

## AN OVERLOOKED STORY OF WWI



In 1916 the Armenian people were forced to confront the devastating effects of the Genocide of their people at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish government.

Driven out of their historic homeland in Turkey, the Armenians searched for the means to assure their survival as a nation.

One response was to form a volunteer Armenian Legion to assist the Allies (France, England, and Russia) to victory during World War I. In recognition of this effort, the Allies promised autonomy to the Armenians.

## VICTORY AND RETURN HOME

On September 19, 1918, the Armenian Legion scored an impressive victory when it seized a key front-line position from the combined Turkish and German forces on the heights of Arara, Palestine. Thus it contributed to the collapse of the enemy forces and the end of the war.



The Legion played a key role in the subsequent occupation of southern Turkey by Allied forces. Displaced Armenians now began returning to their homes under what they believed to be the protective arms of France and Great Britain.

## BROKEN PROMISES

Prewar agreements among the Allies gave France the leading role in Cilicia. Overextended economically and militarily, France disbanded the Armenian Legion (in the summer of 1920) and retreated from Cilicia altogether. Thousands of Armenians were abandoned, subjected to massacre or forced to flee.

Bitter, disillusioned, and disappointed, the Legionnaires returned home and gradually resumed their daily lives. Yet the ultimate failure of their hopes and dreams does not diminish their valor. Their devotion to nation and to freedom serves as an inspiration to subsequent generations.

### About the Exhibit

In 2001 the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), in commemoration of the Armenian Legion's 1918 victory at Arara, opened a major exhibit, "Forgotten Heroes – The Armenian Legion and the Great War," to a capacity audience. The enthusiastic response to the exhibit revealed a tremendous interest in this overlooked and in many ways unwritten story of the brave and selfless young men who fought with the Allies to victory, and later risked all in defense of Armenian human rights.

In response to requests to bring the exhibit to other locations in the United States and as part of its goal of a broader community outreach, ALMA commissioned this traveling exhibit, incorporating the community spirit of the original into an informative historic, literary, and artistic presentation.

### Sponsors

The exhibit was made possible by a grant from the K. George and Carolann S. Najarian, M.D. Foundation, with additional support by the Armenian-American Veterans of Milford, Mass.

### Exhibit Committee

Ardemis Matteosian • Arakel Almasian • Barbara Merguerian

### Venues

The exhibit is available to interested venues in order to inform the public about this largely forgotten episode from the history of the Middle East.

### About ALMA

ALMA is the largest and only independent Armenian museum in the Diaspora which is funded solely through contributions of individuals. ALMA is a major repository for publications as well as a vast array of artifacts that illustrate the heritage and creative achievements of the Armenian people over the centuries.

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# Légion Arménienne

The Armenian Legion and Its Heroism  
in the Middle East During World War I  
1916-1920



## A Traveling Exhibit

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