

AMERICANS INVESTIGATING ANATOLIA

The 1919 Field Notes of Emory Niles and Arthur Sutherland

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At a 1990 history symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, Professor Justin McCarthy revealed the existence of a report by two Americans about the situation in eastern Anatolia following World War I.¹ Between 14 July and 12 August 1919, Emory Niles and Arthur Sutherland, who were in the service of the aid organization The American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE), traveled from Mardin to Trabzon, by way of Bitlis, Van, and Erzurum, to determine local relief needs and how ACRNE could fulfill them. Apparently, they were the first Americans to enter this area of Turkey after the war, near the Ottoman Empire's frontier with Iran and the Democratic Republic of Armenia in Transcaucasia.

McCarthy discovered the Niles and Sutherland report in the United States National Archives, mixed in among various papers related to the Harbord Commission²—a survey expedition sent by the US government to Anatolia and the South Caucasus in September 1919 to investigate the possibilities for an American mandate over the region and the establishment of an Armenian state that would encompass parts of eastern Turkey. Led by Major General James G. Harbord and composed primarily of US military officers, the group traveled from Mardin to

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¹ Justin McCarthy, "The Report of Niles and Sutherland: An American Investigation of Eastern Anatolia after World War I," *XI. Türk Tarih Kongresi, Ankara: 5–9 Eylül 1990* (Ankara: Türk Tarihi Kurumu, 1994), 1809–53. Dr. Justin A. McCarthy is a professor of history at the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, USA..

² The Niles and Sutherland report is located in the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA): Report of Captain Emory H. Niles and Mr. Arthur E. Sutherland Jr. on Trip of Investigation through Eastern Turkish Vilayets, Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1914–1931 (RG 256) file: 184.021/175, available in microfilm as M820B: General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1918–1931, roll 231 (hereafter cited as Report of Niles and Sutherland).

Tiflis, in the same general area that Niles and Sutherland had traversed a few weeks earlier, but by an alternate route over largely different territory.

McCarthy included a transcript of the Niles and Sutherland report in his published paper from the Ankara symposium. He also underscored that the account was incomplete and missing critical segments³—as evidenced by Niles and Sutherland’s caveat: "The object of this report is to summarize our observations as recorded in notes made at the time. This report should be taken in conjunction with these notes and not separately."⁴

Niles and Sutherland’s field notes are absent from the copy of their report in the National Archives. McCarthy observed that the omission of this material, perhaps through deliberate destruction, is a considerable loss. He also surmised that if the missing information were found, it would certainly enhance our historical understanding of the period.⁵

The field notes of Niles and Sutherland have not been destroyed, nor are they lost. Two typewritten copies exist in the archives of the former American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in Istanbul.⁶ Presented here (in digital images) and placed within their historical context, the notes will now permit scholars to review and analyze the Niles and Sutherland report in the form intended by its authors.

William Peet’s Files

The existence of Niles and Sutherland’s field notes in the archives of the ABCFM in Istanbul and the inclusion of their report in the papers of the Harbord Commission is part of a complex story that involves American Protestant missionary activity in the late Ottoman Empire, the destruction of populations in Anatolia during and after the First World War, and American humanitarian and political undertakings immediately after the conflict.

³ McCarthy, “The Report of Niles and Sutherland,” 1824.

⁴ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 3.

⁵ McCarthy, “The Report of Niles and Sutherland,” 1824; Justin McCarthy, Esat Arslan, Cemalettin Taşkıran, and Ömer Turan, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006), 2, fn.1.

⁶ The typewritten texts of both copies are identical, one undoubtedly being a carbon of the other. The documents emerged during a sorting and inventory of the ABCFM archives from 2005 to 2010. The Board’s archives (approximately 500,000 pages of material) were located in the offices of the Amerikan Bord Heyeti in Istanbul until December 2010, when they were transferred to the care of the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT).

The ABCFM was a Protestant mission agency founded in 1810,⁷ with the primary aim of propagating the Gospel and spreading Protestant teachings worldwide. American Board missionaries first arrived in Anatolia in 1820, intending to introduce their beliefs to all of the region's communities.⁸ Finding access to Muslims prohibited, they focused on Christians of the Eastern Churches. By the second half of the century, the ABCFM had broadened its mission to include extensive ventures in general education and medical care. On the eve of World War I, the Board's 174 missionaries in Turkey were operating three theological schools, eight colleges, 46 secondary schools, and 369 other schools, in addition to 19 hospitals and dispensaries.⁹ They served Armenians for the most part, especially in the schools. The ABCFM allocated approximately one quarter of its annual budget for its work in Anatolia,¹⁰ and its properties there were valued in the millions of dollars.

The outbreak of the First World War caught this missionary enterprise at full tide. Although the United States refrained from entering the conflict for almost three years, American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire could not carry on as before. Communications, travel, shipping, and other vital operations were impeded. Moreover, the Armenians, with whom the ABCFM worked primarily, appeared to the Ottoman authorities as a potential fifth column, prepared to join the Empire's enemies. Indeed, in 1914 and early 1915, there were Armenians who deserted from the Ottoman army, instigated rebellion in eastern Anatolia, and fought alongside Russian forces on the Caucasian front.¹¹

⁷ The ABCFM was chartered in the state of Massachusetts in 1812.

⁸ For an account of the ABCFM's early years in Anatolia, see William E. Strong: *The Story of the American Board: An Account of the First Hundred Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston, New York, Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1910). Strong was editor of the *Missionary Herald*, the monthly newsletter of the ABCFM, and his account is an in-house history.

⁹ *The One Hundred and Fourth Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: The Board, 1914), 107.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 232–5.

¹¹ For instance, see “Armenians Fighting Turks: Besieging Van—Others Operating in Turkish Army's Rear,” *New York Times*, 7 November 1914 and “Turkish Armenians in Armed Revolt: Were Ready to Join Russian Invaders, Having Drilled and Collected Arms,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1914. For secondary historical accounts, see Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: a Modern History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 120–1; Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 314–17; McCarthy et al., *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*, 187–98.

The severe measures undertaken by the Ottoman government in the spring of 1915 to expel Armenians from the war zones and elsewhere in its territory, as well as military hostilities, inter-communal strife, and indiscriminate violence and banditry led to the exile, flight, or death of a great number of Anatolia's Armenian inhabitants during the war.¹² Some ABCFM personnel who remained in Turkey opened their institutions to those who were displaced or orphaned. But when the United States finally joined the Allies in 1917 and diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire were broken, many American Board personnel left the region and a number of Board facilities closed.

