1978), 169.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁸ *Krasnaya Zvezda* [Red Star], no. 106, May 8, 1980, 3.

⁹ K.A. Arutyunyan, *Armianskii narod v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, 647.

simultaneously prepared and sent infantry companies and battalions to the front. In addition to those listed, during the war, from the Armenian SSR: the 31st, 61st, 136th (15th Guards), 138th (70th Guards), 151st, 236th, 320th, 406th Rifle Divisions, as well as a number of brigades were formed in which a significant part of the personnel were Armenians¹⁰. In battle Armenian soldiers proved to be skilled artillerymen, tankers, pilots, sailors, signalmen, etc.

In various sections of the frontline, there were many representatives of the Transcaucasian peoples. Famous Russian historian A. Yu. Bezugolny notes:

The number of the Transcaucasian peoples was especially large during the defensive battle in the North Caucasus in the autumn and winter of 1942–1943. For example, as of August 1, 1942, at the beginning of the battle for the Caucasus, the three armies of the Transcaucasian Front (44th, 45th, 46th) included almost 175.5 thousand representatives of the Transcaucasian peoples, primarily Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis¹¹.

In this regard, the study of the contribution of each people of the former USSR, including citizens of the Armenian SSR, to the common victory over fascism is an important scientific and practical task.

Elaboration of the problem. A large number of works have been written on this issue. Nevertheless, many problems still need to be studied. In this regard, we can highlight such topics as: ethnic composition, factors of recruitment, organization, combat use of the Red Army, the Soviet government's national policy during the war, and the cohesion of the USSR peoples as a source of achieving victory over fascism, etc. It is no coincidence that recently post-Soviet historiography has paid much attention to the study of this problem¹². According to A. Yu. Bezugolny, “during the Great Patriotic War, the conscription of local nationalities in the union and autonomous republics, as well as the formation of national military units were given a hefty boost due to the heavy losses of personnel and the occupation by the enemy of the traditional recruitment zone of the Red Army - a significant territory of the European part of the USSR.”¹³

There are a number of valuable scientific works in Armenian historiography covering the participation of the Armenian people in the Great Patriotic War. However, to this day there is no special general study on the exploits of Armenian pilots. In addition, there are few studies on the issue of Lend-Lease in Russian literature¹⁴. In this regard, only a few works on the activities of Marshal S.A. Khudyakov and double Hero of the Soviet Union Nelson Stepanyan can be considered an exception¹⁵. This article is aimed at filling the gaps

¹⁰ K.A. Arutyunyan, *Armianskii narod v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine*, 648.

¹¹ A.Yu. Bezugolny, “The Ethnic Aspect in Red Army Recruitment During the Great Patriotic War: A Historical and Statistical Review,” *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 19, no. 2 (2020): 304.

¹² F.L. Sinitsyn, *Sovetskaia natsiia i voina: Natsional'nyi vopros v SSSR. 1933–1945* [Soviet Nation and War: The National Question in the USSR. 1933–1945] (Moscow: Tsenterpoligraf Publ., 2018); A.Yu. Bezugolny, L.I. Borodkin, E.M. Goryushina, *Narody SSSR na frontakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny: statisticheskoe i voenno-antropologicheskoe issledovanie* [Peoples of the USSR on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War: statistical and military-anthropological study] (Rostov-on-Don: Federal'noe gosudarstvennoe budzhetnoe uchrezhdenie nauki “Federal'nyi issledovatel'skii tsentr Iuzhnyi nauchnyi tsentr Rossiiskoi akademii nauk” Publ., 2022).

¹³ A.Yu. Bezugolny, *Natsionalnyi sostav Krasnoi armii* [National composition of the Red Army. 1918–1945] (Moscow: Tsenterpoligraf Publ., 2021), 11.

¹⁴ N.A. Danilov, “Lend-lease aviation supplies to the USSR in the frame of Anti-Hitler coalition strategies,” *Bulletin of Volgograd State University* 16, no. 2 (2009): 5–10.

