EXECUTIONER SUPREME

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Staff, 26 November 2015

When Armenians hail Soghomon Tehlirian--one of their greatest 20th century heroes—they rarely seem to be aware that the executioner of Tala'at (ring-leader of the perpetrators of the Genocide of Armenians) was only 25 when he brought down the Turkish butcher on the Berlin street. But at 25 Tehlirian was already a veteran fighter and a year earlier had executed Haroutune Mgrdichian who had compiled the list of prominent Constantinople Armenians who were to be arrested on April 24, 1915 upon Tala'at's orders. The "executioner supreme" was born in an Erzingan village in 1896—when the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF)—was only six-years old.

Tehlirian joined the ARF at an early age and took up arms 1914 against the oppressors of his people and had impressed the party leadership by his courage, determination and smarts. Thus when the ARF—at its 9th general meeting (1919) in Armenia—decided to punish the ringleaders of the Genocide, it was natural to pick Tehlirian as one of the fighters who would put "paid" for the Ottoman Empire's supreme crime.

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The executions took months of research before being set into motion. ARF committees in the Caucasus, Constantinople, Berlin, the Balkans, and in the US went into action to determine the hideouts of the killers, confirm their identities, and assign the group or individual who would mete out justice in the name of the Armenian nation. In addition, the ARF decided to eliminate two Azeri leaders who had also persecuted Armenians. Thus the first to be executed was Azeri Prime Minister Khan Khoiski (Tbilisi, May 1920) by Aram Yeganian and Misag Garabedian. The following July it was Azeri Interior Minister Chivanshir who was slain in Constantinople. His killer was Misag Torlakian.

Eight months later (March 1921) Tehlirian pulled his trigger on Hardenbergstrasse and killed arch-

villain Tala'at. As in previous similar operations a small group of ARF members provided clandestine assistance to the avenger. Thus, Tehlirian was supported by poet Shahan Natalie, Hratch Papazian, and several others who already lived in the German capital.

Six months later it was the turn of Ittihadist Prime Minister Sayid Hilmi to meet his Maker. He was killed in Rome by Arshavir Shiragian. In April 1922 Shiragian executed Jemal Azmi in Constantinople and Aram Yerganian killed another arch-villain-- Behaeddin Shakir--who had fled Berlin to seek refuge in Constantinople after Tala'at assassination.

Three months later (July 1922) in Tbilisi Stepan Dzaghigian slew Jemal Pasha, a member of the triumvirate which organized and ordered the Genocide. The following month Hagop Melkoumov, an Armenian soldier in the Red Army, killed Enver Pasha in Boukhara, Central Asia.

Soon after, the ARF halted the executions because most of high Ittihadist party officers who were responsible for the Genocide had been eliminated. One surviving villain—Dr. Nazim--was hanged in Ankara in 1926 upon dictator Mustapha Kemal's order.

After his release from the German jail, Tehlerian settled in Belgrade. Using an assumed name (Saro Melikian) immigrated to California in 1956. Four years later he died of cerebral hemorrhage in San Francisco. He was buried at Ararat Cemetery in Fresno.

Next year will be the 120th anniversary of Armenian hero Soghomon Tehlirian. Armenians in Armenia and in the Diaspora—no matter their political affiliation—will certainly remember and honor the supreme executioner and his associates who dedicated their lives to Hye Tadd.

Click on the picture to view the video.