By 1915, members of the ABCFM and prominent individuals in the US business and political establishment had created an agency, The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR), to assist what they saw as the defenseless, suffering Christian (mainly Armenian) populations of Anatolia and surrounding areas.¹³ Cleveland Dodge, a wealthy industrialist, philanthropist, and close friend of President Woodrow Wilson, was one of ACASR's principal founders. The ABCFM's corresponding secretary, James L. Barton,¹⁴ served as its chairman, and American Board missionaries, supporters, and affiliates comprised much of its membership.¹⁵

During the nineteenth century, ABCFM missionaries who lived in Anatolia, spoke its languages, and experienced its cultures had served as a major source of information for

¹² Further historical examination and analysis is needed to develop a full understanding of all the circumstances of this tragedy, including the number of those who perished or were exiled. (Estimates of deaths, for instance, vary substantially [Zürcher, 120; Shaw, 315–6].) Extensive polemical literature and discourse about this topic have hindered the progress of objective inquiry.

¹³ ACASR became known as The American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE) at the end of the war. In turn, ACRNE was incorporated as The Near East Relief (NER) in August 1919. NER changed its title to The Near East Foundation (NEF) in 1930, by which it is still known today.

¹⁴ Rev. James L. Barton (1855–1936) joined the American Board in 1885 and taught at the Board's theological seminary in Harput (today's Elazığ) in eastern Turkey until 1892, when he returned to the United States. In 1894, he was appointed as the Board's corresponding secretary, and he served in this post for the next 33 years. He was also chairman of Near East Relief from 1915–30. Barton was a prolific writer, and one of his best known works was a history of the ABCFM in the Ottoman Empire: *Daybreak in Turkey* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1908).

¹⁵ For details about the origins, organization, and membership of ACASR, ACRNE, and NER, see James L. Barton, *Story of Near East Relief (1915–1930). An Interpretation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 3–19.

Americans about the Ottoman Empire and its internal happenings.¹⁶ The missionaries generally sympathized with the Armenians and other Christians, in whose communities they had invested so heavily. Likewise, they tended to view the Muslim populace as lesser, misguided, and oppressive. Missionary publications and their reports to the US and international press cultivated pro-Christian, pro-Armenian sentiment and aroused anti-Muslim, anti-Turk prejudices. During World War I, American missionaries continued to be principal informants about events in Anatolia. Even today, their accounts remain a prime source for the history of this era and are often accepted without critique.¹⁷

Promotional literature and other material, including films, generated by ACASR and its successor, ACRNE (NER, Near East Relief, after August 1919), displayed a similar tone.¹⁸ Muslims, especially Turks, were denigrated, and Armenians and other Christians idealized. The

¹⁶ For example, see Eli Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith and Rev. H.G.O. Dwight in Armenia* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1833). This account of a tour in 1830–1 by ABCFM missionaries Eli Smith and H.G.O. Dwight across Turkey to Persia was one of the earliest detailed exposés of Turkey’s geography and cultures to circulate in the United States. The habit of recording and filtering back information to the American public exemplified by this work was a salient feature of the missionary venture throughout the century.

¹⁷ For instance, see ABCFM missionary Joseph K. Greene’s *Leavening the Levant*. Published in 1916, this work is prefaced by a poem, “Call to America,” which beseeches the US to play the Samaritan role for Armenians oppressed by Turks. It also engages in anti-Muslim polemics, e.g., Muslim women are mistreated, the character of the Prophet Muhammad is detestable, Turks are driven to violence by their religion, the *Qur’an* is a jumble of sense and nonsense, etc. (Joseph K. Greene, *Leavening the Levant* [Boston, New York, Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1916]). On reporting biases in the American press, see Justin McCarthy, “Missionaries and the American Image of the Turks,” in Mustafa Aydin, Cagri Erhan (eds.), *Turkish-American Relations: Past, Present and Future* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 26–48.

¹⁸ For a typical example, see the NER pamphlet *Hand Book: Near East Relief*, October 1920, which summarizes the agency’s operations and expenditures from its founding up to 30 June 1920. In a different media, note the motion picture “Auction of Souls” (also titled “Ravished Armenia”), produced by Selig Studios for ACASR and released in 1919 (Alan Gevinson, *Within Our Gates: Ethnicity in American Feature Films, 1911-1960* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997], p. 58). The organization’s publicity material is described in McCarthy, “Missionaries and the American Image of the Turks,” 35–7; Norman Daniel, *American Philanthropy in the Near East. 1820–1960* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1970), 160–1; Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810–1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 129–30; and Sarah Miglio, “America’s Sacred Duty: Near East Relief and the Armenian Crisis, 1915–1930,” Rockefeller Research Reports Online, 2009, <http://www.rockarch.org/publications/resrep/rroonlinealpha.php>.

latter were presented as the sole sufferers during and after the war, persecuted ruthlessly and relentlessly by the former. This skewed publicity was effective in raising money for the relief agency in the United States (from 1915 to mid-1920 over 40 million dollars¹⁹). One historian has described the organization's public relations drive as "propaganda in the service of a good cause,"²⁰ but as a prominent scholar of American philanthropy in the Middle East has stressed:

While such publicity helped to raise money, it did not contribute to an understanding of the problems of the area. ... It exploited the religious differences between the Turks and the Armenians without disclosing that during much of the nineteenth century the Christian subjects of Turkey had enjoyed a degree of religious freedom that was not accorded to dissenters from the established faith in some of the more enlightened kingdoms of Europe. It overlooked the existence of an active Armenian revolutionary party and left unmentioned the doubts entertained by the Ottoman government as to the loyalty of the Armenians. It failed to point out that many of the Armenians had lived in a theater of war or that Moslem Turks were also suffering. ...²¹

Hindered by the war from supplying Anatolia's Armenians and other Christians with material aid, ACASR could do little more than send donated funds to Istanbul, which were distributed by diplomatic representatives and a committee that included the American Board's local business agent and treasurer, William Peet.²² Soon after the armistice on 30 October 1918, the organization (now ACRNE) mobilized to ship food, clothing, medicines, and other items to

¹⁹ *Hand Book: Near East Relief*, 18.

²⁰ Merrill D. Peterson, *"Starving Armenians": America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915–1930 and After* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 53.

²¹ Daniel, 161.

²² Barton, 17; William Wheelock Peet (1851–1942) began his career with the American Board in Istanbul in 1881. Although employed as business manager, his duties extended to those of chief administrative officer and included negotiating with Ottoman state officials and the representatives of other foreign governments. He had a close relationship with the US Department of State and was popularly known as "trainer of ambassadors." Peet played an instrumental role in the local organization and operations of ACASR and its successors. He retired from his ABCFM post in Turkey in 1925.

