

## **The contribution of the Azerbaijan SSR and the banners of national divisions in the history of the victory of the Second World War (1941-1945)**

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### **Abstract**

The article studies the historical contribution of the Azerbaijan SSR to the victory in the Second World War. The author examines the importance of the Azerbaijani national divisions and the heroism of the Azerbaijani sons and daughters in the great battles for the liberation of large cities of the Soviet Union and Europe from the German occupants. Information is given on the combat banners of the Azerbaijani divisions. Also, attention is paid to the decisive importance of Baku-Azerbaijan oil during the entire period of the war.

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### **Overview and history: The contribution of the Azerbaijan SSR and the banners of national divisions in the history of the victory of the Second World War (1941-1945)**

During the Second World War, the Azerbaijani people, along with other Soviet citizens, fought for the liberation of their homeland from Nazi Germany and thereby made their high contribution to the Victory. Every fifth resident of Azerbaijan fought in this war. With a population of 3.4 million people (as of 1941), about 700 thousand people, including more than 10 thousand women, went to the front. In the first days of the war alone, more than 40 thousand sons and daughters of Azerbaijan voluntarily submitted applications to the military commissariats to be sent to the front, 186,704 people signed up for militias. Soon, 87 fighter battalions, 1,124 self-defense detachments and the 15,000-member Air Defense detachment were organized on the territory of the republic. For military units, 15 thousand nurses and sanitary teams, 750 signalmen, 3 thousand drivers were trained.

Soldiers from the Azerbaijan SSR participated in the battles for the Brest Fortress, the defense of Leningrad, the defense of Moscow, the battles for Stalingrad, the Caucasus, and the Kursk Bulge.



In Ukraine, Azerbaijanis fought mainly on the Crimean Peninsula. They also participated in the liberation of the Baltic states and Eastern Europe and the battle for Berlin. Over 400 thousand Azerbaijanis were awarded military awards and medals, 14 soldiers were full holders of the Order of Glory, 43 Azerbaijanis were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for military valor and deeds, 16 of them posthumously, over 170 thousand were awarded military orders and medals. The first Azerbaijani to become a Hero of the Soviet Union was senior sergeant Israfil Mammadov, who fought on the Northwestern Front. It is certainly worth noting that in the company commanded by the Azerbaijani Hero of the Soviet Union Lieutenant Melik Maharramov, 19 Heroes of the Soviet Union fought for his homeland under his command. Major General of the tank forces Azi Aslanov was twice awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union.

**Fig. 1.** Major General Azi Aslanov, Azerbaijani commander of the 55th tank brigade, twice awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union.



**Fig. 2.** Combat banners of the 1037 and 1039 rifle regiment of the 223<sup>rd</sup> Belgrade Rifle Division. Banner Collection of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan

By order of the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander on October 18, 1941, the 223rd Azerbaijan Rifle Division began to be formed on the basis of the 168th reserve rifle regiment of the 46th army. Parts of the division were created in the regions of Azerbaijan. There, soldiers underwent combat training. The 223rd Azerbaijan Rifle Division formed the following: 1037th, 1039th (Two battle banners of the regiment are stored in the famous collection of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan) 1041th rifle regiments, 818th artillery regiment, training infantry battalion, 351st motorized rifle reconnaissance, 332th fighter anti-tank battalion, 669th mortar division, 587th combat engineer battalion, 385th chemical defense company, 752nd battalion of communications, 176th anti-aircraft artillery battery, 820th health battalion, 422nd automobile company.

The 223rd Red Banner Rifle Division became famous in the battles for Mozdok, Georgievsk, the Ukrainian city of Kirovograd, the Moldavian cities of Bender and Chisinau, the capital of Austria -

Vienna, the capital of Yugoslavia - Belgrade. For participating in the liberation of Belgrade, the division was called the Belgrade Division.

