

John Armaganian  
1017 Douglas Ave  
Racine, Wisconsin

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### TORTURING THE ARMENIANS IN TURKEY

My home town was a city of about ten thousand population. We were all Armenians with the exception of a very few Turks. The name of the town was Tomarza. The World-War started in nineteen-fourteen with Germany, Austria and Turkey taking part against the rest of the world.

The Turks among which we Armenians lived were not educated. The Turkish Government started to prepare for war by assembling their military forces and supplies. Their Government first took soldiers from the ages of twenty to thirty-six. The Armenian soldiers were put in the labor battalions and the Turks in the front lines. The Turkish Government did not put the Armenians in the front lines because they were Christians as it was thought that the Armenians would not fight against their brothers. The Turks made plans to take all military supplies and guns, even their knives and revolvers from the Armenians. Any and all things which could be used as a means to kill. They also took wheat, barley and hay which was used for their army horses. Anyone who did not comply to their demands was jailed and force was used to the extent of beating the soles of their feet with a heavy stick and by whipping them.

The Turks also made a house to house search and soon found many more victims which were taken in custody and questioned for information. Those suspected of concealing weapons were also jailed. They were questioned every night and beaten on their soles two and three hundred times with sticks. Among us in the jail was an old man who after the fourth beating died. The Turks went to his wife to tell her to come and take her husband's body. They made her take the body directly to the cemetery and not to her home as she wanted. She cried and wept, but they would not listen to her. I was a little boy at that time and I went with the rest of the children to see the dead old man. His feet were cracked and his toes were smashed. His body was swollen to a black and blue. After they put the body in the tomb, the Armenian people in the town demanded from the Turkish Government an investigation into the old man's death. In twentyfour hours the government officials exhumed the body. They of course found that his death was due to the severe beating he had gotten, but what could be done about it? "A dog does not eat dog's meat!" they said and promised a further inquiry, they then went away.

We soon forgot the old man. We were thinking of others in that jail. My father being one of them. That night was his turn to be questioned. They came at mid-night and at one o'clock my father's name was called. One of the Jandarma (in the U.S.A. we call them police) came and took my father to Murdi Offendi (chief of police) who was the head of Jandarma.

They asked my father how many guns and rifles he had and father answered; "The ones I had were rusty and I turned them in already and I haven't any more." But Murdi Offendi would not believe him. He asked my father about the ones buried underground. Father answered him, saying; "I have no others, I don't believe in such things, I cannot believe in anything but God, I will let God take care of my enemy, so I don't believe in shooting and killing as I am a human. I bother no one!" But the official shook his head and told my father not to lie. That it would be best for him to tell where the weapons were buried. "If you don't tell, it will be too bad for you!" he said and then commanded the Jandarma to tie my father's arms and legs together. They started to beat him with sticks. After inflicting two-hundred lashes on his soles, they asked again if he would confess or be further punished. Father answered; "If you don't believe me, believe God and be afraid of Him, and if you don't, do as you will with me, that is my answer!"

When father finished saying this, he was beaten for ten or fifteen minutes more. Father fell unconscious and the official told the police to remove him to the cell. After lying on the floor for about two hours, he regained consciousness. He was in great pain as his feet were bleeding and he could not rest or sleep. The other prisoners in the cell with him, bandaged his feet with handkerchiefs. They could only see to do this by lighting matches as the cell was dark as pitch. No one could sleep. My Mother brought father a lunch on the following morning after she found out what had happened in the night. By the time mother opened the cell door, a soldier barred her way. He told her to leave the lunch and that he would give it to father. She agreed, but asked to see father. The soldier was good at heart for he could not refuse the request. When mother saw father's condition, she wept bitterly. The soldier took her out and sent her home. She told us children all that had happened. That day passed. The next night was a repetition of the first for the poor victims.

In eight days time, father was summoned once more before the Murdi Offendi. "Well, old man, did you come back to talk?" "Or will you be on the floor again?" Father answered; "I told you the truth the first time!" Whereupon the official repeated the previous torturous whipping on the soles of father's feet! And with such cruelty that two sticks were broken before the officer desisted! Again he was questioned and again father answered as before. He was then thrown into jail in a very bad condition. His feet bleeding terribly and his toes torn. He suffered untold torture!

When mother visited father again and heard and saw his condition, she was very sad. Father asked her to see and talk to an old Turkish friend of his. Mother took four or five gold-pieces in Turkish money and went to see Allie Offendi who was a man of influence among the Turkish people of our town. She gave him the money and told her sad story. He took the money and said he would help her all he could. Six more days had gone by and many more victims were severely beaten.