Anatolia.²³ In January 1919, ACRNE chairman James Barton led a commission to Turkey to launch the aid effort. Before arriving in Istanbul in February, the group stopped in London, Paris, and Rome to secure the cooperation of leaders and officials of the Allied powers occupying the region.²⁴

To accomplish their aims, the relief providers sought precise details about conditions, material needs, and logistical requirements in Anatolia and its surroundings. This information was also critical for assessing the likelihood of repatriating deported and displaced Armenians and restoring their former communities in Turkey, particularly within the boundaries of an envisioned independent state of their own in the east, which was advocated strongly by Barton and others associated with ACRNE and the American Board.²⁵ One of the obvious advantages of resettlement was that the ABCFM could salvage its institutions and resume its century-long work interrupted by the war.

From March to May 1919, Barton personally directed a survey expedition from Istanbul through central and eastern Turkey to Aleppo and back (see map 1). In a letter describing the trip to Admiral Mark Bristol, senior US naval commander (and soon to be US high commissioner) in Turkey, Barton urged occupying all of Anatolia with a military force. He claimed it was essential to protect the Armenians from the Turks and allow them to recover to a level of self-support. Furthermore, he also stressed that without direct intervention, “there is grave danger that the atrocities of four years ago may be re-enacted in an exaggerated form.”²⁶

Barton later recounted that representatives of his mission had gone farther east than he had, “to Bitlis and Van, returning through Erzurum and Trabzon.”²⁷ This is precisely the route traveled by Emory Niles and Arthur Sutherland, two ACRNE personnel, from 14 July to 12 August 1919, a few weeks after Barton had returned to Istanbul. Although Barton did not state

²³ Barton, 108–9.

²⁴ Louise Jenison Peet, *No Less Honor: The Biography of William Wheelock Peet* (Privately printed, 1939), 183.

²⁵ Grabill, 170–3; C.D. Ussher, “Plan for the Safe and Peaceful Repatriation of Armenians in Van and Alashgerd,” n.d., Relief Work 1919, box 37, Amerikan Bord Heyeti, Istanbul. Dr. Ussher was ACRNE medical director in the Caucasus and a longtime ABCFM missionary at Van.

²⁶ Director, American Commission for Relief in the Near East to Admiral Mark L. Bristol, 14 June 1919, Relief Work 1919, box 37, Amerikan Bord Heyeti, Istanbul.

²⁷ Barton, 116.

explicitly when the representatives made their journey, or identify them,²⁸ it seems likely that they were Niles and Sutherland.²⁹ He also emphasized that these nameless individuals “reported that there were no refugees in these areas, that they found no Armenians were left in the region and the country in general was depopulated This made it clear there was no need of relief work”³⁰

After returning to Istanbul in May, Barton arranged for Major Davis G. Arnold, a US military officer, to manage ACRNE operations in Turkey.³¹ Arnold assumed his post in June 1919.³² Based in the capital, he worked under the oversight of a local administrative committee, which included William Peet.³³ Presumably, Arnold gave Niles and Sutherland their “orders from Headquarters” on 25 June to survey the area of eastern Anatolia that Barton's expedition had not covered—principally to determine the region’s relief needs and how ACRNE could help satisfy them.³⁴ This territory had witnessed heavy fighting between Russian and Armenian forces and the Ottomans during the recent war. In the summer of 1919, it was still a volatile area, especially along the tenuous border with the Democratic Republic of Armenia.

When they received their instructions, both Niles and Sutherland were stationed at the ACRNE central supply base at Derince, a main station on the Baghdad railway line, on the Gulf

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Emory H. Niles (1892–1976) was 27 years old when he surveyed eastern Anatolia for ACRNE. He had recently served as captain of artillery in the American Expeditionary Force, 80th Division, in France. (Probably in deference to his military service, he was still referred to as "Captain Niles" while in Turkey.) Niles returned to the United States after his relief service and embarked on a distinguished law career, retiring at the age of 70 as the Chief Judge on the Supreme Bench of Baltimore County.

At the time of the expedition to eastern Anatolia, Arthur E. Sutherland, Jr. (1902–73) was 17 years old. Probably fresh out of high school when he joined ACRNE, he is pictured in a photograph with members of the Barton Relief Commission, sailing for Europe in January 1919 (Barton, plate facing 112). Following his relief work in Turkey, Sutherland returned to the US to study law and eventually join the faculty of Harvard Law School.

³⁰ Barton, 116.

³¹ Grabill, 169.

³² American Commission for Relief in the Near East, Record of Meetings, 20th Meeting, 5 May 1919, Relief Work 1919, box 37, Amerikan Bord Heyeti, Istanbul (hereafter cited as Record of Meetings).

³³ Barton, 118.

³⁴ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 1.

of Izmit.³⁵ Each had been in Turkey about five months.³⁶ On 3 July, they departed from Derince for Mardin by train. Traveling via Konya and Aleppo, they arrived at their destination on 11 July. Three days later, after engaging a Turkish medical officer as interpreter and guide and making other preparations,³⁷ they commenced their journey northward (see map 2). Over the next month, they crossed 1,426 kilometers (886 miles) of rugged, war-torn territory, mostly in the provinces of Bitlis, Van, and Erzurum, by horse, train, carriage, and automobile. Their mission ended on 12 August at the Black Sea port of Trabzon.

Within days of returning by ship to Istanbul (15 August),³⁸ Niles and Sutherland concluded their ACRNE service. Their departure from Turkey was announced in the August 23 issue of the relief organization's local news bulletin, the *Acorne*.³⁹ Prior to leaving for home, they typed up their field notes and drafted a final report of their journey (dated 16 August). The rough, unpolished nature of the two manuscripts, as well as the authors' proviso that they should be read together, suggests that both documents were prepared hurriedly before Niles and Sutherland sailed for the United States.

Undoubtedly, their field notes and report were available to the administrators of ACRNE in Turkey. This explains how the notes emerged from the American Board archives in Istanbul—from the files of ACRNE committee member, and ABCFM business agent and treasurer, William Peet. It also hints at how their report might have found its way into the papers of the Harbord Commission.

³⁵ "ACRNE Personnel," *Acorne*, June 7, 1919; *Acorne*, June 21, 1919, 8. The *Acorne* was the news bulletin of the ACRNE Constantinople office; the title of the bulletin changed to *Near East Relief* in 1920.

³⁶ Although the exact date of their arrival in Turkey is uncertain, it seems to have been when the Barton Commission, to which Sutherland was apparently attached, came in February. From 1 to 10 June, Sutherland took part in a mission to survey relief needs in Thrace (*Acorne*, June 7, 1919, 6; *Acorne*, June 14, 1919, 5). Subsequently, he was assigned to the staff at Derince, where Niles had been stationed at least since early April (*Acorne*, June 14, 1919, 7; Record of Meetings, 13th Meeting, April 9, 1919).

