

"ANTRANIGIAN STORY DEFINES HORRORS IN KEGHI"

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Tom Vartabedian, 25 January 2016

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It tells the story of Armenag Bedigian-Antranigian, a young man who, for almost two years, suffered the horrors of the Armenian Genocide in the Keghi region of Erzurum.

In the process, he witnessed the loss of all members of his family and miraculously survived by hiding in the mountains and gorges of Keghi while serving as a slave for Kurdish families.

"I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of individuals that finally resulted in this publication," said Hagop Antranigian, his grandson. "Although there are numerous documentations on the Genocide, not so much has been recorded about the volunteer corps."

In late 1916, Antranigian finally managed his escape to the Russian side of the war front and reached Erzurum. In 1917, he joined the Armenian Volunteer forces for the defense of Erzurum. As a foot soldier, he served under General Antranig and participated in the military campaigns of Zangezur, Nakhichevan and Khoy in Northern Iran.

He spent a year in Tiflis as a refugee before reaching Constantinople in late 1919 and immigrating to the United States three years later.

"This book is a valuable eyewitness account by a mature and literate young man about life in the Armenian village of Keghi, the complicity of Kurds in the Armenian Genocide, movement of the

Armenian Volunteer Corps, and plight of Armenian refugees from Erzurum to Tiflis," said the grandson. "It's a remarkable story that can be shared by all products of genocide."

The memoir was compiled in the early 1940s in handwritten Armenian. In 2000, it was translated into English by Vatche Ghazarian of Mayreni Publishing, but remained unpublished until now. The Armenian text also remains unpublished.

The 250-page work details Armenag Antranigian's childhood and expatriation, his wedding, calamity, his escape from Dersim, role in the Armenian Volunteer Corps and finally his migration from Constantinople to America, ultimately settling in Portland, Maine, where he gained employment as a shoe worker.

In his introduction, he tells readers:

"Despite my determination to do so for years, I have not been able to write about the horrible days of deportation. However, they are fresh in my mind and heart. Although I have no intention on reopening my wounds, I may, perhaps, relieve my agony in retelling my story."

Armenag Antranigian goes on to mention the loss of his home, land and people --- the death of his mother, brothers, sister-in-law, her children and his very own wife, village and nation.

"You will learn about the agony and pain of someone who, hungry and thirsty, wandered the mountains barefooted and naked, miserable and helpless," he writes. "Even a beggar is free to wander the earth while we, as Armenians, were forced to hide like reptiles to avoid death."

He goes on to add, quite poignantly, "A nation without a state is a nation without God. Had we a state of our own, the crimes and massacres may have been prevented.

"I regret not my youth. I regret my lost happiness," he concludes.

Others contributing to the book were: Dr. Vazken Ghougassian (general editor), Iris Papazian (copy editor), Mary Gulumian (technical support), Khajag Zeitlian (cover designer), Osep Tokat, Professor Robert Hewsen and George Aghjayan (historians).

For Hagop Antranigian, the journey of locating his grandfather's memoirs and getting them published was a 15-year mission of persistence.

"I've done a lot of reflection and feel very blessed to be a vital part of my Armenian Church and community," he admits. "The avenues and branches that are continuously being uncovered through the information my grandfather left me are truly amazing."

