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### HERO OF THE SOVIET UNION, PEOPLE'S HERO, THE FIRST MINISTER OF DEFENSE OF INDEPENDENT KAZAKHSTAN – SAGADAT NURMAGAMBETOV

**Abstract.** This article presents a brief biography and career path of Sagadat Kozhakhmetuly Nurmagambetov, who was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union at the age of 20 during the Great Patriotic War, thereby becoming a source of pride for the nation. Subsequently, he received the title of «National Hero» of independent Kazakhstan, served as the first Minister of Defense, and was granted the highest military rank of «Army General».

**Keywords:** *front, platoon, company, battalion, regiment, division, soldier, machine gunner, batyr, hero, commander, military district, defense headquarters.*

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### КЕҢЕС ОДАҒЫНЫҢ БАТЫРЫ, ХАЛЫҚ ҚАҺАРМАНЫ, ТӘУЕЛСІЗ ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ ТҰҢҒЫШ ҚОРҒАНЫС МИНИСТРІ САҒАДАТ НҰРМАҒАМБЕТОВ ТУРАЛЫ

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақалада Ұлы Отан соғысы жылдарында жиырма жасында Кеңес Одағының батыры атағына ие болып, халқымыздың мақтанышына айналған, кейінірек тәуелсіз еліміздің № 1 Халық қаһарманы атағын алып, әрі тұңғыш Қорғаныс министрі қызметіне тағайын-

далып, «Армия генералы» жоғарғы әскери шенге ие болған Сағадат Қожахметұлы Нұрмағамбетовтың өнегелі өмір жолы мен қызметіне қысқаша шолу жасалған.

**Түйін сөздер:** майдан, взвод, рота, батальон, полк, дивизия, жауынгер, пулеметші, батыр, қаһарман, қолбасшы, әскери округ, қорғаныс штабы.

**Талгатбек Аминов, Жанар Аминова**

## **ГЕРОЙ СОВЕТСКОГО СОЮЗА, НАРОДНЫЙ ГЕРОЙ, ПЕРВЫЙ МИНИСТР ОБОРОНЫ НЕЗАВИСИМОГО КАЗАХСТАНА – САГАДАТ НУРМАГАМБЕТОВ**

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассмотрена краткая биография и служебный путь Сагадата Кожахметұлы Нурмагамбетова, который в годы Великой Отечественной войны удостоился звания Героя Советского Союза в 20-летнем возрасте, став гордостью нашего народа, а впоследствии получил звание «Народного героя» независимого Казахстана, был назначен первым министром обороны и получил высшее воинское звание «Генерал армии».

**Ключевые слова:** фронт, взвод, рота, батальон, полк, дивизия, боец, пулемётчик, батыр, герой, военачальник, военный округ, штаб обороны.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In May of this year, the 101st anniversary of the birth of the legendary commander coincides with the 80th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War.

As the poet Kakimbek Salykuly once wrote:

*«Among Kazakhs there are many warriors, many poets,  
Wise minds blessed with reason are plentiful.  
When we first saw Sagadat,  
We agreed he was one of the noble falcons.»*

Indeed, our nation is blessed with many figures we can be proud of. Among these distinguished personalities stands the remarkable military leader, statesman, and public figure – **Sagadat Kozhakhmetovich Nurmagambetov**, the glorious commander of our Armed Forces.

The lives and contributions of Kazakh military commanders during the Great Patriotic War remain an important and underexplored topic within national historical research. By studying the life and service of **Sagadat Kozhakhmetovich Nurmagambetov**, this paper aims to link Kazakhstan's military history of the 20th century with the formation of its defense sector during the period of independence. The main objectives are:

- To review the existing literature and sources on the subject and analyze the historiography;
- To thoroughly examine Nurmagambetov's heroic path and leadership abilities;
- To define his role in the establishment of the Armed Forces of independent Kazakhstan.

Thus, the goal of this research is to conduct a comprehensive study of S. K. Nurmagambetov's life and service, highlighting his historical significance. The tasks of the study include comparing historical sources, supplementing information from previous works, and clearly identifying his place in our military history.

## FAMILY BACKGROUND

As for the origin of Sagadat, his ancestor **Koskarbay Batyr** is often mentioned in connection with battles against the Dzungars that took place from the Altai Mountains to the Irtysh River and the West Siberian Plain during the reign of **Abylai Khan**. It is said that Abylai Khan called him «My Young Warrior.» The name of the Khan's «Young Warrior» frequently appears in historical records and epic tales. His descendants, who proudly trace their lineage to Koskarbay Batyr, are numerous in the regions of Torgai, Akmola, Kostanay, and Pavlodar. Descendants of the batyr also live in the Sharlak and Novo-Varshavka districts of Omsk. In the village of Karaozek, Novo-Varshavka, his descendants live to this day (Abdirakhman 2014).