The Azerbaijan 223rd Infantry Division also participated in the liberation of Romania and Hungary. For three months of the spring offensive of 1944, she cleared the enemy of 950 square meters/km of Soviet territory and liberated 90 settlements. During the Iasi-Kishinev operation of the Soviet troops, Azerbaijani fighters routed the 257th Wehrmacht Infantry Division. And in a battle in the vicinity of Yugoslav Bogovina, Azerbaijanis defeated a Wehrmacht unit of 2.5 thousand soldiers and officers. Participating in the offensive on the territory of Austria, the 223rd division liberated 4 cities and 44 settlements.

The Azerbaijan 402nd Rifle Division was formed in August 1941 on the Transcaucasian Front. On August 26, 1941, the commander of the Transcaucasian Front signed a directive on the formation of the 402nd Azerbaijani division. The formation of the division began in the regional center of Nagorno-Karabakh - the city of Khankendi. The personnel of the division: officers - 1,295 people, junior commanders - 1,088 people, rank and file - 8,104 people. 9,400 fighters and division commanders, i.e. 90% of the personnel were Azerbaijanis. From October 1941 to April 1942 she was part of a group of Soviet troops in Iran. In October 1942, the division was transferred to the North Caucasus, where it heroically occupied the defense on the outskirts of the city of Grozny. Units of the 402nd Infantry Division in stubborn and fierce battles liberated the settlements of Otrashnikovo, Staro-Bukhirovo, Shirkutovskoye, Khokhlatsky, Smirnovka, Poti-Onin, Sborny, Naydenovsky. At the same time, units of the 833th regiment of Major Akim Abbasov held a counterattack by the Germans northeast of Mozdok on the Isherskaya-Kapustino-Novolednyov-Mayorsk line. The enemy entered into battle from 70 to 100 units of armored vehicles. Fighters of Major Abbasov repulsed 13 counterattacks of the Germans. The Germans suffered heavy losses in armored vehicles and, having lost their striking power, were forced to withdraw. For the stamina and heroism shown in the battle, 75 fighters and commanders of the 833th Infantry Regiment were awarded orders and medals of the USSR. Major Abbasov himself was awarded the Order of the Fighting Red Banner. By the end of 1942, up to 4 thousand people remained alive in the 402nd Infantry Division-less than half the full-time personnel. Therefore, it was decided to use the 402nd division to replenish the 416th division. From that moment, the 402nd Infantry Division became the training national division, on the basis of which the fighters and commanders of Azerbaijani nationality were trained and then sent to the front.



**Fig. 3.** Fighting banner and top of the Taganrog Red Banner, Order of Suvorogo 416th Azerbaijan Rifle Division (Banner collection of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan)

The Azerbaijani Red Banner Order of Suvorov, the 416th Infantry Division was formed on the basis of the order of the commander of the Transcaucasian Military District on February 22, 1942. It went the military way from the Caucasus to Berlin. Received the honorary name of the Taganrog Division. The soldiers liberated Taganrog, Melitopol, defeated the 9th infantry division of the German Wehrmacht in early February 1944. They were in the front ranks of the troops liberating Odessa, Chisinau and Warsaw. In February 1945, the 416th division, in cooperation with the 295th division, broke through the defenses of the German troops and entered the city of Kustrin, which was considered the gate of Berlin. In April, they took part in the assault on the German capital.

On May 1, at three in the afternoon, after fierce fighting, the 373rd Infantry Regiment of the division captured the Kaiser Palace, hoisting the Red Banner on it. On the morning of May 2, 1945, a group of division fighters led by Lieutenant Medzhidov hoisted the Red Banner over the Brandenburg Gate.



*Fig. 4. Brandenburg Gate May 2, 1945*

Soon after, a rally was held at the Brandenburg Gate. Member of the Military Council of the 5th Shock Army, Lieutenant General Fedor Efimovich Bokov wrote in his memoirs: "General Vladimir Pavlovich Zyvanov was the first to speak. He spoke with great enthusiasm about the exploits of our soldiers during the assault on Berlin and the great significance of victory: "The last shot in the historic battle for Berlin," the general said, "sounded here at the Brandenburg Gate, and this shot was fired by the sons of the Azerbaijani people."

