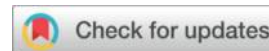




Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to Execution



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Abstract:

This article examines the main stages in the life and revolutionary career of the martyr Abbas Laghrour. It begins with his education and political activism within the national movement. It then considers his role in launching the Revolution in the Aures region and his later leadership of the First Region after the deaths of Mostefa Ben Boulaid and Bachir Chihani. The study follows his career until his death, or execution, under unclear circumstances in Tunisia. Its importance lies in contributing to the history of a revolutionary figure who was later marginalized and largely forgotten. Laghrour's trajectory also intersected with several controversial issues in the history of the Algerian War of Liberation, especially in the First Region. These include the execution of Bachir Chihani and the Villa La Cania incident, among other events that continue to attract the attention of historians and researchers.

Keywords: Abbas Laghrour; Aures-Nememcha; Matildeville Conspiracy; execution.

INTRODUCTION:

Any discussion of the Algerian War of Liberation naturally leads to the study of the figures who shaped its different stages. Their sustained activism and armed struggle helped drive the movement toward independence. This article examines the major stages and the political and military efforts of one of the less remembered figures of Region/Wilaya I. He worked to advance the Revolution and ultimately paid with his life for conflicts among comrades-in-arms.

The Revolution emerged through immense sacrifice. Successive groups of young Algerians gave their lives to sustain it. After years of repression and hardship, a group of nationalists committed themselves fully to the National Liberation Front and the National Liberation Army. In eastern Algeria, and particularly in the First Region, Abbas Laghrour emerged as one of the nationalist figures most strongly committed to freedom.

Accordingly, this study traces the life and career of Abbas Laghrour through the following questions: How did his personal charisma influence his political and revolutionary activism? To what extent did he succeed in leading the First Region, later Wilaya I?

The purpose of this study is not to diminish the Algerian Revolution or to disparage its leading figures. Rather, it seeks to shed light on several historical facts concerning the background and forms of the leadership conflict in the First Region, particularly the Aures-Nememcha area. It also aims to contribute to the historical record by revisiting Laghrour's militant career and highlighting his leading role, especially in the Aures.

In light of the research problem and the nature of the study, the article adopts descriptive and analytical approaches. Historical material is examined critically, analyzed, synthesized, and then presented in a coherent framework. This is intended as a modest contribution to preserving the memory of Abbas Laghrour and his place in the history of the Algerian Revolution.

Section One: Abbas Laghrour, from Cultural Formation to Political Activism

Subsection One: Biography of the Martyr

Abbas Laghrour was born on 23 June 1926 in the Khenchela douar, among the Amamra tribal group in present-day Khenchela Province, into a family of modest means by the standards of the time¹. His father was Mohamed Ben Ammar. His mother, Laitem El-Atra, was his father's first wife². She was the widow of his uncle Salah, whom his father married in order to care for his brother's two daughters. Their children included Abbas, Mesbah, Chaabane, and Bouaziz.

Abbas's father paid close attention to the education of his children. During his seasonal journeys between Khenchela and the Sahara, he took a Quran teacher with the family so that the children could memorize as much of the Quran as possible before reaching school age. In 1930, he bought a house in Khenchela so that the family would live near both the Quranic school and the regular school. Abbas

¹ - His family owned several hectares of arable land around Oued Laghrour and a herd of sheep and cattle, in addition to horses and pack animals used for travel between the Tell and Khenchela.

² - His father's second wife gave birth to Ammar, Salah, Zahra, Zerfa, Aicha, Mazouzia, and Zina.

was then four years old. He spent two years in the Quranic school, where he studied the Quran and the basic principles of Arabic. At the age of six, he entered the French school. He remained there until the final class, when an incident involving a ball brought his schooling to an end.³

According to the account of this incident, a group of Europeans regularly played tennis on a court near the Laghrour family home. On one occasion, a ball went outside the court. Abbas's teacher asked him to return it. He refused because he considered the request humiliating and unworthy. He replied, "I will not return it." The next day, the teacher told him that his father had to come to the school before Abbas could be admitted again.