**Sagadat Kozhakhmetovich** was born on **May 25, 1924**, in the village of **Kossym** (now known as **Enbek (Trudovoye)**) in the **Akkol District of Akmola Region**.

*«My native village was surrounded by dense pine forests and clusters of birch trees, with the golden steppe beyond. In spring, birds would chirp around the nearby lake, while in winter, everything would be covered in snow, making roads impassable. God did not grant me a father's guidance. Before his passing, my*

*father told my mother Aisa: 'Whether it is a boy or a girl, name the child **Sagadat**. In Arabic, «Sagadat» means peace and tranquility. If Sagit and Sagadat survive, consider me alive, – recalled Sagadat about his father. His father, Kozhakhmet, passed away a month before Sagadat's birth. Before he turned eight, his mother Aisa also passed away. Thus, from a young age, he was raised by his elder brother Sagit and his sister-in-law Kultay (Nurmagambetov 1984a), (Zhunisbekov 2010a).*

## RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed the **historical-biographical method**, **comparative historical analysis**, and **documentary-critical examination**. The main sources included:

- **Archival documents** (warfront notes, award sheets);
- **Memoirs of S. Nurmagambetov and his fellow soldiers;**
- **Data from scholarly works and articles** related to the Great Patriotic War and the military history of independent Kazakhstan.

By using these methods, the authors aimed to verify the authenticity of the sources and to derive systematic biographical and historical conclusions.

Sagadat, who became an orphan at the age of eight, started school in 1933. He finished school the same year the war began. His brother Sagit received his draft notice first. Sagadat wished to volunteer and go to the front with him, but the district military commissar told him: «Son, don't rush. You'll have your turn. We'll call you when it's time.» Later, a mourning notice arrived stating that Sagit had died in battle near Novgorod. Losing his only brother was a devastating blow for Sagadat (Nurmagambetov 1984b).

Eager to avenge his brother, Sagadat longed to go to the front. Eventually, he was drafted but was first sent not to the battlefield, but to a **military academy**. It was necessary to train officers from among the educated youth. He ended up at a **machine-gun training school in Bayram-Ali, Turkmenistan**. Many of his fellow villagers who came with him failed the medical exam and were sent directly to the front. Sagadat stayed at the academy, parting from his friends with difficulty, agreeing to meet again in their native village of Trudovoye after the war.

Sagadat dedicated himself fully to military studies. He began with **Russian language** and **mathematics**, both essential for a machine-gunner. Without knowledge of math, one could not become a machine-gunner, and military life was impossible without Russian, as all commands were issued

in that language. Fortunately, he had done well in both subjects at school.

Here is the English translation of your continuation, in the same academic-historical tone as before:

### Research Findings:

**Evidence of Heroism:** Nurmagambetov's military valor during the war – particularly in the battles at the **Magnuszew and Pilica bridgeheads** and the **Berlin operation** – has been verified through archival materials and the memoirs of his contemporaries.

**1. Personal Development:** His rapid rise from an orphaned child to battalion commander in a short period demonstrated his exceptional personal capabilities and military training.

**2. Role in the Post-Soviet Period:** As the first Minister of Defense of independent Kazakhstan, his service had a direct impact on shaping the defense capacity of the sovereign state.

Sagadat faced no difficulties in his studies. Having completed military school ahead of schedule and received his officer's insignia, he was sent directly to the western front. His journey took him from **Kushka** to **Ashgabat**, then through **Krasnovodsk**, across the **Caspian Sea** aboard the steamship *Dagestan*, arriving at the **Makhachkala sea port**, and from there through **Grozny, Pyatigorsk, Nevinnomyssk, Armavir, and Krasnodar** (Kalmurzayev 2012a).

He and his fellow officers were assigned to the headquarters of the **9th Red Banner Rifle Corps** and then distributed among the units of the **157th Separate Rifle Brigade**. The brigade's chief of staff, **Lieutenant Colonel Safonov**, received them. A veteran of the military, Safonov proudly shared that he had begun his career in the **15th Cavalry Division** under **Konstantin Rokossovsky**. From their first meeting, Sagadat felt a strong connection with this seasoned officer and came to see him as a mentor – a friendship that continued even after Safonov retired with the rank of major general.