³⁷ Notes of Captain E. H. Niles and Mr. A. E. Sutherland taken on trip of investigation July & August, 1919, Near East Relief 1919–1923, box 41, Amerikan Bord Heyeti, Istanbul, 2 (hereafter cited as Notes of Niles and Sutherland).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁹ *Acorne*, August 23, 1919, 2.

Earlier in the summer, President Wilson had appointed Major General James G. Harbord of the US Army to lead an expedition to Anatolia and Transcaucasia.⁴⁰ He was ordered to investigate American political, military, and economic interests and obligations in the region, particularly regarding Armenian security, repatriation, and requirements for establishing a state. The mission had been planned in consideration of a political and military takeover of this territory by a major power, especially the United States, as a mandate of the Paris Peace Conference then in progress. Vigorous lobbying by James Barton and like-minded supporters of such a protectorate encouraged the Wilson administration to organize the Harbord Commission.⁴¹

Harbord was advised to solicit information from a number of individuals during his journey, including American missionaries residing in Anatolia and the Caucasus.⁴² After disembarking at Istanbul on 2 September,⁴³ he spent several days meeting with local US officials, missionaries, and relief workers. James Barton, who was preparing to return to the United States, helped him plan the itinerary for his mission.⁴⁴ Harbord probably received a copy of the Niles and Sutherland report at this time from someone affiliated with ACRNE, most likely as background material about the area that he was going to investigate. On 7 September, he set out for the same general region from which Niles and Sutherland had just returned (see map 1).⁴⁵

“Both Sides are Right and Both are Wrong”

Niles and Sutherland’s field notes consist of 34 typewritten pages, which is considerably longer than the 21 pages of their report. The notes are grouped into four sections, or “books,” which may correspond to actual notebooks carried by the travelers.⁴⁶ The consistent style of the text

⁴⁰ James Guthrie Harbord (1866–1947) had served as chief of staff to the commander-in-chief of the American Expeditionary Force in France, John Pershing. He also led forces in the field at the Battle of Belleau Wood and the Second Battle of the Marne.

⁴¹ Grabill, 206–10.

⁴² McCarthy, “The Report of Niles and Sutherland,” 1816–17.

⁴³ *Acorne*, September 6, 1919, 4.

⁴⁴ Grabill, 227.

⁴⁵ *Acorne*, September 13, 1919, 7.

⁴⁶ Book 1: pp. 1–9, from start of journey to Van (July 3–24); Book 2: pp. 10–22, from Van to Bayazit

seems to indicate that it is the work of one compiler. Emory Niles, the senior of the two, might have fulfilled this role. He had served in an executive post at the supply depot in Derince,⁴⁷ and his experience in the logistics of relief work would have qualified him well for the task. His practical knowledge was probably a major reason why he had been chosen for the survey expedition.

Sutherland also had suitable expertise. Prior to being stationed at Derince, he had accompanied an ACRNE team on a survey of Thrace.⁴⁸ Furthermore, he seems to have been skilled with a camera. James Barton had proposed appointing him photographer for his expedition through central Turkey in March.⁴⁹ It is unclear whether Sutherland eventually traveled with Barton, but perhaps he undertook the duty of photographer on the mission with Niles. Their field notes mention that photographs were taken on the journey. Unfortunately, the current whereabouts of these images are unknown.

Niles and Sutherland carried out their investigation methodically. They wanted to guide planners of relief efforts, and their reporting was systematic and dispassionate, as in a logistics document. Covering an average of 64.8 kilometers (25 miles) per day,⁵⁰ they considered geography, agriculture, food availability, and the transportation infrastructure. They recorded war damage, including demographic and material losses. They also interviewed local officials and inhabitants and weighed the informants' comments against their own observations. After evaluating this information, they made projections about the need for food supplies and other support. Their notes for 3 August exemplify their methods. After leaving Kara Kilise (today's Ağrı) at 5:45 a.m., they headed towards Zidikan (today's Eleşkirt), where they made a brief stop before continuing on to Köse Dağ.⁵¹

(July 25–30); Book 3: pp. 23–9, from Bayazıt to Erzurum (July 31–August 5); Book 4: pp. 30–4, from Erzurum to end of journey (August 6–15). Books 2 and 3 contain the bulk of the data, covering the travels from Van to Erzurum, a region that witnessed some of the heaviest fighting during the war and lengthy occupation by Russian and Armenian forces. It was also the area closest to the border with the Armenian Republic and to the ongoing turmoil in Transcaucasia.

⁴⁷ Record of Meetings, 13th Meeting, 9 April 1919.

⁴⁸ *Acorne*, June 7, 1919, 6.

⁴⁹ Record of Meetings, 4th Meeting, 20 February 1919.

⁵⁰ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 2.

⁵¹ This territory was in the Ottoman province of Erzurum.

Country passed through consists of wide valley, apparently of fertile land. Several villages passed, about half of which destroyed completely, other half had a few inhabitants who seemed in fairly miserable condition. Cattle seems plentiful, but practically no land under cultivation. Some hay fields passed in which hay had been cut and stacked.

Road very poor, being crossed at many points by streams which made boggy stretches of 10 to 30 yards, while at others streams had left steep banks of 1 to 4 feet. Near Kara Kilissa several bridges remained apparently of Russian construction, but at each bridge several widths of flooring were missing. Road in present condition not practicable for autos.

At Zeidakam [*sic*] village chief offered to kill a lamb in our honor. We were told a few minutes later that the inhabitants were suffering from famine and several were pointed out as showing the effects of starvation and grass eating. They did not appear, however, to be in bad condition.

Zeidekan.

Chief of town says there are 300–600–100 people in the village. That ten houses are left and that those who cannot find shelter are in mountains either with cattle or gathering herbs. Chiefs [*sic*] stories are very disconnected. General result seems to be that population has enough Everik grain for 40 days.⁵² They have lived on Ebehgumedgi for two years,⁵³ having sowed neither last year nor this. They have no means of support for the winter. Last week 2 people died of starvation.

Photo taken of starved inhabitants. Cannot judge as to truth or falsehood of stories; but certainly no grain seen in neighborhood.

Usual tale of Armenian atrocities.

⁵² Everik (Turk. *e felek* or *evelik*, also known as *labada*) is a “dock,” belonging to the buckwheat family. Both leaves and seeds are edible.

⁵³ Ebehgumedgi/Ebegumedge (Turk. *ebegümeçi*) is “mallow.”