Abbas returned home and told his father what had happened. He insisted that he would never go back to the school. He also rejected the idea that his father should apologize to the French teacher or accept conditions imposed on him. He was therefore expelled from the French school⁴. Some accounts also suggest that the teacher had become annoyed by Abbas's frequent questions and used the incident as an opportunity to remove him from the school⁵.

Immediately afterward, his father returned him to Quranic education and enrolled him in evening schools run by the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulama. Through these two forms of schooling, Abbas acquired a substantial grounding in Arabic and religion⁶. This background suggests that he developed an early tendency to resist domination and authority. When he entered working life, he first worked as a cook for the city administrator. He later opened a vegetable shop in Khenchela's public market.⁷

In 1950, Abbas married his maternal cousin Gamra Bougrara, daughter of Mohamed. They had three children: Cherifa, Hassina, and Tarek.⁸

Subsection Two: His Political Activism

Abbas closely followed the difficult conditions endured by the Algerian population and the forms of social oppression directed against his compatriots. He therefore joined the independence-oriented current of the national movement at an early stage. This current was represented by the

³ - Omar Tablit, *The Faithful Remember You*, Abbas Laghrour, 1st ed., Dar Al-Almaiya, 2012, p. 12.

⁴ - Salah Laghrour, *Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle*, trans. Salah Laghrour and El-Rabie Mebarki, Al-Shihab Publications, 2016, p. 33.

⁵ - Salah Laghrour, *Insights into Internal History*, Dar Al-Khaldounia, Algeria, 2019, p. 214.

⁶ - Omar Tablit, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁷ - Asia Tamim, *Algerian Personalities: 100 Figures*, no edition stated, Dar Al-Misk, Algeria, 2008, p. 118.

⁸ - Omar Tablit, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Algerian People's Party and the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties. At that time, it attracted many activists opposed to colonial rule. In the Aures, it was supervised by Ibrahim Hachani.⁹

He took part in the demonstrations of 8 May 1945, which marked a break with confidence in peaceful solutions with France. He participated with several activists, including Othman Tidjani, Lahcen Merir, Ali Kachroud, Ghazali Ben Abbas, and Ali Ghriani. They raised the Algerian flag publicly for the first time in their local context. His nationalist orientation had by then become clear, and his military service was postponed.¹⁰

After the Second World War, Laghrour continued his political activism within the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties. From 1948, his work as a cook for the city administrator helped conceal some of his movements. It also allowed him to follow events by reading the newspapers regularly received by the administrator. This continued until 1951. That year, the administrator discovered the political identity of his cook after seeing Abbas publicly shake hands with Ibrahim Hachani in front of a club in Khenchela market.¹¹

His activism extended across several fields. He encouraged people not to buy from European traders and not to frequent European-owned cafes. He also urged the singing of nationalist and revolutionary songs at weddings before other forms of entertainment, as a means of political awareness.¹² He used every available occasion to recall the achievements of the Algerian people. On the fifth anniversary of the 8 May uprising, he addressed a gathering: "Dear brothers, I congratulate you on the success of last week's action. Party posters were displayed and nationalist slogans were written on the walls. Free the political prisoners. Long live a free and independent Algeria." He then reminded those present of the party's internal rules and objectives.¹³

To make his activity more effective, Abbas opened a vegetable shop and gradually turned it into a place for secret meetings.¹⁴ He often insisted that winning people to an idea was not enough; the idea had to be put into practice. In Chaoui, he used the expression "Agherzoul yetnebbah, naoulid remch," meaning that a dog that barks too much does not bite.¹⁵

⁹ - Dominique Farale, *Laghrour Abbas 1926-1957*, Editions Bouchene, Saint-Denis, France, 2016, p. 59.

¹⁰ - Salah Laghrour, *Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle*, op. cit., p. 47.

¹¹ - Achour Cheurfi, *Dictionary of the Algerian Revolution, 1954-1962*, trans. Mokhtar Alem, Dar Al-Qasba, Algeria, 2007, p. 297.

