

OUR 'BOYS' IN ALEPPO

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✘ **Manuel Keshishian**, Aleppo, 16 May 2016

Translated by Vahe H. Apelian.

Manuel Keshishian posted this article on his Facebook page. He had titled it "Testimonial For the Sake of History" (ՊԱՏՄՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՀԱՄԱՐ, ՎԿԱՅՈՒԹԻՒՆ).--Editor.

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On the evening of May 16, 2016, around 7 o'clock, I passed by the Mazloumin Hospital, where a short while ago someone had fallen victim to an exploding rocket. Crossing the street, known for its many garages, next to the Saint Holy Mother Of God Church (Ս. Աստուածածին), I arrived to the entry of Haj Habib Avenue. At the corner two Armenian boys were talking about a fallen gas canister that had not exploded.

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- "Where did it fall?" I asked.

- "There," they said pointing towards the "Tetten" gas station.

I saw it. The gas canister lay on the ground some 200 feet from us. "God saved us," I thought as I entered the Haj Habib Avenue. I had barely taken ten steps when I turned towards the boys and asked if they had the telephone number of someone I wanted to contact.


- "My brother might have his number. I'll call him," said one of them.

- "Please try to locate him. I will be at Ardo's shop," I said, although I doubted the shop would still be open.

I had barely uttered the words when I heard a huge explosion some 50 feet away as pieces of stone

started to shower on us. A huge cloud of dust, covering an area of 150 feet, descended and engulfed us. Our nostrils were filled with the pungent smell of the exploded chemicals. We hurried to the site of the explosion. From terror-ridden voice of a woman on a balcony, we learned that the demolished house was not inhabited.

I need to tell this to testify for what transpired after the explosion.

Barely five minutes after the explosion, Armenian boys in an old Volkswagen station wagon, were  at the scene. Among them was Ardo, whose shop I had intended to stop by. The young men headed to the nearby buildings.

- "Ardo," I said pointing the unexploded gas canister, "there is an unexploded gas canister".

Ardo stood in the middle of the road that lead towards the canister and stopped cars from entering the road. At the same time he dialed a number and in Arabic demanded experts to defuse the canister which was tied to an explosive device.

- "At times these canisters explode after 30 to 40 minutes," he said.

Two boys in their mid- teens approached Ardo. "Uncle, permit us to man the road instead of you," one of them said. Ardo relented. The boys brought two huge slabs and tires from the nearby garages and barricaded the road.

- "What grade are you in?" Ardo asked.

- "Few days ago we finished tenth grade (junior year)," they replied.

Hardly fifteen minutes had elapsed when the other young men returned and said they had checked the adjacent buildings and learned there were no casualties. The damage was material only.

Ardo dialed once again and spoke in Arabic. This time I could not hear what he was saying but I noticed that he was getting agitated. After ending the call, he redialed but this time he spoke in Armenian. Not long after, a car stopped by; two young men got off the car and headed towards the gas canister. They picked it, put it in their car and sped away. I asked

Ardo: "Who were they?"

"They are our boys," he said with a sad smile.

Then the young Armenian boys manning the road carried the tires and the heavy slabs back where they had picked them. The road was reopened and traffic resumed. More than half-an-hour had passed by and not a single government official or soldier had arrived.

By now I have lost the count of times I have been close to an explosion. Every time I only saw Armenian young men and boys who arrived in their now-familiar old Volkswagen.

I wanted to record the facts, and as an eyewitness I wanted to tell the truth and vouch for the whole

truth and nothing but the truth.