¹⁵ K.A. Arutyunyan, *Marshal aviatsii S.A. Khudyakov – A.A. Khanferyants* [Marshal of Aviation S.A. Khudyakov – A.A. Khanferyants] (Yerevan: Zangak-97 Publ., 2008); N. Zaryan, *Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuzu kapitan N.G. Stepanyan* [Hero of the Soviet Union Captain N.G. Stepanyan] (Erevan: ArmFAN Publ., 1943); V. Gurkin, “Yarkaia zhizn Nelsona Stepanyana [The Bright Life of Nelson Stepanyan],” in *Sbornik materialov*

in Russian and Armenian historiography in terms of covering the contribution of Armenian pilots to the victory in the Great Patriotic War, and their participation in utilizing aviation supplies to the USSR under Lend-Lease.

The purpose of the study is to reveal the contribution of the Armenian people to the victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War in the context of the general history of the Great Patriotic War by using the example of the participation of Armenian pilots in it.

Source base. The article was prepared on the basis of archival documents from the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, the Central Naval Archives of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, and relevant literature and periodicals.

In the ranks of naval aviation

During the Great Patriotic War, more than a thousand Armenian naval pilots fought in the ranks of the Air Forces of the Baltic, Black Sea, Northern, and Pacific Fleets; they were awarded orders and medals with some of them being awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union.

By the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of October 23, 1942, for 58 combat missions from June 28 to December 28, 1941 (of which 20 combat missions were on the Southern Front; 38 on the approaches to Leningrad in the North-West direction), commander of the air unit of the 3rd Air Squadron of the 8th Air Brigade of the Air Force of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet, Junior Lieutenant Nelson Georgievich Stepanyan was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union¹⁶. In these battles, in an Il-2 aircraft, together with his group, he destroyed: 8 tanks, 88 vehicles, 8 armored vehicles, 32 anti-aircraft guns, 33 anti-aircraft machine guns, 10 carts, 8 vans, 1 locomotive, 1 ammunition depot, 2 cisterns, 4 anti-aircraft machine guns, and many enemy fighters¹⁷. From June 28 to September 10, 1941, Nelson Stepanyan also distinguished himself in the bloody battles on the approaches to Odessa and Nikolaev, during which he was wounded. Soon, after returning to duty, starting from September 28, 1941, he carried out combat missions again on the Leningrad Front. For exemplary performance of fighting tasks of the Southern Front command, on November 24, 1941, he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. This was his first combat award¹⁸. Soon N.G. Stepanyan was awarded the rank of lieutenant and was appointed commander of an air squadron. By order of Vice-Admiral V.F. Tributs, No. 29/N of June 9, 1942, for exemplary performance of fighting tasks, N.G. Stepanyan was awarded the Order of Lenin¹⁹. By the fall of 1942, N.G. Stepanyan became a Captain and commander of the 57th Aviation Regiment of the 8th Aviation Brigade of the Baltic Front Air Force. From June to October 1942, he successfully carried out 36 combat missions on the Leningrad Front and was awarded a second Order of the Red Banner (order No. 74/N of October 21, 1942). In early 1944, N.G. Stepanyan was already a guard major, and from April 12, he was the commander of the 47th Assault Aviation Regiment of the 11th Assault

mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii 'Stanovlenie i razvitiie grazhdanskoi aviatsii v Rossii (1910–1940-ye gg.)' (Ulyanovsk: Ulianovskii gosudarstvennyi tekhnicheskii universitet Publ., 2014), 154–171; V. Gurkin, *Uletevshie v nebesa* [Flew into the skies] (Ulyanovsk: Ulianovskii institut grazhdanskoi aviatsii Publ., 2017); K.A. Arutyunyan, *Nelson Stepanyan* [Nelson Stepanyan] (Yerevan: Institut istorii natsionalnoi Akademii nauk Respubliki Armeniia Publ., 2015).

¹⁶ TSVMA RF, f. 3, op. 2421, d. 3, l. 97–99; N.G. Stepanyan was born on April 10, 1913 in the city of Shushi, Elizavetpol Governorate, Russian Empire.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., f. 89, op. 2421, d. 2, l. 97–98.

¹⁹ Ibid., f. 3, op. 2, d. 562, l. 304.

Aviation Division, the history of which is inextricably linked with the heroic defense of Leningrad.