Sagadat began his military career as the **commander of a machine-gun platoon**. Although the platoon was part of a machine-gun company, it operated alongside an infantry company in combat. His three machine-gun crews were responsible for supporting the infantry during engagements. Determining the correct positioning of the machine guns was a task that fell to the platoon commander. Sagadat understood how vital it was to select the right location.

Before launching an assault, the enemy would typically open artillery fire to identify opposing forces. A random artillery shell could destroy any

exposed soldier or position. Sagadat's machine gunners vigilantly monitored enemy movements, aiming never to miss a single sign of action. On the battlefield, under enemy fire, every soldier had to remain alert and observant – something deeply instilled in them from the moment they were conscripted.

Thus, Sagadat's youth coincided with a harsh period in national history – the **Great Patriotic War**. He never experienced carefree student years or youthful romance. He matured early. After finishing military school, he immediately became a commander. Under the direction of the **North Caucasus Front**, the **301st Rifle Division** was formed, with Sagadat included. This division became part of the 9th Rifle Corps, comprising the 1050th, 1052nd, and 1054th Rifle Regiments. Sagadat served in the **1052nd Rifle Regiment** until the end of the war.

After commanding a platoon, he was promoted to lead a machine-gun company. He took part in the liberation of **Donbas**, the USSR's major coal basin. The battle for **Makeevka** was particularly intense – clearing each house, square, and street of enemy forces was no easy task. The fighting involved direct, hand-to-hand combat. Though the city was reclaimed, it came at a cost. Capturing **Hill 81.9** demanded unimaginable bravery. His soldiers showed great resilience and ingenuity while crossing the **Dnieper River** (Kalmurzayev 2012b).

On **January 17, 1945**, Sagadat successfully carried out a combat mission during the breakthrough of enemy defenses on **Polish territory**. In the **battle for the Magnuszew bridgehead**, his machine-gun company eliminated **120 enemy soldiers and 12 machine-gun positions** over two days. During the liberation of the city of **Magnuszew**, located 60 kilometers from Warsaw, Nurmagambetov demonstrated exceptional command ability. In one fierce battle, his machine gun aimer was incapacitated, but Sagadat himself took control of the weapon and opened intense fire on the enemy, repelling two major enemy attacks and killing **65 Nazi soldiers**.

Subsequently, the company led by Nurmagambetov crossed the **Pilica River** in Poland, eliminating **35 enemy soldiers and six machine-gun positions**, enabling the Soviet army to advance. According to **Kassym-Jomart Tokayev**, then Chairman of the Senate and now President of Kazakhstan, **Marshal Georgy Zhukov** himself observed these battles. «Marshal Zhukov witnessed the battle in which Nurmagambetov participated. He recommended awarding Sagadat Nurmagambetov the title of **Hero of the Soviet Union**. It was an act of undeniable heroism, » said Tokayev in the documentary «*Duty, Honor, Feat of Sagadat Nurmagambetov*» (Documentary 2014a).



On **February 27, 1945**, at the age of 21, **Sagadat Nurmagambetov** was awarded the **Hero of the Soviet Union** title.

The Kazakh hero recalled the award ceremony:

«The army commander personally presented the medals. He pinned the **Order of Lenin** and the **Gold Star** on our chests and sincerely congratulated us. I couldn't hide my emotions. I couldn't believe such a great honor had been bestowed upon a Kazakh orphan. I wished that my father, mother, brother Sagit, and all my fellow countrymen could have witnessed this achievement,» he said in his memoirs (Nurmagambetov 1975c).

The next day, the decorated soldiers were summoned to the **military council**. Soldiers and sergeants from Qatar were granted leave to visit home, while officers returned to their respective companies, battalions, and regiments. Sagadat returned to his battalion, now as its commander.

This is a good moment to introduce a previously unpublished document – a **commendation** jointly signed by **Lieutenant Colonel A. Peshkov**, commander of the 1052nd Rifle Regiment and Hero of the Soviet Union, and **Major General V. Antonov**, commander of the 301st Rifle Division. The document recommends **Major S. Nurmagambetov**, commander of the 1st Rifle Battalion, for a **second Order of Lenin** and **Gold Star Medal**. It describes the battalion's role in the **April battles for Berlin**. A brief excerpt reveals the scale of heroism:

«On April 14, Major Nurmagambetov's skillful leadership enabled his battalion to break through the enemy's well-prepared defensive lines west of Küstrin, paving the way for the tanks and other battalions to launch an offensive. In urban battles in **Guzow**, the battalion eliminated **200 enemy soldiers, 18 combat units, 8 fortified strongpoints**, and captured **69 soldiers and officers**. On April 18, the battalion repelled **three enemy counterattacks**, inflicted heavy losses on enemy manpower and equipment, and liberated **Bucov**, killing **100 Nazi soldiers**, disabling **12 firing points, 3 tanks**, and **one self-propelled gun**. On April 23, the battalion was the first to cross the **Spree River**, destroying **over 80 enemy troops** and capturing **145 prisoners** near the town of **Treptow**, thus facilitating its capture. On April 24, despite fierce resistance, Nurmagambetov's battalion advanced toward **Berlin**, where, in street battles, it killed **450 Nazis**, captured **1,500**, and neutralized **9 strategic enemy positions**. During this battle, Major Nurmagambetov was wounded» (Nurmagambetov 1984d).

In the commendation paper mentioned above, such a high appraisal of Nurmagambetov was given. Whether the fact that he had only recently

received the highest military title in February of that year was taken into account, or perhaps the recommendation never reached its destination before the war ended, remains unclear. In any case, Sagadat did not receive a second Gold Star. Had he been awarded, he could have become the second Kazakh, after Talgat Begeldinov, to be named a Hero of the Soviet Union twice. The fact that his fellow soldiers saw his courage as worthy of a second recognition was a great honor and a mark of deep respect.

Thus, Sagadat, who began his military path in the North Caucasus, ended the war in Berlin—the very heart of fascism. He marched through Eastern Europe and reached Western Europe. He was directly involved in the storming of the Gestapo headquarters. This area included fortified stone walls, service buildings, a prison, and school facilities. The long-awaited assault began. Artillery fire shook the ground. Sagadat led his battalion into battle. Soldiers used gaps in the stone walls to open fire on the enemy. The fight moved into the Gestapo courtyard. The Nazis fiercely resisted, and Soviet troops responded with grenades. Battles broke out in every room and staircase. Mobile units worked in close coordination with the infantry companies. By afternoon, soldiers from the division, regiment, and battalion had raised the Red Flag over the Gestapo buildings. The evil nest of fascism was destroyed.

The 301st Rifle Division was tasked with storming Hitler's Imperial Chancellery. Sagadat's battalion, as part of this division, had the honor of carrying out this critical mission. The operation lasted from April 30 to the evening of May 1. White flags of surrender were spotted. On the morning of May 2, battalion commanders received a message from the regimental headquarters: The Reichstag had surrendered. Victory had been achieved. By noon, the regiment commander called: «Comrade Nurmagambetov, I bring you and your entire battalion joyful news—the enemy has capitulated».

There was no limit to the soldiers' joy. They embraced, congratulated one another, and threw their caps into the air.

Despite the war's end, Sagadat's battalion remained on active duty. He was appointed commandant of the area around the Imperial Chancellery, with several battalions under his authority. His duties included managing the city garrison, organizing guard and patrol services, and securing various facilities such as factories, government buildings, and, most notably, Hitler's palace and underground bunker, as well as the surrounding park and quarter.

In September 1945, Sagadat was granted a 45-day leave and returned home. He spent a month visiting his collective farm. For the entire village, the hero's return was a grand celebration. Sagadat had longed for his homeland's



air, soil, and people. Local officials honored him and informed him that he would soon join the regional delegation traveling to Almaty to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the republic. The festive event in Almaty passed in a joyful atmosphere. Before he realized it, his leave had ended, and it was time to return to duty.

By decision of the Field Military District headquartered in Almaty, Sagadat was sent to study in Moscow. From 1946 to 1949, he attended the Frunze Military Academy. Upon graduation, he was appointed commander of a regiment in the Turkestan Military District of Central Asia.

Leading a regiment required extensive training and experience. Major Nurmagambetov quickly adapted, mastering the intricacies of military service, building strong relationships with his subordinates and local communities. As a Hero of the Soviet Union, he earned great respect from party and government officials. In 1958, he was promoted to chief of staff of a division. In 1961, General of the Army Ivan Fedyuninsky, commander of the Turkestan Military District, nominated him to command the division. However, due to illness, Sagadat was hospitalized and unable to recover quickly. A new candidate had to be appointed. Despite this, he was grateful for the trust shown by General Fedyuninsky.

After recovering, Sagadat was transferred from Tashkent to Almaty, where he was appointed head of the Civil Defense Headquarters of the Kazakh SSR. Although the position was new to him, returning to his homeland brought great joy. He established close ties with national leaders, intellectuals, artists, and his fellow countrymen from Akmola. While not directly involved in military operations, he contributed significantly to strengthening the country's defense capacity and military preparedness.