At the beginning of the war of 1941-1945, the most compact Azerbaijani fighters were concentrated in the personnel of the 77th Mountain Rifle Division. The first operation of this compound in 1941 was the participation of the Soviet troops in Iran, undertaken in connection with the aggravated military-political situation on the southern border of the USSR. The 77th Red Banner Order of the Suvorov Rifle Division liberated the territory of Crimea and the Baltic states from fascist occupiers. For the heroism of the 77th Division during the liberation of Simferopol, the honorary title of "Simferopol Division" was awarded. On May 7, 1944, the division stormed the passage to Sevastopol - Sapun Mountain. The division fighter Abdulaziz Kurbanov, under enemy fire, reached

the summit and hoisted the Red Banner over the Sapun Mountain. This division ended the war in Courland. On May 8, 1945, in the Dzintari region, units of the Wehrmacht laid down their arms and surrendered to the fighting detachments of the 77th Division. The Azerbaijani Lieutenant Mursal Majid oglu Mursalov led the platoon of the 77th Infantry Division. He was born in 1922 in the Azerbaijan SSR. After graduating from the Baku Military Infantry School, he was mobilized into the Red Army. He fought in the North Caucasus, participated in the battlefields in Eastern Europe and in the war with Japan.

The path of the 396th Infantry Division, which was formed in September – October 1941 on the Transcaucasian Front in the city of Gusar, Azerbaijan SSR, as part of the implementation of the resolution of the USSR State Defense Committee of August 11, 1941, turned out to be tragic. It entered the army in November 1941, becoming part of the 51st army. As part of the Kerch-Feodosia landing operation, it landed in the region of Feodosia and subsequently operated in the Crimea. Since February 1942, the 396th division was used as the Azerbaijani national division. During the German offensive of the 11th Army in Crimea in May 1942, the division was destroyed, many of its soldiers died the death of the brave.

There was unprecedented heroism on the fronts of the 1941-1945 war. Hero of the Soviet Union, Major General of Tank Forces Azi Aslanov, Israfil Mammadov, Adil Guliyev, Gafur Mammadov, Jamil Akhmedov, Gerai Asadov, Museib Bagirov, Melik Maharramov and others showed twice.

The battle that led to the collapse of the German plan was the Battle of Stalingrad - one of the decisive battles during the Second World War. It was the heroic defense of Stalingrad that allowed disrupting the Germans' plans for a breakthrough to the Volga - the main transport artery through which Baku oil was delivered to the central regions of Soviet Russia.