After the breakthrough of the Leningrad blockade, N.G. Stepanyan's regiment was sent to the Crimean front in April 1944, where it took an active part in the liberation of the peninsula by dealing crushing blows to the enemy near Sevastopol, Feodosia, Sudak, etc. By order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, № 0115 of May 4, 1944, the 47th Assault Aviation Regiment was awarded the honorary title of Feodosia assault aviation regiment. On June 26, 1944, for his successful command of the regiment and courage in fighting for the liberation of Crimea, N.G. Stepanyan was awarded a third Order of the Red Banner²⁰. On July 27, 1944, he was awarded the military rank of Guards Lieutenant Colonel²¹. In mid-May 1944, N.G. Stepanyan returned to Leningrad with his regiment and took an active part in fighting for the liberation of the Leningrad Region and the Baltic republics. On August 20, 1944, by commander of the 11th Assault Aviation Division, Colonel D.I. Manzhosov, N.G. Stepanyan was presented the second title as a Hero of the Soviet Union. The award sheet states that during the Great Patriotic War he carried out 259 successful combat missions and personally destroyed: 5 enemy transport units with total displacement of 18 thousand tons, a destroyer, 2 rifle ships, a minesweeper, 2 patrol and 2 torpedo boats, up to 5,000 enemy soldiers and officers, 80 tanks, 600 vehicles, 60 anti-aircraft artillery guns, 40 field artillery guns, 130 machine-gun positions, 40 railway cars, and a locomotive. He destroyed 4 temporary bridges, shot down two Junkers-88 aircraft in an air battle, and destroyed 25 enemy aircraft of various models on the ground²². However, N.G. Stepanyan never received his second Gold Star Medal of the Hero of the Soviet Union, since on December 14, 1944 he died while carrying out a combat mission. In addition, a decree by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on awarding N.G. Stepanyan the title of double Hero of the Soviet Union was issued only on March 6, 1945²³.

By the same decree, Nelson Stepanyan's fellow soldier and fellow countryman, deputy squadron commander, Senior Lieutenant Yefim Grigorievich Udaltsov was awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union. Prior to that, he had been awarded the Order of the Red Banner and the Order of the Patriotic War, first degree²⁴.

In the first days of the war, military commissar of the 1st Mine-and-torpedo Aviation Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Grigory Zakharovich Oganezov enjoyed broad authority in the Baltic Front Air Force. The regiment commander was Colonel E.N. Preobrazhensky. Together with the regiment commissar, he organized and commanded the first bombings of Berlin, Hamburg and other cities of Nazi Germany. From June 22 to October 8, 1941, the regiment carried out 1,131 combat missions, 78 of which were to Berlin and a number of industrial centers of Germany. By the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for courage in organizing and bombing military targets in Berlin, regiment commander, Colonel E.N. Preobrazhensky was awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union, and regiment commissar, Lieutenant Colonel G.Z. Oganessov was awarded the Order of the Red Banner²⁵.

²⁰ TSVMA RF, f. 88, op. 2, d. 562, l. 297.

²¹ TSVMA RF, Personal file of twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Guards Lieutenant Colonel N.G. Stepanyan, № 170753, l. 7.

²² TSVMA RF, f. 3, op. 2422, d. 11, l. 184–187.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., l. 204–207. E.G. Udaltsov was born in 1922 in the village of Fioletovo in the Gugark region of Armenia.

²⁵ Ibid., f. 88, op. 2, d. 461, l. 196.

In the ranks of the Baltic Front Air Force, others who distinguished themselves with courage were 35th Assault Aviation Regiment, Junior Lieutenant Arutyun Surenovich Porsugyan and pilot-navigator of the aircraft of the 3rd Air Squadron of the 1st Guards Mine-and-torpedo Aviation Regiment, Guards Senior Lieutenant Nikita Martynovich Sagatellov, both of whom were awarded the Order of the Red Banner. Chief of Staff of the 15th Separate Reconnaissance Aviation Regiment, Major Artavazd Georgievich Yeribekyan and pilot of the 35th Assault Aviation Regiment, Junior Lieutenant Mnatsakan Zakharovich Dzhansuzyan were awarded both also the Order of the Patriotic War, first degree; pilot of the 1st Air Squadron of the 4th Guards Fighter Aviation Regiment Guards, Senior Lieutenant Sergei Tigranovich Apinov and senior air gunner of the 26th Separate Reconnaissance Aviation Squadron Sergeant Iosif Nikolaevich Azizyan were both awarded the Order of the Red Star²⁶.

Naval pilots also distinguished themselves with courage in the ranks of the Air Force of the Red Banner Black Sea Fleet.