Father was beginning to think that the Turks were through with him, but not so! That night they again commanded him to go before the officials. For the third time he was questioned as before and answered as before. He was then threatened with death if he would not disclose the information they wanted as to the whereabouts of the concealed weapons, but father said; "I am almost dead, I am not afraid to die nor am I afraid of anything except God!" Once more he was beaten, this time on the bare soles. After two-hundred lashes he could not stand on his feet. He had to be carried home. After being laid in bed we children were awakened by his piteous cries. He suffered for many days. The other victims had

suffered equally much in that they were all tortured for ten days. After about ten days time, two soldiers came to our house to see how father was getting along. Again they wanted him to go before the chief of police, but as he could not stand on his feet, he had to be carried to the barn where a horse was procured and they then transported him to the jail on it.

My mother talked to our alderman about father's case. He and two other men of some influence came and talked to the soldiers. They gave each soldier two gold-pieces and promised also each of them a pail of honey. The soldiers then let father go.

There were others still in jail who were waiting their turn. One man by the name of Baba was taken one night before the same official whom father was taken before. He didn't deny anything. He just kept quiet. To all questions he replied that he didn't know anything, so he was treated as father had been. They transferred him to another jail and there he died.

Another man in this jail was quite influential. *Hogju Madaryian* was his name. He was the head of our town. After a terrible beating, he decided to tell the officials where the secret hiding place of the weapons was. They believed him and two or three soldiers were sent with him. He climbed to the roof of our church and as soon as he reached the top he made believe he was searching for something, but in reality he contemplated suicide by jumping to the ground. At an opportune moment he jumped from the roof, but he did not succeed in killing himself, instead, he suffered a broken leg. The fall injured the leg so that it had to be amputated.

After this incident the Turkish faction stopped their cruel treatment of our people for a while. They now started to transport the prisoners. Some were sent to Arabia. One night at about midnight, a group of about eighty men were tied together by their arms and made to walk away from the town. Walking ten to fifteen miles every day. After about fifty miles from our town, they were let loose.

In about three weeks time, father could walk again. The government was asking for soldiers from the ages of thirty-five to forty-eight. Father was fifty, but he was taken for forty-eight. He was glad to be a soldier. In a week's time he was in a labor-battalion. They broke stones and made roads. Those left in the jails were scattered to other jails to suffer more and some more were deported to Arabia. In a month's time, the Turkish government canvassed our homes to find any slackers. A few men and boys were left who were only seventeen or eighteen and a few men of fifty years of age and over. Despite their age they too were taken. They were divided into two groups, one comprising one-hundred and fifty men and the other about one hundred and eighty. Then one mid-night they were deported.

By now no men, only women and children were left in our town. We heard that in three weeks time our women and children were to be massacred! The Turks told us to get ready in two days to move out of our homes and town unless we were willing to become Turkish subjects and also willing to adopt their religion which was utterly to our dislike.

The third day we were ready to go as none of our people would change their religion. Our people said that if we were to die, we were willing to die for our religion and our children. The entire population was moving on the third day. We sold what we could or traded for horses and mules to carry our baggage. The road was surrounded with soldiers and Turks on both sides. Most of our property was left behind and we gave the keys of our homes to the Turkish government. We traveled ten to twelve miles a day. There were eight or nine thousand of our people.

We climbed torturous mountain trails with our sore feet and overburdened mules. During all this time the Turks watched us very closely.

The Turkish government gave us only a few soldiers for our protection. We did not know where we were going. After about fifteen days, we reached the base of a high mountain. We climbed to the top of it in three days. It was a hard and rough journey. We rested two days before we started to go down the other side which was just as rough a journey as the climb had been. A lot of the cartage and horses fell on the way-side. We had plenty of bad times. Three or four of our people were killed in falls. We traveled nine to ten hours each day. We made collections of money from among our people to give to the soldiers who had been harrassing us almost continually and prevented our rest and peace. We relied on these soldiers to guide us over the easiest roads and that was the reason we had to give them our money. We got two more days of rest and this time two of our people died and one was lost in the forest.

We traveled through a huge forest where we met big black bears, climbing trees. We were afraid of them. We thought that they would hurt us, but they did not hurt any one. They were more afraid of us than we of them! In two days we passed through this forest. In two more we reached another mountain which was not as difficult to climb as the last one. The roads were good. On the way down we met some Arab soldiers. They were run-away soldiers and had been captured by the Germans. They were being taken as prisoners. There were more than two hundred of them. They were so wild and unruly that a few of them broke ranks and tried to attack our women, but they were stopped in time to avoid any harm. Most of our young girls and women wore men's suits so that they would not be molested. Even then they were afraid.