Inspection of village showed inhabitants in most miserable state. No food except Ebegumedge in any house except one. This village will certainly starve next winter if relief is not provided.⁵⁴

This excerpt portrays a systematic analysis of local conditions. Niles and Sutherland's first impressions of the countryside reveal their uncertainty about the productivity of the land and the needs of its population. At Zidikan, they are also skeptical of the headman's immediate assertion of food shortage. However, after inspecting the village firsthand, noticing signs of malnourishment among the residents, and discovering that the only provisions are a scant supply of wild plants, they conclude that the community is on the brink of starvation.

Niles and Sutherland summarized their observations about Zidikan and other parts of Erzurum province in their final report to ACRNE. They reiterated that famine was inevitable during the coming months and that without outside food supplies, the region's inhabitants would suffer and die. Based on their assessment, they recommended that the aid organization provide the province with: "food relief on a large scale ... and distribution in the towns and villages, especially Diadin, Kara Kilissa, Zeidekan, Hasan Kale, and Alashgird."⁵⁵

The two Americans also chronicled war damages and population loss in eastern Anatolia. They focused particularly on comparing pre-war and current demographic figures (broken down on religious-ethnic lines), as well as gauging the possibility of whether Armenian refugees could return to their homes. The latter concern reflects the interest of Barton and others connected with ACRNE and the American Board in resettling Armenians in Turkey to foster an independent state, which they regarded as a long-term solution to stabilizing the region, as well as a means of reviving local ABCFM institutions.

The Caucasus campaigns of World War I had taken a heavy toll on the peoples of eastern Anatolia. Between 1915 and 1918, the Russians and their Armenian allies occupied areas of the Ottoman provinces of Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, and Trabzon. Following the Russian revolution in 1917, Armenian forces replaced the disbanding Russian army. When the Ottomans launched an offensive on this front in early 1918, much of the Armenian populace fled eastward with their retreating troops. In turn, after the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Armenia in the

⁵⁴ Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 26–7.

⁵⁵ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 21.

South Caucasus in May 1918, Muslims living within its borders moved into Ottoman territory. When Niles and Sutherland traveled through eastern Turkey in the summer of 1919, they encountered numerous refugees, especially Kurds, from across the frontier.

Unquestionably, Niles and Sutherland's estimates of population and material loss are approximate. The Americans spent little time (sometimes only a few hours and usually no more than a day) in the towns and villages on their route, even the major centers. They had to acquire statistics rapidly, and they usually relied on local officials to provide them, especially current figures. However, their field notes indicate that they were aware of other sources of pre-war demographic information.⁵⁶ Given their meticulousness, it seems likely that they attempted to compare multiple records in pursuit of their task.

Even if the exact numbers are debatable, Niles and Sutherland's data reflect broadly the untold destruction of eastern Turkey's communities during the war. The human devastation suggested by their statistics was substantiated by widespread physical signs of desolation and ruin. Most significantly, this evidence underscores that injury and loss were not restricted to a single group of people, but spread across populations, Christian Armenian and Muslim Turkish and Kurdish alike. The town of Bitlis, which Niles and Sutherland visited between 19 and 21 July, provides an example.

According to the estimates of the Americans, no Armenians remained from a pre-war population of 10,000, while 4,000 Muslims were left from the 30,000 who inhabited the town prior to 1914.⁵⁷ Niles and Sutherland concluded that only about one-seventh of the normal populace was left in Bitlis in the summer of 1919,⁵⁸ the rest having been killed or fled. The Americans also calculated that about nine-tenths of the town had been destroyed.⁵⁹ The Muslim quarter was in total ruin, with an estimated 6,500 homes lost.⁶⁰ Mosques, shops, public buildings,

⁵⁶ "Cuinet," "Elysee Reclus," and "Maievsky" appear at the top of page 11 in Niles and Sutherland's field notes, beside pre-war population figures for Van. They are the names of authors of recognized sources of statistical information about Anatolia and its peoples: Vital Cuinet, Élisée Réclus, and V.T. Mayevski. The notes also contain references to Ottoman population registers.

⁵⁷ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 6. Niles and Sutherland's pre-war data is consistent with other sources of population figures. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Bidlīs" and *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, s.v. "Bitlis."

⁵⁸ Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 6.

⁵⁹ Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 5.

⁶⁰ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 6.

and bridges had also been wrecked. In the Armenian area, about 500 dwellings out of 1500 had been destroyed.⁶¹

The same general conditions were evident throughout the region, especially in territory that had been under Russian and Armenian control. In the province of Van, Niles and Sutherland estimated that 150,000 Muslims and 700 Armenians remained from pre-war populations of 301,000 and 68,000 respectively. They also calculated that out of 1373 Muslim, 112 Armenian, and 187 mixed villages in the province, approximately 200 from the latter two groups alone had been left intact (without need of repair) in 1919.⁶² Proportionally, the majority Muslim community had suffered greater loss.

Visible evidence of lesser damage in Armenian town quarters and villages persuaded Niles and Sutherland to reconsider the frequent accounts that they heard from Muslims about destruction and atrocities committed by Armenians during the war.⁶³ They doubted these stories at first, which contradicted the customary image in the American media, including the press material of the ACRNE, of exclusive Armenian victimization and Turkish persecution. Niles and Sutherland explained in their final report how their observations in the field reshaped their views.

In this entire region we were informed that the damage and destruction had been done by the Armenians, who, after the Russians retired, remained in occupation of the country, and who, when the Turkish army advanced, destroyed everything belonging to the Musulmans. Moreover, the Armenians are accused of having committed murder, rape, arson and horrible atrocities of every description upon the Musulman population. At first we were incredulous of these stories, but we finally came to believe them, since the testimony was absolutely unanimous and was corroborated by material evidence. For instance, the only quarters left at all intact in the cities of Bitlis and Van are the Armenian quarters, as was evidenced by churches and inscriptions on the houses, while the Moslem quarters were completely destroyed. ... At every town and village at which we stopped the inhabitants' first desire was to tell us, not of their needs, but of horrors which the

⁶¹ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 6.

⁶² Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 14–5; Report of Niles and Sutherland, 7–8.

⁶³ For instance, see the account of a massacre at “Djanik” (Canik), between Van and Bayazit (Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 17).