From August 19, 1941, to September 25, 1943, 22 combat missions were carried out by pilot of the 5th Air Squadron of the 11th Guards Regiment of the 63rd Air Brigade, Guards Lieutenant Suren Ambartsumovich Tashchiyev, who shot down 11 enemy aircraft. The pilot of one of those aircraft was commander of the Air Force group of the Wehrmacht Army Group "South." On February 27, 1943, S.A. Tashchiyev was presented to the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union, and also was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. Prior to that, the brave pilot had been already awarded the Order of the Red Banner and the Order of the Red Star. On September 25, 1943, the last day of his life, he shot down two more enemy aircraft. S.A. Tashchiyev died like a hero. By the Decree of President of the Russian Federation B.N. Yeltsin of February 16, 1995, Guards Lieutenant S.A. Tashchiyev was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of Russia²⁷.

In the heroic defense of Sevastopol and in the battle for the Caucasus, Captain Vardges Margarovich Vardanyan, commander of the 2nd Air Squadron of the 8th Guards Assault Aviation Regiment of the 11th Assault Aviation Division fought with extraordinary bravery. He died in battle on September 14, 1943. Prior to that, the pilot had been awarded the Order of the Red Banner twice. After his death, he was posthumously presented to the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union and was awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, first degree²⁸.

In the ranks of the Air Force, personnel who distinguished themselves with courage and heroism as follows: Deputy Commander of the 80th Separate Air Squadron Captain, Shaen Levonovich Agekyan, pilot of the 3rd Air Squadron of the 6th Guards Air Regiment, Lieutenant Alexander Ivanovich Kasabyan, pilot of the 69th Fighter Aviation Regiment, Captain-Lieutenant Vladimir Tadevosovich Mikayelyants, radio operator gunner, Junior Lieutenant Khristofor Georgievich Arutyunov, commander of the 5th Air Base, Major Ruben Nikitovich Beglyarov (they were awarded the Order of the Red Banner), pilot-navigator of the crew of the 18th Air Squadron sergeant-major, Manuk Sarkisovich Minasyan, chief of communications of the 2nd Air Squadron of the 40th Air Regiment, Captain Sargis Misakovich Misakyan, and mechanic of the air unit of the 3rd Air Squadron of the same

²⁶ TSVMA RF, f. 88, op. 2, d. 473, l. 255, 256; d. 275, l. 368; d. 415, l. 16; d. 292, l. 4–5; f. 3, op. 1, d. 641, l. 276; f. 3, op. 2, d. 172, l. 159.

²⁷ *Krasnaia Zvezda* [Red Star], February 18, 1995; S.A. Tashchiev was born on March 22, 1919 in the village of Chaltyr, Myasnikovsky District, Rostov Region.

²⁸ TSVMA RF, f. 3, op. 1, d. 680, l. 200–201.

regiment, Senior Technical Lieutenant Khachatur Nikolaevich Grigoryan (they were awarded the Order of the Red Star)²⁹ etc.

In the harsh subarctic environment, the pilots of the Northern Fleet Air Force bravely protected the sea communications, reliably covering the right flank of the Karelian Front and thereby not allowing the enemy to fully use its forces against convoys traveling from the USA and England to the USSR³⁰.

In the ranks of the Northern Fleet Air Force, along with Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians and representatives of other peoples of the Soviet Union, fought alongside Armenian naval pilots. By order of Northern Fleet Commander-in-Chief, Admiral A.G. Golovko, № 24/n of July 23, 1942, for combat skill and courage during combat missions and for personally shooting down three enemy aircraft, Senior Lieutenant Emil Markosovich Dilanyan, commander of the air unit of the 2nd Fighter Squadron of the 78th Air Regiment was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. On August 5, 1942, in an air battle he shot down a Junkers-87 bomber³¹. In this battle, the pilot was badly wounded in his left arm (the arm was later amputated), and the aircraft caught fire and began to fall. Despite severe pain, Senior Lieutenant E.M. Dilanyan jumped from the aircraft and landed safely via parachute. By order of Admiral A.G. Gorshkov, № 31 of September 25, 1942, for this feat he was awarded the Order of the Red Star³².

