

Supporting Our Soldiers: *from* Protecting *the* Borders *to* Receiving Western Education *in* Homeland

The sun rose over Stepanakert as the Armenian Armed forces prepared for another day of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Before he even opened his eyes, Arman Vardanyan began his mental countdown of the 100 days until he would return to his family and friends. With thoughts of home filling his mind, Arman began his daily routine of morning exercise followed by breakfast. Within his first few bites, Arman heard an alarm sound.

"We had barely started eating when a long alarm went off telling us that we needed to evacuate the whole military base within an

hour," Arman recalled tearfully. "We grabbed our weapons and backpacks and started the engines heading to Aghdam." No words can justly describe how he and his friends felt at that moment. "I was scared. I realized that all my dreams and goals, my vision of the future, everything was getting washed away. I thought of my family. I was not sure that I would come back alive and would ever see them again. Death seemed so close..."

Arman was a trained tank shooter. For the next four days, Arman slept in his tank and subsisted on dried bread and rainwater. As

he lay in the tank, Arman grew angry. "I kept asking myself, 'Why did it have to happen right before I was done serving in the military? Why? Why now?' I realized that I was asking questions that had no answers." Arman prayed.

"My emotions of fear and anger turned into sense of appreciation for all that I have had in life—my friends, my loving family, and everything



Arman Vardanyan during his military service



Arman Vardanyan

B.A. English and
Communications, '20
AGBU Asbeds Scholarship
Recipient

Arman excited to be back at AUA

that I managed to achieve in my 20 years of existence. I thought of the unique opportunity that I had to spend one year of my high school education in the United States through the FLEX Program.

I thought to myself, 'If I am going to die, then let it be for my homeland; for the security of our Armenian grandmothers, mothers, and sisters. I was no longer afraid... I was ready to fight.'

The Four-Day-War in **Nagorno Karabakh** began on **April 1, 2016**. On April 5, the intense fighting ended as suddenly as it began, but the scars of the horrific war will always stay with Arman. Miraculously, he survived, but many of his friends did not. Despite all that he lost, Arman does not regret anything. "I am proud to say

that I served my country with dignity and honor." Long before stepping foot in a tank, Arman dreamt of pursuing his undergraduate education at the AUA.

Armenian Veteran Fulfills AUA Dream

He had just completed his first year at AUA when he was drafted, and each day of war he experienced made AUA seem further away. His focus turned from his studies to his survival. He worried that even if he did make it home, he might not have the opportunity to pick up his life where he had left off. Thankfully, with the generous support of **AGBU Asbeds Scholarship**, Arman doesn't need to worry any longer. Arman is on track to graduate with a B.A. in

English and Communications in 2020. "I am extremely grateful to AGBU Asbeds for opening this door of opportunity for me to receive the best education in my

homeland," shared Arman. "I give them my word: I will work hard, excel academically, and will give back to society, one way or another."

After graduation, Arman plans to pursue his master's degree in Political Science and International Affairs. It is his goal to one day become an ambassador so that he may facilitate peace and cooperation between countries, prevent war, and make the world a better place.