¹² - Salah Laghrour, *Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle*, op. cit., p. 49.

¹³ - Dominique Farale, op. cit., p. 65.

¹⁴ - Omar Tablit, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁵ - Salah Laghrour, *Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle*, op. cit., p. 50.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Abbas was appointed head of the local branch of the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties in Khenchela.¹⁶ The branch consisted of five members: Abbas Laghrour, Ghazali Ben Abbas, Abdelkrim Ben Kout, Kilani Lergat, and Boubaker Salem. One of his most important activities before the outbreak of the Revolution was the organization of a protest in Khenchela in early 1951. The demonstration drew attention to the severe living conditions of the local population and demanded measures against unemployment and shortages of bread.

French authorities arrested him and held him for three days, during which he was tortured. He subsequently developed a chest illness that required treatment in Batna. After recovering, he returned to Khenchela and resumed his clandestine party activity.¹⁷ The demonstration appears to have had another purpose as well: to assess the political awareness and readiness of young people to confront colonial rule.

Alongside his awareness-raising activities, the party asked Abbas to sell its newspapers in order to disseminate the movement's demands and to gauge public opinion.¹⁸ He was also involved in observing French troop movements along the Tunisian border. In August 1954, he drew Mostefa Ben Boulaid's attention to suspicious French movements near the Algerian-Tunisian frontier, where French forces were pursuing Tunisians who had crossed the border. Ben Boulaid then entrusted him with protecting them. Laghrour had also been selected as one of the representatives of the Special Organization in the Aures district after its creation in 1947 under Ben Boulaid's leadership.¹⁹

This organizational structure continued until March 1954, when the crisis inside the party culminated in a split between the Centralists and the Messalists. A group of nationalists decided to move beyond the dispute and begin immediate preparations for armed action. This process was reflected in the creation of the Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action and in a series of meetings at national, regional, and local levels.

Subsection Three: His Entry into Armed Struggle

Abbas attended the regional meetings organized by Ben Boulaid. He was given responsibility for the groups in Khenchela and Kais in preparation for the attacks of 1 November. After the meeting

¹⁶ - Dominique Farale, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁷ - *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁸ - Salah Laghrour, Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁹ - Issa Kachida, *The Engineers of the Revolution*, foreword by Abdelhamid Mehri, trans. Moussa Achrchour, Al-Shihab Publications, 2003, p. 79.

at the house of Barghout Ali, he returned to Khenchela so that he would be ready for the date set for the outbreak of the Revolution.

Because his own home was under surveillance, Abbas held a meeting at the house of Salem Boubaker. He read two National Liberation Front leaflets and then declared, "God is greatest. The promised day has come." With visible optimism, he announced the time of the attacks and the password. He instructed those present to keep the date and hour secret until Sunday, 31 October 1954.

He supervised the final preparations for launching the Revolution in the Khenchela area. He prepared the attack plan and the list of participants, coordinated the operations and communications with Ben Boulaid, and took command of the group assigned to attack the headquarters of the mixed commune.²⁰

The groups led by Abbas Laghrour attacked the mixed commune building. A guard was wounded, several offices were burned, and the attack on the military barracks left two people dead.²¹ The group also fired on the administrator's building, killing a soldier, and set fire to the gendarmerie post.²²

Section Two: Abbas Laghrour and the War of Liberation, 1954-1957

Subsection One: His Role in Leading the First Region

Abbas Laghrour experienced the major events of the Revolution in the Aures-Nememcha area. He attended most of the meetings²³ in which decisions concerning the conduct of the Revolution in the region were taken. He was one of the members of a leadership group that included Mostefa Ben Boulaid, Adjoul Adjoul, and Bachir Chihani, among others.

When Ben Boulaid decided to travel eastward to obtain weapons, Laghrour was appointed deputy to Bachir Chihani and placed in charge of the eastern part of the region, from Khenchela to the Tunisian border. He was also part of the patrol that accompanied Ben Boulaid as far as the frontier.²⁴ Laghrour was reportedly seen weeping intensely for the first time after Ben Boulaid was

²⁰ - Salem Boubakeur, "Le 1er Novembre a Khenchela," in *Recits de feu*, presented by Mahfoud Kaddache, SNED, 1976. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkvPIrcQ4TE> (accessed 24/01/2022, 16:16).