In the ranks of the Northern Fleet Air Force, others who distinguished themselves with courage as follows: pilot-navigator of the 46th Assault Aviation Regiment Gevorg Martirosovich Oganyan, air unit commander of the 3rd Air Squadron of the 78th Fighter Aviation Regiment Grigor Gukasevich Dzheriyan, pilot of the 3rd Air Squadron of the 20th Fighter Aviation Regiment, Junior Lieutenant Vasily Aleksandrovich Manukyan, air unit commander of the 30th Separate Air Squadron, lieutenant Mkrtych Karapetovich Cherkezyan, aircraft mechanic of the air squadron, Senior Sergeant Arshaluys Vaganovich Kotandzhyan, assistant commander of the 16th Air Base, Major Andrei Beniaminovich Petrosyan, and party organizer of the battalion of the 9th Air Brigade, Captain Serob Aramovich Manukyan, whom among others who were awarded orders and medals³³.

Armenian naval pilots of the Pacific Fleet Air Force actively participated in the defeat of militaristic Japan by the Red Army in August 1945.

By order of Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral I.S. Yumashev, № 82/n, of February 22, 1946, for courage and fearlessness in the combat missions, Commander of the 2nd Squadron of the 26th Guards Assault Aviation Regiment, Guards Senior Lieutenant Viktor Gareginovich Agababov was awarded the Order of the Red Banner. During three combat missions, he sank one enemy transport unit with a displacement of 3,000 tons. By order of Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet Air Force, Lieutenant General of Aviation P.N. Lemeshko, № 0414/n, of August 26, 1945, pilot of the 3rd Squadron of the 33rd Aviation Regiment, Lieutenant Mkrtych Gurgenovich Amatuni was awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, second degree. The same award was given to commander of the air unit of the 1st Squadron of the 49th Air Regiment, Senior Lieutenant Rafael Avdeevich Bazadzhyan, and pilot of the 122nd Separate Squadron, Lieutenant Karp Ivanovich Mkrtchyan. Pilot-navigator of the air unit of the 53rd Separate Squadron, Lieutenant Perch

²⁹ TSVMA RF, f. 3, op. 1, d. 530, l. 343; d. 652, l. 125; f. 920, op. 2, d. 225, l. 373, 516, 465.

³⁰ *Krasnoznamennyi Severnyi flot* [Red Banner Northern Fleet] (Moscow: Voenizdat Publ., 1983), 141.

³¹ TSVMA RF, f. 3, op. 1, d. 549, l. 32–33.

³² Ibid., d. 550, l. 86–87.

³³ Ibid., d. 702, l. 111; d. 609, l. 620; d. 1048, l. 418; d. 1514, l. 227; d. 152, l. 253, 153.

Arutyunovich Kasparov and senior inspector of the political department, Major Stepan Asaturovich Shmavonyan were awarded the Order of the Red Star; pilot of the 3rd squadron of the 48th Air Regiment, Junior Lieutenant Arutyun Georgievich Martirosyan and many others were also awarded the medal "For Courage."³⁴

In the ranks of frontline aviation

At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, on July 22-25, 1941, in order to strengthen the Red Army Air Force, frontline aviation was created, and a position of commander of the Red Army Air Force was approved. Lieutenant General of Aviation A.A. Novikov was appointed to this position and Major General of Aviation S.A. Khudiyakov became his chief of staff. In the fierce and bloody battles of the initial period of the war there also fought Armenian pilots. Many of them were awarded orders and medals. By the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of July 21, 1942, commander of the 416th Fighter Aviation Regiment of the Northwestern Front, Battalion Commissar Lazar Sergeevich Chapchakhov was posthumously awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union. From June 22 to April 5, 1941 (From June 22, 1941 to April 5, 1942), L.S. Chapchakhov carried out 268 combat missions on the approaches to Leningrad; in 59 air battles he personally shot down 8 enemy aircraft, and 19 as part of a group³⁵. Prior to that, by order of Commander of the Northwestern Front, Lieutenant General P.A. Kurochkin, № 0931/n, of November 27, 1941, L.S. Chapchakhov had been awarded the Order of Lenin³⁶. He was the first Armenian to be awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War.

