

REMARKABLE, UNSUNG DIASPORANS

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By **Jirair Tutunjian**, Toronto, 6 October 2017

Our often tortured history (battlefield for empires, occupation by nearby Persia and distant Rome, countless exiled by Byzantium to Cyprus, Thrace, and Sicily for heresy, invasions and centuries of persecution and finally genocide by the Ottomans) have tossed us to the four corners of the world. In addition to pain, alienation and loss of bearing felt by individuals away from their homeland, the nation has for millennia "bled" from "Jermag Chart" (White Massacre in Armenian): an unknown number of Armenians, over the past two thousand years, have assimilated in disparate countries like India, Byzantium, Turkey, Poland, Russia, the United States, France, and Italy...



Despite the challenges of exilic life, many diaspora Armenians have managed to achieve remarkable success—even greatness-- in their new "homelands". But to our great national loss, we have lost track of many of these Armenians. We have also been denied hailing them while the nation has lost their genetic boon. We will take a look at three such Armenians...from Russia, France, and Britain.

Generalissimo Alexander SUVOROV (1730-1800)

It will come as a stunning news to most Armenians that the greatest Russian general (both during tsarist and Soviet rule) had an Armenian mother (Hripsimeh Manoogian). She was a descendant of Artsakh-born brigadier Stepan Manoogian. According to vague Russian sources, Suvorov's father was of Swedish descent. Some fanciful Russians claim Suvorov Sr. was descended from Ruric, the founder of Russia.



A modest soldier who considered Hannibal, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon the greatest military commanders of all time, Generalissimo Suvorov led 63 battles and never lost one! Don't check the "Guinness Book of Records". You won't find him.

Seriously wounded six times, he again and again returned to battle to lead his armies to victory. His most frequent antagonists were the Turks as Empress Catherine the Great strategy called for driving the Turks from the Balkans and the northern shores of the Black Sea. Although often outnumbered, Suvorov beat the Turks at every encounter. As a result of his victories, he was awarded scores of Russian and foreign medals in addition to the highest Russian award (St. Alexander Nevsky Order).

Because he was a sickly child, Suvorov didn't attend school: he depended on his father's vast library for his education. He read the ancients, mastered history, battle tactics and strategy. From library books he learned engineering, philosophy, siege warfare, geography, artillery deployment, and the art of building sturdy fortifications. The young autodidact complemented his learning with rigorous exercises to overcome his ailments. At the age of 18 he enrolled in the Cadet Corps of Land Forces. Following graduation, he rose fast as he was progressively given bigger and tougher responsibilities. After getting battle-hardened in wars in the Caucasus, he spent most of the 1770s and '80s pushing


the Turks from Crimea, the Caucasus and the Balkans—the soft underbelly of Russia. He also conquered Krakow, Poland and occupied Milan.

Suvorov also found time to organize the resettlement of Armenian migrants--displaced from Crimea--and gave them permission to establish a new city called Nor Nakhichevan. Together with the empress and Prime Minister Grigory Potemkin, he attended the opening of the first Armenian church in St. Petersburg.

One of Suvorov's greatest triumphs was putting down the Yemelyan Pugachev rebellion in the mid-1770s. Pugachev, a Cossack with wide-ranging military experience, claimed that he was the assassinated Tsar Peter III. He gathered a large army of Cossacks, serfs and others unhappy with tsarina's rule to unseat her and install himself as tsar. When several Russian generals failed to stop the advancing horde of Pugachev's, Catherine asked Suvorov to put an end to the rebellion. Suvorov beat the rebel in a single battle, put him in an iron cage and shipped him to Catherine. Pugachev was beheaded in public in 1775.

Although a contemporary of Napoleon, Suvorov didn't encounter Napoleon on the battlefield. However, when the French general was in Egypt, Suvorov liberated many of the European territories Napoleon had conquered. Later, when Napoleon returned to France, Suvorov wanted to advance on Paris. Instead, he was ordered to travel to Switzerland to join other Russian forces so as to drive the French from Switzerland. To do so, he—like his hero Hannibal—crossed the Alps.

Because of his courage and modesty, he was adored by his men. He called common soldiers "brother" and held conversations with them. In the battlefield he stood at the most exposed position. He said the secret of martial success is speed and mobility, the accuracy of gunfire and the use of the bayonet. He was an enlightened monarchist who disdained court lifestyle. His gibes and sarcasm made enemies in court. Nevertheless, he was a confidante of Catherine the Great.

Another achievement of Suvorov's was mentoring future Field-Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov who, after Suvorov, is considered the most accomplished Russian military leader. Kutuzov's mother was also Armenian! While Suvorov missed the big battles of the Napoleonic era (he died in 1800), Kutuzov led the imperial army against Napoleon and was in command of the Russian forces at the Battle of  Borodino.

Suvorov wrote several books on military affairs and was well-known for his quotes. He said, "Achieve victory not by numbers, but by knowing how", "What is difficult in training will become easy in battle", and "the bullet is a mad thing; only the bayonet knows what it is about."

Suvorov, who led a modest life, was consistent in style in death. His gravestone in St. Petersburg reads, "Here lies Suvorov".

Suvorov's son, Arkady (1784-1811) and his grandson, Alexander (1804-1882) also became generals. In all, ten generals descended from Generalissimo Suvorov. Suvorov's and Kutuzov's successes

undoubtedly encouraged many Armenian young men to join the Russian army. From the 17th to the 20th centuries, hundreds of Armenian generals and a number of admirals served in the Russian army.