²¹ - Khalifa Lagha, "The Decisive Night in Khenchela," *Awwal November Magazine*, no. 175, April 2011, pp. 75-77.

²² - Kamal Mekhaoufi, "The 1 November 1954 Attack in Khenchela as Recounted by One of Its Participants," *Awwal November Magazine*, no. 63, December 1983, p. 12.

²³ - These included the Tafrent meeting south of Inoughissen, the farewell meeting at Ain Toulilit, the Smair Ben Melloul meeting, and the Wastiya meeting, among others.

²⁴ - First of November Association, *Mostefa Ben Boulaid and the Algerian Revolution*, Batna, Algeria, 1999, pp. 370-371.

arrested. Ben Boulaid had devoted both his resources and his efforts to preserving the unity of the Revolution.²⁵

In late April 1955, Chihani assigned Laghrour, together with Omar Ben Boulaid, to inspect the western part of the Aures. Their mission took them through the Chilia Mountains, southern Constantine, and Bordj Bou Arreridj, passing through Bouarif, Kessrou, Telmat, Boutaleb, Ouled Tebben, and the Maadid area. They introduced broad organizational changes along the route. Several clashes with French forces occurred on both the outward and return journeys, but they captured no weapons. They also clashed once with a Moroccan column. Abbas stated that this unit fought the National Liberation Army "without mercy in their hearts."²⁶

During this period, disorder and internal tension spread within the leadership. Kerbadou, who was responsible for the Taberdga sector, killed Messaoud Maach after the latter had insulted his honor. Omar Ben Boulaid also rebelled against the recognized leadership and withdrew to the Chilia Mountains. Laghrour played an important role in restoring order. He brought Hadj Kerbadou before the leadership for trial. When Chihani asked Adjoul, "Should Abbas not have arrested Omar and tried him before the court at the Kalaa?" Adjoul replied: "Yes. But Si Abbas may be the only member of the Aures leadership who never removes the sacred character of the Revolution. He does not compromise with his conscience, and he shows no mercy when those who violate what he considers sacred must be punished."²⁷

Laghrour became known for intense combat. Mujahid Mohamed Cherif Abbas later testified: "He fought battle after battle and set ambush after ambush. Even his periods of rest were filled with skirmishes so that the enemy would never feel secure. He was one of the heroes of the famous Battle of El Djorf, which lasted three days and three nights. Abbas Laghrour broke through the enemy siege and inflicted heavy losses." Those French soldiers who survived were deliberately allowed to carry a message back to the colonial authorities about the seriousness of the situation and the determination of the fighters: "Let them return to the colonial forces with the news."²⁸

In addition to the Battle of El Djorf, Laghrour is credited in the cited accounts with defeating French forces in a number of engagements from the first stages of the Revolution. These included the Battles of Tefsour, El Bayada, Gantis-Merah El Baroud, the ambush at Khenget Sidi Nadji after the

²⁵ - Moumen El Omari, "The Militant and Revolutionary Career of the Martyr Abbas Laghrour through Published Testimonies and Memoirs," *Journal of Emir Abdelkader University for Islamic Sciences*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2016, p. 416.

²⁶ - Mohamed Larbi Madaci, *Les Tamiseurs de sable - Aures Nememcha 1954-1962*, ANEP, 2001, p. 91.

²⁷ - Salah Laghrour, *Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle*, op. cit., p. 249.

²⁸ - Moumen El Omari, op. cit., p. 403.