Armenians had committed upon them and their families, the details of which were almost exactly the same as those perpetrated by the Turks upon the Armenians. We believe that it is incontestable that the Armenians were guilty of crimes of the same nature against the Turks as those of which the Turks are guilty against the Armenians.⁶⁴

This presumption of mutual wrongdoing and culpability was reinforced during Niles and Sutherland's stopover at Bayazıt (today's Doğubayazıt) from 29 to 31 July, where they recorded individual narratives of atrocities that had occurred during the Armenian occupation of the town. They identified the victims and described their injuries. Furthermore, they interviewed recently arrived refugees from the Republic of Armenia who told them of continuing massacres of Muslims in Transcaucasia, which the immigrants portrayed as a deliberate policy of extermination carried out by the Armenian military.⁶⁵

The victims' testimony and physical evidence, in addition to the accounts of ongoing violence, bolstered Niles and Sutherland's belief in Armenian atrocities against Muslims in eastern Anatolia in the past four years. The anger this brutality had aroused among Muslims in the region led them to conclude that Armenian resettlement there was not viable.⁶⁶ The carnage (which eliminated three-quarters of the region's Muslim population by Niles and Sutherland's reckoning) had aroused "a most bitter hatred [of] Musulmans for Armenians which makes it impossible for the two races to live together at the present time."⁶⁷

The reports of the refugees from the Armenian Republic, as well as their appeals for help, prompted the two Americans to take action—as any humanitarian aid workers probably would.⁶⁸ But they did not let sentiment overwhelm their objectivity. They decided to report the claims of slaughter to their superiors and call for an investigation to determine the veracity of the allegations. To this end, on 31 July, they sent a telegram both to their director, Major Arnold, in

⁶⁴ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 3–4.

⁶⁵ Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 18–9, 23–4.

⁶⁶ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 12, 19–20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁸ Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 24.

Istanbul, and the official in charge of ACRNE's operations in the Caucasus, ABCFM missionary Ernest Yarrow, based in Tiflis, Georgia:⁶⁹

Réfugiés Mussulmen à Bayazid rapportent cruauté et massacres organisés par troupes Armeniennes dans les Sandjaks de Surmeli, Oveyzidi, Nahtchevan, Sheril et Ordupat, Province Erivan. Demande d'urgence investigation immédiats et menires pour protection.⁷⁰

Niles and Sutherland tended to believe the refugees' stories, yet they also suspected that the Muslims in the South Caucasus were defying the authority of the Armenian state with arms and that their main grievance was that the Armenians were better equipped.⁷¹ An Ottoman official confirmed this notion the next day. After arriving in Kara Kilise on 1 August, Niles and Sutherland met the commander of the 11th Caucasian division, Djavid (Cavit) Bey, who conjectured that the allegations of the Muslims in Transcaucasia might be exaggerated. He speculated that they "were resisting the Armenian government in an organized manner" and the military operation against them was "not one of massacre but ... of the Armenians being successful in forcing the Musulmans to obey them." Apparently referring to claims and counterclaims of persecution by the two groups, he declared, "both sides are right and both are wrong."⁷²

Niles and Sutherland seem to have shared this pragmatic Ottoman officer's outlook. They demonstrated similar impartiality when they returned to Istanbul and repeated their petition for an investigation into the situation in Transcaucasia. Evidently, neither the ACRNE's

⁶⁹ Niles and Sutherland's interviews in Bayazıt and subsequent transmission of the cables were reported by local Ottoman authorities to officials in Erzurum (T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri, DH.KMS.53-3/15_11).

⁷⁰ Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 25. The telegram translates as "Muslim refugees in Beyazit report cruelties and massacres organized by Armenian troops in the regions of Surmeli, Oveyzidi, Nahtchevan, Sheril and Ordupat, Yerevan Province. Urgently demand investigation and provision of protection." French, the predominant international language of the time, was used generally for international telegraphs, with English second among the foreign languages (Yakup Bektas, "The Sultan's Messenger: Cultural Constructions of Ottoman Telegraphy, 1847–1880," *Technology and Culture*, Vol. 41, No. 4 [Oct 2000], 687–8.)

⁷¹ Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 24.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 25.

administrators in the capital nor those in Tiflis had initiated an inquiry. In their final report, Niles and Sutherland advised their superiors to examine the matter, and, if necessary, not sit in judgment about past conflicts but act decisively to stop current strife, without regard for any interest other than a humanitarian concern for ending violence and bloodshed.

It is strongly recommended that the situation of the Musulmans in the Caucasus be investigated, and, if the statements of refugees be found true, that energetic steps be taken to bring the Armenian government to repress massacres and atrocities at present going on. Whatever has occurred in the past, and whatever the rights and wrongs of the case may be, the disorders now occurring merely keep alive the hatred of Musulmans and Armenians and make a final peaceful settlement further distant and more difficult.⁷³

Aftermath of the Mission

No direct evidence has come to light to indicate the reaction of ACRNE's executive officers to the overall conclusions Niles and Sutherland expressed in their final report. But the agency's managers seem to have largely ignored and perhaps even concealed the two investigators' findings and recommendations. ACRNE chairman James Barton's subsequent avowal in his published memoirs, in contradiction to Niles and Sutherland's findings, that relief had not been needed during this period in eastern Anatolia, including Bitlis and Van, which "in general was depopulated," supports this supposition.⁷⁴

ACRNE took no steps to alleviate the reported signs of imminent famine in the Muslim towns and villages of Erzurum province, such as Zidikan. The minutes of an advisory committee meeting in Istanbul six months later allude to the reason. Concerning "relief work at Van, Bitlis, Ezeroum [*sic*] etc." one member "called attention to the present situation in this district where there are practically no Christians, and expressed the idea that the money given in America could hardly be appropriately spent in that district at present." Another participant added that the area "was likely to be included in the bounds of Armenia ... in which case there would be an attempt

⁷³ Report of Niles and Sutherland, 13.

⁷⁴ Barton, 116.

to repatriate Armenians, and hence there would soon be need of medical and other relief institutions to aid the work of repatriation.”⁷⁵

ACRNE had instructed Niles and Sutherland to ascertain relief needs in eastern Turkey and how to satisfy them. The two Americans fulfilled this duty with humanitarian concern and detachment. They reported the needs of the region’s inhabitants regardless of their ethnic and religious background. Yet, ACRNE was not neutral, and Niles and Sutherland’s findings did not concur with its perspectives or the notions it espoused. The agency had formed in 1915 and raised millions of dollars among Americans by propagating a compelling image of Christian and Armenian suffering at the hands of Muslim Turks. Mirrored in missionary accounts, as well as the US press, this well-publicized, categorical view fundamentally shaped American public opinion about events in Anatolia during and after World War I.

Niles and Sutherland’s findings contradicted this outlook. The results of their mission highlighted that Armenians and other Christians were not Anatolia’s only innocent victims of the war. Muslim Turks and Kurds had suffered too on a massive scale, and they were in need of relief. The Americans also revealed that Armenians had committed atrocities and were responsible for much of the physical devastation of Turkey’s eastern provinces. Moreover, they reported that these past occurrences, in addition to allegations of continuing brutality in the South Caucasus, had aroused such animosity among the Muslims of Anatolia that Armenian repatriation there was impractical.