From June 22 to December 31, 1941, 58 Armenian soldiers were awarded the Order of the Red Banner. By the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of July 8, 1941, the first Armenian to be awarded this order was deputy squadron commander of the 8th High-speed Bomber Aviation Regiment, Senior Lieutenant Patrick Oganessian Gazazyan³⁷. After receiving the award, Patrick Gazazyan continued to fight on the Western Front and distinguished himself in fierce fighting for Bryansk, Sukhinichi, and Orsha, destroying enemy men and materiel. On October 19, 1941, near the city of Orsha (Byelorussia), when his bomber was shot down, he deliberately directed his burning aircraft onto a bridge across which a column of enemy vehicles and tanks was moving³⁸.

On the third day of the war, such a feat was performed by a squadron commander of the 31st Air Regiment of the Northwestern Front Air Force, Senior Political Instructor Sarkis Mikhailovich Airapetov. On June 24, 1941, in Taurage (Lithuania), while carrying out a combat mission, the bomber's engine was hit by an enemy anti-aircraft artillery shell and then Airapetov's aircraft was set on fire by machine gun from a German fighter. S.M. Airapetov directed the burning aircraft at an enemy tank column moving along the road and crashed into it³⁹. For this feat, the selfless pilot was posthumously awarded the Order of the Red Banner. It should be noted that Captain Nikolai Gastello performed a similar feat on June 26, 1941.

³⁴ TSVMA RF, op. 47, d. 148, l. 267; op. 1, d. 1580, l. 25; d. 1571, l. 37; d. 1513, l. 75; d. 1588, l. 88; d. 1590, l. 40.

³⁵ TSAMO RF, f. 33, op. 793756, d. 53, l. 17–19; L.S. Chapchakhov was born on March 6, 1911 in the village of Bol'shiye Saly, Myasnikovsky District, Rostov Region. He died on April 13, 1942.

³⁶ Ibid., op. 682524, d. 112, l. 154–156.

³⁷ Ibid., op. 42436, d. 47, l. 177.

³⁸ *Kommunist* [Communist], November 29, 1941.

³⁹ *Vo slavu Rodiny* [For the Glory of the Motherland], February 27, 1942.

By the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of June 20, 1942, pilot of the 81st Bomber Aviation Regiment of the Southern Front Air Force, Junior Lieutenant Avetik Petrosovich Sirekanyan was awarded the Order of Lenin for courage⁴⁰. The following were awarded the Order of the Red Banner: pilot of the 69th Fighter Regiment, Lieutenant Vladimir Tadevosovich Mikayelyants, air unit commander of the 152nd Separate Army Reconnaissance Squadron of the Crimean Front Air Force, Senior Lieutenant Ivan Sergeyevich Petrosyan, air unit commander of the 763rd Flight Bomber Aviation Regiment of the Crimean Front Air Force, Odessa Defensive Region Air Force, Lieutenant Mikhail Semyonovich Oganessov, air squadron commander of the 535th Night Bomber Aviation Regiment of the Transcaucasian Front Air Force, Senior Lieutenant Aleksandr Nikolaevich Mkhitarov, pilot of the 347th Fighter Aviation Regiment of the North Caucasian Front Air Force, Senior Lieutenant Vazgen Mikhailovich Oganessyan, and air unit commander of the 2nd Air Squadron of the 44th High-speed Bomber Aviation Regiment of the Leningrad Front Air Force, Captain Gegam Enokovich Petrosyan (posthumously), and others⁴¹.

In the ranks of the air armies

In July–November 1942, in order to centralize control and improve the effectiveness of air strikes, the air forces of the fronts were reorganized into air armies. A total of 17 air armies were formed. In December 1944, long-range aviation was reorganized into the 18th Air Army⁴². The high combat qualities of the fighters of the air armies were especially evident in the battles of: Stalingrad and Kursk, air battles in Kuban, in Right-Bank Ukraine, in the Belorussian SSR, Jassy-Kishinev, Vistula-Oder, Berlin and Manchurian operations. According to our estimates, more than 10 thousand Armenian aviators (pilots, pilot-navigators, mechanics, radio operators, etc.) served in the army. About 1 thousand of them were awarded orders and medals, and nine pilots were awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union. Among them are: Semeon Movsesovich Mkrtumyan, Martiros Karapetovich Nagulyan, Sergey Avdeevich Burnazyan, Vazgen Mikhailovich Oganezov, Akop Balabekovich Manukyan, Goga Grigorievich Agamarov, Ashot Dzhumshudovich Kasparov, Armen Tevosovich Ayryan, and Valentin Grigorievich Kozlov (Russian, born on August 20, 1917, in Alexandropol – Gyumri). Of the Armenian pilots, S.A. Khudyakov (A.A. Khanferyants) was commander of the 1st and 12th Air Army, Sergey Arkadyevich (Arshakovich) Sardarov was commander of the 123rd Air Division. During the war, Rafael Ivanovich Kaprelyan was commander of the 89th Air Transport Regiment and after the war, he became a test pilot; on May 15, 1945, he was awarded the title of the Hero of the Soviet Union. More than a hundred pilots became deputy regiment commanders, squadron commanders. For courage in battle, more than 1,000 Armenian pilots were awarded orders and medals.