Tebessa incident, the Battle of Khenget Maach to relieve surrounded fighters, the Battle of Asfour near Chechar, and the Battle of Gbou on the eve of Ramadan. At the latter, he addressed the fighters: "Mujahidin, do not fast. God has decreed that you are to fight, and the fighter does not fast."²⁹

Laghroun developed considerable experience in guerrilla warfare and was described as highly skilled in the techniques and maneuvering required by revolutionary war. Bigeard is said to have explicitly acknowledged his courage and to have regarded him as one of the revolutionary commanders capable of killing French officers in battle. The text cites the French commander "Metzinger" and the civil administrator of Tebessa, identified as Dupwy, as examples. It also refers to eight other French officers, including the well-known Captain "Kartouf."³⁰

Immediately after the Battle of El Djorf, allegations circulated that Commander Bachir Chihani had been involved in sexual misconduct. The article cannot confirm or deny this allegation. Sensitive matters of this kind were usually kept highly confidential during the Revolution and confined to the senior leadership.

Some historical writings cited in the article state that Abbas Laghroun said Chihani had engaged in a homosexual act with his secretary and that Laghroun personally discovered the incident in a cave during the Battle of El Djorf. According to these accounts, Laghroun sought a religious opinion on what he had witnessed and received a ruling that such conduct was forbidden within what was regarded as a sacred Revolution. During Chihani's trial, Laghroun confronted him with what he claimed to have seen. Chihani denied the allegation. Laghroun reportedly became extremely angry, picked up a nearby stone as if to throw it at Chihani, then restrained himself and dropped it. He told the fighters that if they committed such acts, God would never grant them victory. If they remained on the right path, he said, even "nour" could emerge from that stone. He pointed to the stone as a metaphor for growth.³¹ The account concludes that Abbas Laghroun and Adjoul accepted responsibility, openly and without equivocation, for the execution of Commander Chihani before God, the fighters, and history.

As noted above, the execution of Chihani remains a complex issue. Some accounts explain it primarily in religious and moral terms, while others relate it to organizational and tribal factors. Because Abbas accepted responsibility for seeking the religious ruling, some parties accused him of pursuing leadership and of removing Chihani under a religious pretext. The article rejects that

²⁹ - Asia Tamim, op. cit., p. 119.

- Dominique Farale, *The Battle of the Nememcha Mountains, 1954-1962*, trans. Massoud Hadj Massoud, Dar Al-Qasba, Algeria, 2008, p. 149.

³¹ - Omar Tablit, op. cit., p. 88.

interpretation. It argues that Abbas Laghrour was widely regarded as devoted to the Revolution and concerned above all with defeating the French forces. It also notes that effective leadership was already in the hands of Laghrour and Adjoul, and that the speed and complexity of the Revolution contributed to the circumstances surrounding Chihani's fate.

After Chihani's execution, Abbas Laghrour and Adjoul Adjoul continued to lead the region. They relied on the legitimacy of appointments made by Mostefa Ben Boulaid before his capture. Even after Ben Boulaid escaped from Koudiat prison, he did not replace them. They therefore continued their leadership roles after his death. Abbas became the effective leader of the Nememcha Mountains area as far as the Tunisian border and extended his authority over the territory between Oued El Arab and Oued Gantis.³²

Subsection Two: Laghrour and the Internal Divisions

The Nememcha area was affected by leadership decisions that some of its members regarded as reckless, as well as by the divisions that developed within the revolutionary ranks. Its leaders therefore decided to reject the higher authority represented by Laghrour and Adjoul. Abbas regretted the split and tried to repair it. He first sent El Bahi Chouchane to contact Lazhar Chrit, then went in person. After long discussions at Djebel El Abiod, the two sides failed to reach an agreement. Their common commitment to fighting colonial rule remained the main bond between them.³³

Laghrour made another attempt at reconciliation by organizing meetings in Tunisia to discuss the problems between the Nememcha leadership and the Aures leadership. The first meeting was held on 20 September 1956 in Manouba, a suburb of Tunis. The Nememcha delegation included Lazhar Chrit, El Wardi Kettal, El Bahi Chouchane, Ezzine Abbad, and Abdelmadjid Belghith. The other side included Abbas Laghrour, Said Abdelhay, Abdelkrim Hali, and Abdelhafid Soufi. Several issues were discussed, especially the assassinations. Because the debate became highly polarized, the meeting was postponed until the next day and moved to Tunis.³⁴