The Unknown Seamstress

Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973) was one of the pillars of international fashion design from the late '20s to the late '40s. Born into a prominent family, her father was a historian and the dean of University of Rome while her mother was a Neapolitan aristocrat. Elsa was born in a Roman palace called Palazzo Corsini.

From an early age, she was a rebel. Hoping that boarding school might scotch her rebellious character, her parents sent her to a Swiss boarding school. But as soon as she arrived, she went on hunger strike. The school dispatched her back to her parents.

In the next decade, she led a peripatetic life, dabbling in theosophy, associating with psychic cranks and fortune tellers. She had a short-lived marriage and then moved to the United States. Suspecting she was communist, the FBI investigated her. She then became interested in the Dada movement and surrealism. Thanks to family money and connections, Elsa continued her dervish-like international social life. She wanted to become a fashion designer but had no credible background in fashion or the arts. She continued to move in avant garde circles becoming acquainted with Dali, couturier Paul Poiret, and Cocteau. It seemed she was destined to spend her life as a social butterfly... but then... deus ex machine descended on her shoulders in the shape of an Armenian seamstress.

The miracle happened in 1927 in Paris, when she asked an Armenian seamstress, whose hand-knit  peasant sweater she had admired, to knit her a similar one in black and white with a trompe l'oeil butterfly bow on the front. The seamstress, a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, knitted the sweater at full speed. When Schiaparelli wore the sweater to a prestigious luncheon for the Paris fashion elite, it created an immediate buzz. Until then the fashion scene was dominated by the understated Coco Chanel. In contrast, Schiaparelli's dramatic artsy design was shocking. When the Lord and Taylor fashion store placed an order for forty butterfly sweaters, Schiaparelli rushed to the Armenian refugee and asked her if she knew others who could knit similar sweaters. The Armenian woman found twenty Armenian women to fill the store's order. The women used a special double layered stitch which they had created. The sweaters sold like a fire sale. Schiaparelli's career was finally on its way. She never looked back.

By 1930, she had more than two thousand employees working for her, and by 1935 she had opened a ninety-eight room virtual victory of style on the Place Vendome in Paris. For the next twenty-five years she, along with Coco Chanel, dominated the international fashion scene. Hubert Givenchy and Guy Laroche were just two of the many young designers who started under Schiaparelli's professional wing as stylists. Drawn by her fame, Hollywood beckoned Schiaparelli. She did the

wardrobe for a Mae West movie and a John Houston movie about the life of Gauguin.

What about the Armenian seamstress who made it all happen? Who was she? Who were her twenty colleagues? What happened to them after the Schiaparelli label hit the big time?

Deegeen X, seamstress, is yet another nameless diaspora Armenian who contributed to world culture but who remains unsung.


The Jesuit Who Mentored Alec Guinness

George P. Caraman was a leading British Jesuit for nearly 70 years. He attended Oxford University, wrote twenty books mostly about the Jesuits, had top British writers as friend, corresponded with the mighty, and edited the prestigious Jesuit "Month" journal. For his contributions to English literature, he was elected in 1956 a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He seemed more British than British royalty.

The echt-British Jesuit was Armenian. His Catholic parents (Rene Caraman and Betina Pasqua) had fled Constantinople's Hamidian Massacres in the late 19th century and settled in London where George Caraman was born in 1911. He had eight siblings: a brother and seven sisters. Two of his sisters became nuns and his brother preceded him as a Jesuit.

A workaholic, he wrote the biography of Ignatius Loyola (the founder of the Jesuits), the history of the Jesuits in Britain and in Australia, and Catholic life under Queen Elizabeth I. He also wrote about the Jesuit mission in Paraguay and about the 17th century Jesuit journey to Tibet. He contributed to the Jesuit Encyclopedia while his "The Lost Paradise" was made into a movie titled "The Mission" starring Robert di Niro and Jeremy Irons.

In addition to his ability for hard work, Caraman was a networker par excellence. His "Rolodex" was packed by the names of the great and the near great of Britain—clerical and lay. He had a salesman's knack for making friends. His office was so popular that his friends nicknamed it Caramanserai. When he was in Norway he blessed a newly built ship and he was with the Pope Paul VI at the canonization of 40 English and Welsh martyrs.

But there was toughness to the "salesman". For all his charm and courtesy, he was not a man to be crossed or opposed. He could be intransigent and unyielding. 

After the Second World War, the prestigious Jesuit journal ("Month") was struggling and faced certain closure. Caraman was invited to rescue the august magazine. Through hard work and journalistic innovation, Caraman reestablished "Month" as the journal no British Jesuit could afford not to read. To achieve the turnaround, Caraman depended partly on his circle of friends who happened to be among Britain's top writers. Graham Greene, Edith Sitwell, Muriel Spark and other British literary luminaries began to contribute to "Month". His friendship with Greene was so deep that when he advised the writer to end his illicit romance, Greene did so and wrote one of his most

popular novels ("The End of the Affair") based on the relationship.

Another celebrity who was a close friend was Sir Alec Guinness. Caraman mentored the versatile actor during Guinness' conversion to the Roman Catholic faith.

To his last days (he died in 1998), Caraman corresponded with poet John Betjeman, leading intellectual Peter Levi, France's Andre Malraux, Guinness, Greene, Spark and other European glitterati.

A first generation immigrant, Caraman was staunchly British. Perhaps the John Bull act was a protective camouflage--a strategy the children of some immigrants pick for protection. One wonders how much Father Caraman would have contributed to his people had it not been for Sultan Abdul Hamid II's massacres of the mid-1890s. But then again, he could have been slain at the age of four by the hyenas of the Young Turks.