In August 1969, General Lyashchenko of the Turkestan Military District brought good news. At that time, tensions between the USSR and China were escalating. Moscow had decided to establish a new Central Asian Military District in Almaty. Nurmagambetov was appointed deputy commander of the district and head of the Almaty garrison. He organized and led military parades in the city, earning the affection of the local population. His leadership during these events left a lasting impression.

In 1981, Sagadat was reassigned again, as military duty required. He was sent to Hungary as the first deputy commander of the Southern Group of Soviet Forces, serving there for nearly four years. His efforts were highly valued by both the Soviet Ministry of Defense and Hungarian military leadership.

Upon returning to Kazakhstan, now approaching retirement age, he resumed work in a familiar role. During the USSR's campaigns for increased

grain production, his leadership ensured effective military assistance in logistics. He often traveled with Dinmukhamed Kunayev, resolving matters directly in the field. For these contributions, he received multiple commendations. He was elected five times as a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Kazakh SSR and was a delegate to party congresses.

Until the dissolution of the Central Asian Military District, he served as deputy commander. On June 6, 1989, the USSR Ministry of Defense officially retired him, concluding a military career that spanned 51 years and 6 months. But retirement did not mean idleness. In 1990, he was elected a deputy of the Supreme Council of the Republic and took part in passing the law on Kazakhstan's independence.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev valued Nurmagambetov's experience and appointed him Chairman of the State Defense Committee on October 25, 1991. On May 7, 1992, he became the first Minister of Defense of independent Kazakhstan. On May 5, 1993, he was awarded the rank of Army General—the first in Kazakhstan's history. On May 23, 1994, he was named a «People's Hero» and received Gold Star No. 1.

Thus, in his retirement years, Sagadat's second military career began. He was tasked with forming the army and defense doctrine of the new state. His first challenge was assembling national military personnel.

«When I was appointed Chairman of the Defense Committee in 1991, our armed forces had not yet been established. Many non-Kazakh officers were planning to return to their countries. Other republics were demanding allegiance from soldiers stationed on their territories. After consulting with the president, we turned the tide ».

«I knew the personnel well from my time as deputy commander. I called on capable and loyal officers, even those in reserve. Many of them proved worthy of the trust. Among them were officers like Zharbolov, Ertaev, Sykhimov, Shatskov, Aubakirov, Khalikov, Elamanov, Ibraev, Vasimov, and Tasbulatov» he recalled in an interview (Zhunisbekov 2010b).

He also appointed Abai Tasbulatov, then a lieutenant colonel and later a member of parliament, as head of the military school in Almaty. «I told him to recruit and train Kazakh youth. Today, 95% of cadets are Kazakh. The number of military specializations has increased from four to eleven» he said.

Tasbulatov praised his mentor: «As a young soldier who became a Hero of the Soviet Union at 21, Nurmagambetov prioritized junior officer training. In the early years of independence, we revived the 'Junior Lieutenant' rank—an effective wartime method for maintaining leadership continuity. Nurma-

gambetov successfully applied it in building Kazakhstan's military » he wrote (Tasbulatov 2018).

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Comparing the findings with other studies confirms Nurmagambetov's universal significance. While some sources (e.g., Nurmagambetov 1984; Zhunisbekov 2010; Kalmurzayev 2012) focus solely on his wartime heroism, others (e.g., Zhunisbekov 2010; Tasbulatov 2018) emphasize his reformist role in building the independent nation's military. However, given that this study is based primarily on Soviet and Kazakh archives, future research should incorporate international archival materials and perspectives from former Soviet republics.

## CONCLUSION

Sagadat Kozhakhmetovich Nurmagambetov remains a towering figure in Kazakh military history. His legacy spans both war and peace. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to his life, emphasizing his role in shaping Kazakhstan's military potential.

His story serves as a valuable source for military-patriotic education and can be incorporated into curricula for historical and social sciences.

In recognition of his heroic legacy, the «Zhas Ulan» military school in Astana was named after him. He received numerous decorations from both the USSR and other countries. He was honored as a citizen of Almaty, Astana, Donetsk (Ukraine), Akmola Region, and Akkol District.

In April 2024, the Kazakh Parliament approved a law renaming the three classes of the «Aibyn» Order in honor of three national heroes: the 1st class after **Sagadat Nurmagambetov**, the 2nd after **Baurzhan Momyshuly**, and the 3rd after **Rakhimzhan Koshkarbayev**.

Sagadat Nurmagambetov passed away on September 24, 2013, at the age of 89. He is survived by his children, Talgat and Aisulu, and four grandchildren. His wife, Lira Sabirova, passed away in 2005.

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