The following day, the participants traveled from Manouba to Tunis. The second meeting was scheduled at Villa La Cania, identified in the source as "Villa La Canai," in the Bardo area. They gathered there on the evening of 22 September 1956. The Nememcha delegation sat on one side and the Souafa delegation on the opposite side. The meeting ended in violence. A soldier fired from

³² - Ammar Jerman, *Facts from Our Struggle*, Dar Al-Huda, Ain M'lila, Algeria, 2009, p. 50.

³³ - Mohamed Zeroual, *The Nememcha in the Revolution*, Dar Houma, Algeria, 2003, p. 285.

³⁴ - Tahar Zbiri, *Memoirs of the Last Historical Leaders of the Aures*, ANEP Publications, Algeria, 2008, p. 166.

behind the door, killing Ezzine Abbad. Lazhar Chrit was wounded in the eyes, El Wardi Kettal in the chest, and Babana Sai in the arm. Bachir Abdouni was also killed outside the room.

Accounts of the incident differ. El Wardi Kettal stated that the lights were turned off and that heavy gunfire came through the windows, killing some participants and wounding others.³⁵ Ibrahim Cherfi's account³⁶ states that Ahmed Rachdi closed the door and that the participants were ordered to raise their hands. Ezzine Abbad then used his pistol in an attempt to hit Abbas Laghrour, after which intense gunfire was directed at the meeting. Other accounts attributed to El Hachemi Hammadi³⁷ and Ammar Jerman³⁸ state that an unidentified soldier fired on the Nememcha delegation. Djab El Kheir is quoted as saying: "There was a Tunisian from Negrine... Mahjoub Ben Ali, who was an officer in the Tunisian Guard. In my view, the Bourguiba supporters were the ones who fired. They knew about us and were following our activities."³⁹

After examining the different testimonies, the article identifies several unresolved questions:

1. The relevant police documents and the archives of the Tunisian border guard have not been accessible.
2. The available testimonies describe the meeting as an attempt at reconciliation rather than as a conspiracy.
3. The incident occurred close to the aerial hijacking of 22 October 1956. Was it related to changes within the leadership of the Revolution and to the subsequent dominance of supporters of the Soummam resolutions?
4. Who turned off the lights in the room?
5. Who was inciting the two sides before and after the incident: the Aures and Souafa groups on one side, and the Nememcha group on the other?
6. Who fired first: Ezzine Abbad or an unidentified pro-Bourguiba party? Who killed Ezzine Abbad? Was it Ahmed Rachdi, Abdelwahab Ben Khalifa, or someone else?

³⁵ - El Wardi Kettal, *Memoirs of the Mujahid and Field Commander El Wardi Kettal Arassa*, 1st ed., Dar Kounouz, Tlemcen, 2017, pp. 140-142.

³⁶ - Salah Laghrour, *Insights into the Internal History of Wilaya I*, op. cit., p. 148.

³⁷ - Salah Laghrour, *Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle*, op. cit., p. 235.

³⁸ - Ammar Jerman, *The Truth: Memoirs on the War of National Liberation and the Post-Independence Period*, Dar Al-Huda, Ain M'lila, Algeria, 2007, p. 65.

³⁹ - Salah Laghrour, *Abbas Laghrour: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle*, op. cit., p. 234.

7. Why was Abbas Laghrour accused and arrested? Lazhar Chrit and Houha Belaid later tried to clear him of suspicion. They were themselves arrested by the Bourguiba authorities and later killed, even though they had been opponents of Abbas and Abdelhay in the dispute.

8. Reports held by the Mujahidin organization mention only that "Abdelhay" called Abbas outside the room. Why did Abdelhay call Abbas outside alone? Was it for organizational reasons?