That night two more of our people died. The next morning we were on the road again. At noon we were on a road which was flanked by bushes. Suddenly two men came out of them and ordered us to put up our hands. By the time the main body of the caravan reached us (as we had been traveling a little ahead) the bandits had relieved us of what valuables we had and fled. That night we came to a place where more than two hundred Arabians were working on a road. This was the first time we had seen Arabs. We did not know if they were men or women because they all had long hair. At first we thought they were women. As soon as they saw us they started to search us and tried to take whatever they could snatch from our persons. By this time our soldiers or rather Turkish guards, came up with their horses to inquire as to the confusion. The Arabs tried to run into the hills, but the Turks soon overtook them and gave them a beating. A fight began. We were not far from a town. The soldiers in that town heard the fighting and came to help us. Some of the Arabs were held and some of our people were put in jail. The next day they were all freed.

We then rested another two days and buried nine or ten more of our people. After this we were on our way to Ghatma. The next day we got there. From there it took us ten hours to go to Aleppo. Aleppo was full of Armenian immigration so we had to stay at Ghatma until they transferred some of them to different parts. Most of these were taken to Dirjor where the majority of them were massacred! Very few survived. We had to wait in Ghatma nearly five weeks. Before we got to Aleppo, most of the people got sick and in five weeks time we lost two hundred. The water supply was meager and filthy from a small stream. Finally after waiting for five weeks we got notice to go to Aleppo. We started on our way and reached there at about five o'clock that afternoon. There we met some of our own people. They brought us food and water. We were



so glad to see them. They stayed with us till morning and then led us to the place where seventy thousand Armenians and refugees were being transported to and from. The place was filthy with vermin. So much so that one could not sit or lie down, but we had to stay there for six weeks!

It was one day in August 1915 they brought us fifty or sixty camels and we were told to prepare for departure to Dirjor. We were all in the same group and afraid to go there. Mother took the tent down. We children took our belongings and joined another caravan. Most of the people went to Dirjor. Nearly all of them were massacred! Many of them were thrown into the river. People were being continuously transferred. After two months in Aleppo we had to move by train to Damascus. We were glad to go even though the train accommodation were crowded.

After about a day and a half on the train we reached Akayak. We stayed here only till twelve o'clock that night and then were forced by the Turks to move again. Once more we boarded our train, but did not leave till the following afternoon. Some of the sick died and we were unable to bury them. We finally got on our way to Damascus. We were met by some of our people there. They fed us bread, a loaf each. Again after a stay of only a few hours we were on our way. We went this time to Journey. There the Turks ordered us out of the trains. The sick and baggage were loaded on camels. Most of the sick died, due to the rough going. Again we were transported by train to a town named Ezra. From there we walked for three hours to Sheik-Miskin. We were housed in a large barn-like building without glass windows or doors. Our baggage was left behind on the train and we did not get possession of it for three weeks. At night we lay on the bare floor. Neither had we any coverings. There was such lack of medical care that sickness was now rampant.

Half a hundred people died nearly every day. We were exposed most of the time to the elements and could not bury our dead. We did not have tools and the ground was frozen. We buried as best we could, but not very deep so that at night the jackals would dig them out. After our baggage arrived we had better tools. Then we made holes big enough to bury thirty-five to forty corpse in each. Our diet too, was very bad and the water which we drank was procured from a muddy stream. It was no wonder that our people died like flies!

After six weeks we were transferred to Nimra. Some to different sections. It was an improvement to our conditions. Here we lived with the Arabs. Many of our people died of typhoid fever. The Arabs treated us much better than the Turks had. They gave each Armenian family a room. There were fifteen in our family. Typhoid fever took ten of them. The dead were kept in the same room with us until the following day and then mother had to pay a dollar apiece to have the bodies removed. The Arabs buried them in Cayo Tees. Each of us from day to day expected to be the next to die. Finally only five of our family were left!

We were starving, so mother exchanged some of our possessions with the Arabs for food. We lived in this manner for three or four months. When Spring came we went into the fields and cut weeds to cook for our food which was mixed with a little wheat. It took us about four months to get well. The Arabs let us gather the leavings of their field-harvest. We lived thus for two years. There were now but one hundred and fifty of our people left out of the six hundred group which I had arrived with. All this time my father was with the work-battalion.