Conclusion

Summarizing the results of the study on the contribution of Armenian pilots to the victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War, we can conclude that along with other peoples of the USSR in the ranks of naval aviation, front air forces, and air armies, that Armenians had made a great contribution to the historic victory over Nazi Germany and its satellites.

⁴⁰ TSAMO RF, f. 33, op. 682524, d. 5046, l. 177–178.

⁴¹ Ibid., d. 16, l. 458; d. 605, l. 286; d. 613, l. 351–352; d. 616, l. 774–775; d. 610, l. 101–102; op. 682526, d. 919, l. 33; op. 682524, d. 75, l. 185.

⁴² *Sovetskaia voennaia entsiklopediia* [Soviet Military Encyclopedia] (Moscow: Voennoe izdatelstvo ministerstva oborony SSSR Publ., 1976), 291–298.

The uniqueness of Armenian pilots compared to those of other nationalities was that, by being mainly natives of the Armenian SSR, where there were no special educational institutions for training of not only military but also civilian pilots, they needed to mainly study in the educational institutions of the RSFSR. Thanks to the education they received and the appropriate qualifications, Armenian pilots became experienced specialists and, alongside representatives of other peoples, and fought side by side for their common homeland in the name of the liberation of humanity from fascism.

Many Armenian pilots were awarded orders and medals for their fearlessness and heroism, and 14 Armenians and two Russians (born in Armenia) became Heroes of the Soviet Union. Of these, Nelson Georgievich Stepanyan became a Hero of the Soviet Union twice. With their dedication and fearlessness, these heroes added a glorious page in the history of the Great Patriotic War, justifying confidence in the motherland.

Submitted / Поступила в редакцию: 20.12.2024

Approved after reviewing / Одобрена после рецензирования: 11.02.2025

Accepted for publication / Принята к публикации: 12.03.2025

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Информация об авторах / Information about the authors

Климент Амасиевич Арутюнян, доктор исторических наук, главный научный сотрудник отдела новейшей истории Института истории, Национальная академия наук Республики Армения; Армения, 0019, Ереван, пр. Маршала Баграмяна, 24/4; harutyunyankliment@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8754-0700>

Kliment Amasievich Arutyunyan, Dr. Habil. Hist., Head Researcher of the Modern History Department of Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia; 24/4, Marshal Baghramyan Av., Yerevan, 0019, Armenia; arutyunyankliment@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8754-0700>

Ашот Агасиевич Мелконян, доктор исторических наук, профессор, академик, директор Института истории, Национальная академия наук Республики Армения; Армения, 0019, Ереван, пр. Маршала Баграмяна, 24/4; профессор кафедры истории Армении, 0025, Ереванский государственный университет, пр. Алека Манукяна, 1, Ереван, Армения; ashamelk@yahoo.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2579-0286>

Ashot Agasievich Melkonyan, Dr. Habil. Hist., Professor, Academician, Director of the Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia; 4/4, Marshal Baghramyan Av., Yerevan, 0019, Armenia; Professor of the Department of History of Armenia, Yerevan State University; 1, Aler Manukyan Av., Yerevan, 0025, Armenia; ashamelk@yahoo.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2579-0286>

Эдита Варужановна Дадаян, старший лаборант отдела новейшей истории Института истории, Национальная академия наук Республики Армения; Армения, 0019, Ереван, пр. Маршала Баграмяна, 24/4; dadayane77@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8748-6255>

Edita Varuzhanovna Dadayan, Senior Laboratory Assistant of the Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia; 4/4, Marshal Baghramyan Av., Yerevan, 0019, Armenia; dadayane77@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8748-6255>