ACRNE’s leaders and their associates in the ABCFM and supporters in the US had staked their hopes for the future on Armenian resettlement in Turkey and the creation of an independent state in the east. Niles and Sutherland’s appraisal of the situation on the ground in August 1919 cast severe doubt on the practicality of this plan. The idea of an American mandate for Armenia was being debated intensely in the United States at the time, and ACRNE—whose chairman was one of the most vociferous advocates of a protectorate—would have been reluctant to disclose details that questioned its feasibility.

Justin McCarthy’s discovery of the Niles and Sutherland report in the papers of the Harbord Commission confirms that ACRNE’s administrators shared it outside the agency. However, Harbord’s government-sponsored expedition to Anatolia and Transcaucasia had been

⁷⁵Minutes of the Meeting of the Constantinople Advisory Committee of the N.E.R., 13 March 1920, NER File 1920–1921, box 41, Amerikan Bord Heyeti, Istanbul.

organized largely because of lobbying by James Barton and other supporters of a protectorate. Harbord consulted members of ACRNE and the ABCFM for advice and guidance from the outset of his survey. Predictably, in his written conclusions, composed in October 1919 and submitted to the US Secretary of State on November 14, he recommended a mandate over the region by a single great power, the United States being the prime candidate.⁷⁶

In his report, Harbord referred to Niles and Sutherland's earlier investigation of eastern Turkey. He mentioned that they had covered territory that had been inaccessible at the time of his journey, specifically Bitlis and Van provinces. He also affirmed that their findings in these areas substantiated his own observations in neighboring territories.⁷⁷ Niles and Sutherland certainly would have agreed with Harbord's testimony about the devastation and need for humanitarian relief in eastern Anatolia,⁷⁸ but they might have hesitated endorsing his thoughts about the advisability of carving out an independent Armenia under the auspices of a foreign power in the region.

Conclusions

Niles and Sutherland's service contracts with ACRNE apparently expired in August 1919, and they were released from the agency's employ within days of returning to Istanbul from the east.⁷⁹ Both their involvement with the organization and their presence in Turkey ended abruptly, without even enough time to refine their final report. No contemporary public mention of their mission seems to exist except for the brief note by Harbord.⁸⁰ Their observations and assessments were buried in the archives of the US government and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, where they remained forgotten until the emergence of the report in 1990 and the field notes in 2010.

⁷⁶ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919*, vol. 2 (Washington, 1934), 861, 869.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 842.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 848.

⁷⁹ See note 39.

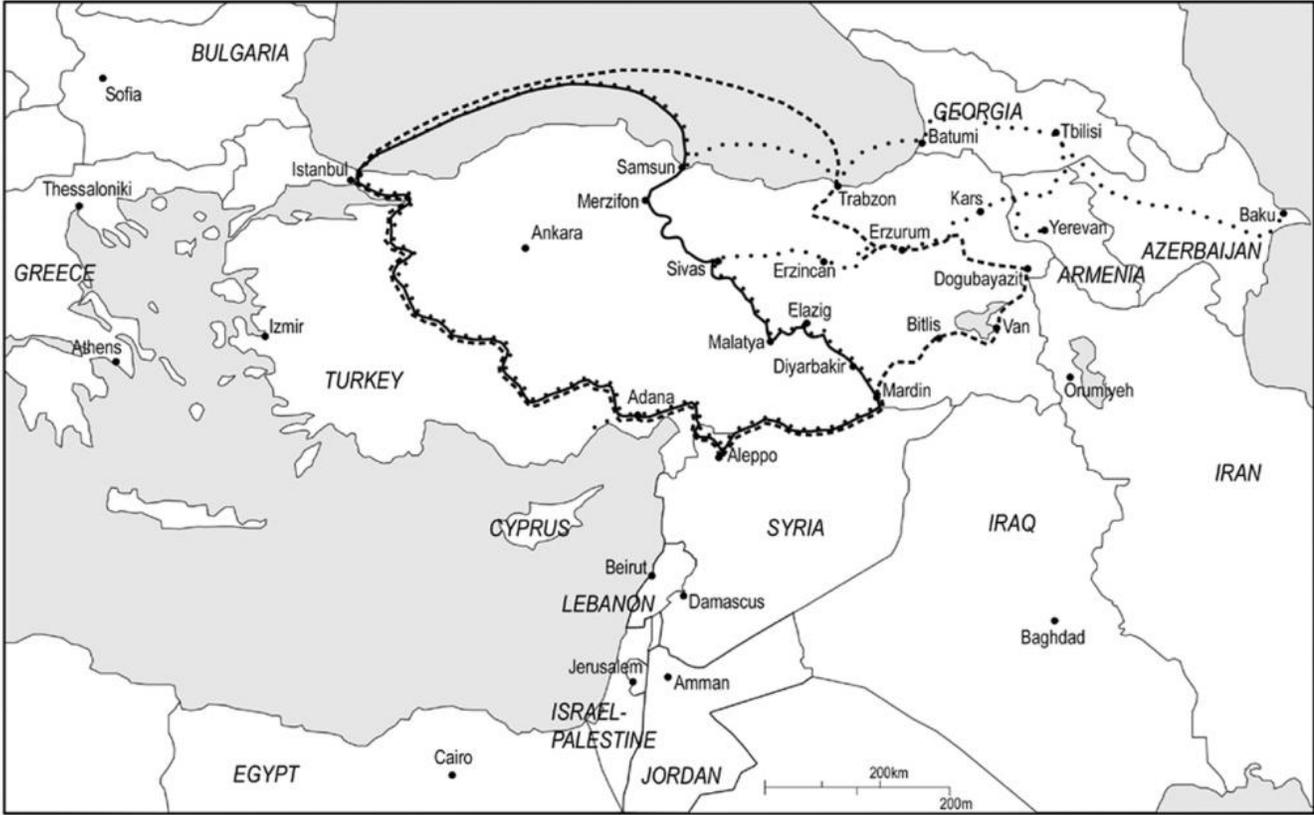
⁸⁰ The Harbord report was not released to Congress until March 1920. In May, President Wilson requested congressional approval to accept a European proffered mandate for Armenia. On 1 June 1920, the Senate voted down the request, ending the bid for an American protectorate in Anatolia.

Full understanding of Niles and Sutherland's final report and its historical importance depends on examining it together with their field notes. The day-to-day account of their mission contained in the notes presents a fuller, more illuminating view of the two Americans' methods, observations, and thoughts. The notes also augment the report with extra detail. Besides providing eyewitness information about eastern Anatolia following World War I, they supplement appraisals of current conditions, as well as events in the recent past. Finally, the notes and report combined offer further insight into the efforts and approach of The American Committee for Near East Relief in pursuing humanitarian work in Turkey after the war.