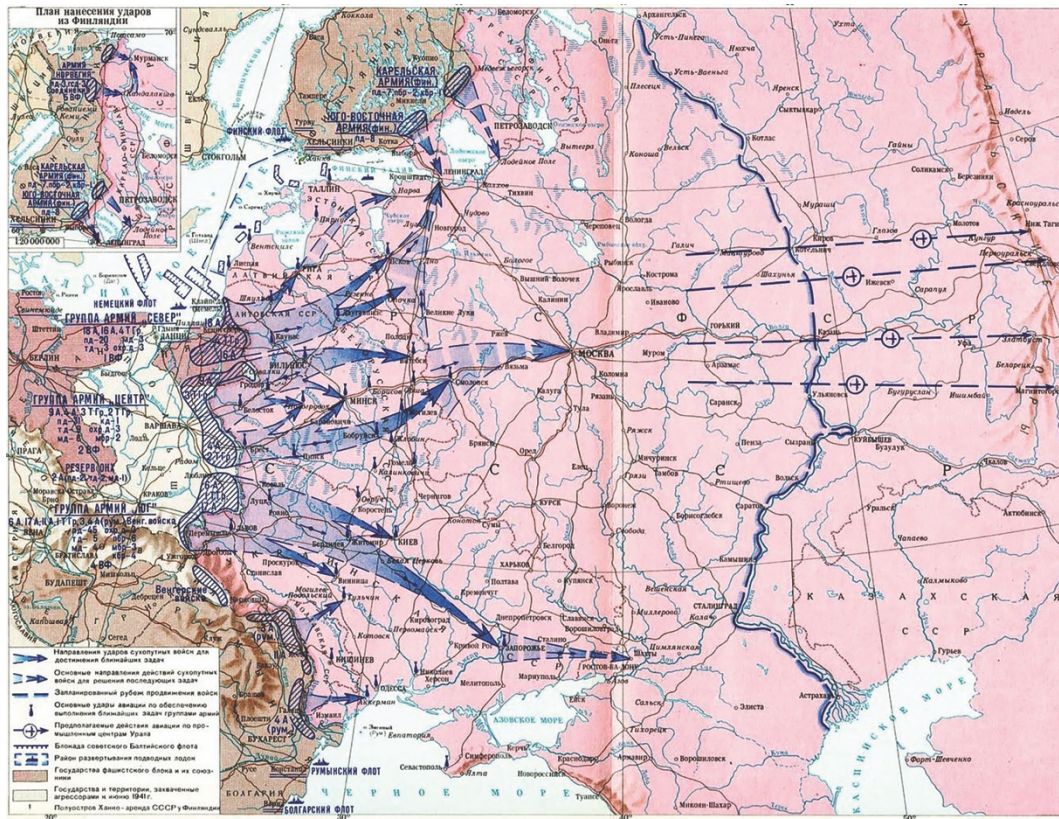
### **The importance of Azerbaijan Oil**



*Fig. 5. Transportation of Baku oil by trains to the front*



Pride in a common Great Victory unites our peoples and cultures. Faced with the stubborn resistance of the Soviet troops, realizing that the attempt to instantly conquer the heart of the union state - Moscow - failed, Adolf Hitler turned his attention to the south of the country. The aim of the Nazis was to undermine Soviet industry, for this it was imperative for German troops to seize the oil fields in Azerbaijan and the main transport artery through which fuel was delivered to the European part of the country, the Volga River.



**Fig. 6.** Map of military operations of the Second World War

However, the defenders of Stalingrad prevented these plans from coming true, when on July 17, 1942, the largest land battle in history began. If everything had gone as Adolf Hitler had planned, and the Germans ended up in Azerbaijan, where almost all the oil and fuel industries of the Soviet Union were concentrated, it's hard to even say what the further course of the war would have been. During the Great Patriotic War, Azerbaijani oil workers produced up to 90% of the fuel of the entire Soviet Union. In the first year of the war more than 23 million tons of oil was transported. During the Great Patriotic War, more than 75 million tons of oil was sent from the Azerbaijan SSR to military needs. The battles for the city lasted 200 days. At the cost of enormous losses and by the power of incredible valor, the fraternal peoples of the union state gave a worthy rebuff to the German troops and completely turned the tide of World War II. It is difficult to overestimate the impact of that victory on future history, for it was after Stalingrad that the Red Army took the initiative, the pro-fascist regimes in many countries were shaken, and the countries that had maintained neutrality at that time finally decided to recognize Germany as an aggressor.

We have been separated from those events for 75 years, but the lessons of history are still kept in the memory of the peoples who participated in these battles. And the main one is that only together

the people-liberators could defeat the occupier. In battles, the fighters did not ask each other their nationality. That is why, until today, the date of victory has become a memorable date in Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as for the countries of the union states during the Second World War. In the Republic of Azerbaijan every year, at the state level, Victory Day 1941-1945 is celebrated. The events are attended by the President of the Azerbaijan Republic, Ilham Aliyev, and First vice president, UNESCO and ISESCO Goodwill Ambassador, President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and Cultural Fund Mehriban Aliyeva. They meet with veterans of the Great Victory and express their high appreciation and gratitude to them.



*Fig. 7. Meeting of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and First Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva with veterans of the Second World War*

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