We had three brothers who had gone to the United States of America a year before we were driven from our home town. We wrote to them several times, but never received a reply. Later we heard from Dijor, from the Kurdish people there, that whoever went thru Dijor was killed by the Turks and the Kurds. Many were tortured. Thousands were taken to a great and swift-running river called Jeahan. Across this river was a bridge. On each end stood soldiers with bayonets. The Armenians were stripped of all their valuables and forced either to jump into the mighty torrent or be bayoneted or both! Very few children were saved. The Kurds took the children and raised them till 1918 when the Allies came to the rescue and searched village to village and house to house for all Armenians.

We stayed in that little town for over a half year. A revolution started between the Turks and the Arabs. The Turks were taking everything the Arabs produced away from them at very low prices. One day two hundred and fifty Arabs came to this town and drove the Turkish soldiers away and started to harass the Armenians. Only the head man was left in the town who wired to head-quarters at Damascus. The next morning when the Arabs sent their cattle into the fields they were chased back by the Turkish soldiers. The Arabs could not figure this out. Then they found out that the town was surrounded by the Turks, who had come at midnight. The Turks had their trenches dug and were ready for battle by morning. The Arabs were taken by surprise as they did not realize the seriousness of the situation till one of their number was killed and then the Arab commander gave the order to begin firing. The battle lasted about two hours. Many soldiers were killed and about fifty Arabs.

The Turks were victorious and as the saying goes that "to the victor belongs the spoils" so were the spoils divided among the Turkish soldiers. The invaders stayed about four days till things were settled and then left. The Armenians took care of the Arabians property as best they could for which the Arabs were grateful and vowed they were our friends, but still we were suspicious of them and dared not trust ourselves to them, so about twenty Armenian families moved to Damascus. Some of the women and children had left before us and were already in an orphanage in Damascus.

The first six months we got along well enough to make our living. At this time one of my brothers reached the compulsory military age so he had to hide in order not to be taken and made a soldier. In about four weeks time he was captured and jailed. A month later he was transferred to the Turkish army. After several weeks he deserted the army and came home. I was a little boy at that time, walking around town. I met some Arab soldiers who questioned me and found that they knew my brother. I told them that he was in hiding from the Turks. They offered to help my brother by taking him with them that night. I ran home and told my brother the good news. He went with them and a month later one of the Arabs came back to take us to our brother.

By now there were only my mother and I left in the family, besides our brother as we had lost two others of the family in Damascus. In about two days time we reached him. It was the month of June. The Arabs were harvesting barley. After they took what they wanted, we were allowed to gather the leavings. We used stones as mills to grind it for food and toasted it. Mother cooked it for us. We slowly gained strength to work in the fields. This was in the fall of 1917. We did not have much clothing to wear, but our bellies were full for the time being, so we cared nothing naught as to the condition of our apparel. We stayed here till 1918. Then we heard that the Allies were coming. This made us extremely happy because we knew they were Christians.

We were about two hundred miles from the war-zone. It soon lessened it's distance however and in a short time the Turkish army was driven back to the point which made them retreat in such haste as to leave all ammunition and guns behind them. The Arabs were benifitted by this as it increased their supplies. One morning we saw a detachment of Turkish soldiers who had retreated from their front lines. The Arabs intended to plunder them, but the Arab commander ordered to fire on them. Soon a pitched battle was on. The village was destroyed and many were killed. The Allies were in the rear and on hearing of the battle sent help in the form of an army-bomber and soldiers. They soon killed nearly all of the Turks and Germans. Many of them fled to Damascus, and were killed or captured on the way.

The Allies swept thru Damascus with few battles, but the Turks and Germans still held their strongest sector between Damascus and Allepp. The battle raged here to end in victory for the Allies. The Allies camped there and made the Armenians free from the Turkish Government. The Allies gathered us into camp and saved us from starvation. Most of the Armenians had been killed. The little children had been taken by the Arabs. The English began a search from house to house for all Christian children. Not many were found, only three hundred and these were taken care of by the Red Cross and an orphanage.

The British Government fed us for nearly one and a half years. Then most of us began to get help from friends her and there. We had brothers in America, but did not have their address. Most of the time we were lost in Arabia so we had to wait till one day we were informed that we were in Damascus. The brothers sent us fifty dollars to see if it would reach us. We received it and wrote back that only three of us were left out of eighteen. Two months later we received a check for two hundred dollars. We bought food and clothing for ourselves. That was in 1919. In 1920 our brothers wrote us again and asked if we could come to America. We answered that we were willing to come, so one of my brothers being a citizen of America and also being of the United States Army, sent us an affadavit and then we came to America.

We have now been in the United States of America since nineteen-twenty, free from all danger and able to make a fair living for ourselves. I only wish that many more of my people had been so blessed as to have gotten the freedom I now enjoy. This is the end of my story.

The End