Niles and Sutherland's field notes and report document an investigation by observers who valued impartiality. The two men surveyed extensive territory, interviewed local informants, and compared and evaluated information from multiple sources. The details they uncovered should contribute greatly to scholarly understanding of Anatolia and its surroundings both during and after the First World War.⁸¹ Yet, the records of their mission are vital for much more. The notes and report highlight an attempt at objective analysis, which seems to have been unappreciated at the time they were written. Historians and others who hope to better comprehend the events of the past will certainly benefit from Emory Niles and Arthur Sutherland's data and estimates, but they will perhaps profit most by implementing a similar method of inquiry.

⁸¹ For objective evaluation, this evidence should be compared with other eyewitness accounts, especially those of British military officers in the region at the time, some of whom Niles and Sutherland mention (Notes of Niles and Sutherland, 21, 31). There is surely much to be discovered in Turkish and Armenian primary sources as well.

Map 1



Barton Commission *March-May 1919* —————
 Niles and Sutherland *July-August 1919* - - - - -
 Harbord Commission *September-October 1919*

The names and national borders are contemporary

Map 2

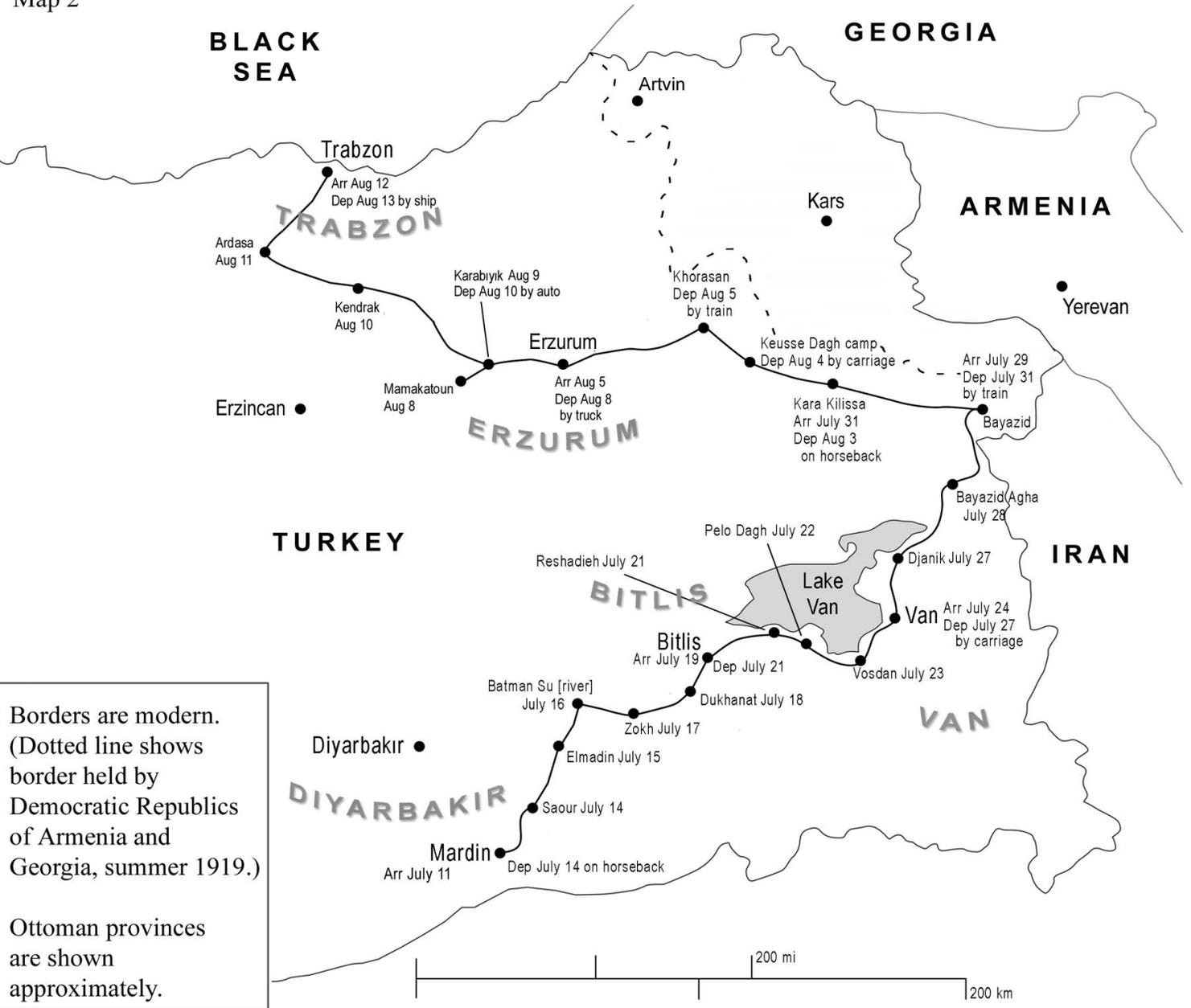
BLACK SEA

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

TURKEY

IRAN



Borders are modern.
 (Dotted line shows border held by Democratic Republics of Armenia and Georgia, summer 1919.)

Ottoman provinces are shown approximately.

**Glossary of Selected Sites Mentioned in
Niles and Sutherland's Field Notes and Report**

Site	Ottoman Spelling	Turkish Transcription	Current Identification
Derindje	درينجه	Derince	Derince (Kocaeli)
Saour	صاورور	Savur	Savur
Elmadin	المدين	Elmedin	Beşiri
Batman Su	باتمان صو	Batman Su	Batman Çayı
Zokh	زوق	Zok	Yanarsu
Reshadieh	رشاديه	Reşadiye	Reşadiye (Yelkenli)
Vosdan	وسطان	Vustan	Gevaş
Djanik	جانك	Canik	Timar (Gedikbulak)
Bayazid Agha	بايزيد آغا	Bayazıt Ağa	Çaldıran
Bayazid	بايزيد	Bayazıt	Doğubayazıt
Kara Kilissa	قره كليسه	Kara Kilise	Ağrı
Zeidekan	زيدكان	Zidikan	Eleşkirt
Keusse Dagh	كوسه داغ	Köse Dağ	Kösedağ
Khorasan	خوراسان	Horasan	Horasan
Karabiyik	قره بيق	Kara Bıyık	Aşkale
Namoukatoun (Mamakaton)	ماما خاطون	Mama Hatun	Tercan
Khadrak (Kendrak)	خادراق	Hadrak	Balkaynak
Ardasa	آردسه	Ardasa	Torul