Section Three: The Execution of Abbas Laghrour

Subsection One: The Arrest of Abbas Laghrour

After the incident, Abbas decided to leave Tunisia and return to Algeria. On the way back to the Aures, he saw enemy trucks heading toward Algeria and decided to ambush them.⁴⁰ Some accounts state that after this ambush he tried to return to Algeria, but an order from National Liberation Front representatives for his arrest caused him to change course.⁴¹ He then chose to surrender voluntarily to the FLN body that ultimately detained him. Major Othman Saadi later recalled: "At that time I was inside the country with the fighting units. Abbas and Lazhar headed toward the border to join their units. The committee ordered the arrest of Lazhar Chrit and instructed Ben Ahmed Messai to arrest Abbas. They decided to carry out the order. When the southern soldiers tried to move to protect him, Abbas told them: Stay where you are. I will go to the officials who summoned me, and I fear nothing. As for you, Si Ahmed, take me with you and carry out the order you were given."⁴²

Another account states that Abbas Laghrour was wounded in the clash and secretly admitted to a hospital in Tunisia. The French government then protested to Habib Bourguiba.⁴³ Fearing for Tunisia's recently acquired independence, Bourguiba reportedly submitted a complaint to the external representatives of the National Liberation Front, who ordered Laghrour's arrest. After recovering, he was detained on 22 October 1956⁴⁴ and held in Bardo prison in Tunisia⁴⁵ for eight months. He was

⁴⁰ - Omar Tablit, *The Faithful Remember You*, Abbas Laghrour, op. cit., p. 117.

⁴¹ - According to the cited account, the Coordination and Execution Committee prevented him from leaving Tunisia because it feared that he might eliminate Mahmoud Cherif. The text states that his own objective was to fight French colonialism rather than remain inactive in Tunisia. Dominique Farale, op. cit., p. 159.

⁴² - Othman Saadi Ben El Hadj, *Memoirs of Major Othman Saadi Ben El Hadj*, Dar Al-Umma for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, 2010, p. 138.

⁴³ - Habib Bourguiba was a Tunisian diplomat and politician and the first president of the Republic of Tunisia, serving from 1957 to 1987. His public statements were often controversial. See: Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, accessed 6/4/2022 at 12:30.

⁴⁴ - Omar Tablit, op. cit., p. 117.

⁴⁵ - While in prison, he rejected attempts to help him escape. He was confident that he could easily answer the accusations against him and trusted Krim Belkacem and Omar Oumrane, even though he disagreed with them over the Soummam Congress. See Dominique Farale, op. cit., p. 161.

then brought to trial together with Lazhar Chrit.⁴⁶ The court is described as consisting of Abdallah Ben Tobbal as president, Ammar Ben Aouda as vice-president, Ammar Bouglaz as a member⁴⁷, and Mahmoud Cherif as prosecutor.

Mujahid Ammar Guarram stated that he visited Laghrour in prison in Tunisia and offered to arrange his escape to Libya or Egypt because the case was serious and its likely outcome had become clear. Abbas became angry and replied: "Why? Am I a traitor that I should flee?"⁴⁸

Subsection Two: His Death

The trial resulted in a death sentence for Abbas Laghrour and several other commanders. The principal charge against him concerned the execution of Bachir Chihani, which had taken place about ten months before the Soummam Congress. When Amirouche questioned him about the matter, Abbas openly acknowledged his role in the execution and maintained that Chihani had received a fair trial. The article nevertheless notes that this claim cannot be confirmed in the absence of official documents.

The article argues that the Chihani case belonged to an earlier period and was an internal matter of Wilaya I. In its view, the Coordination and Execution Committee should not have reopened it after so much time had passed. Laghrour, like any human being, could make mistakes.⁴⁹ The text adds that leaders in wartime are especially exposed to error because of pressure and because an intense concern for the interests of the Revolution can shape their decisions. It therefore argues that judgments about a commander should consider the conditions and causes surrounding the decision. Only then, it maintains, can the decision be assessed with objectivity and detachment. "Deeds are judged by intentions."⁵⁰

The article further states that Abbas Laghrour was executed at the same time and under the same conditions as more than fifty revolutionary cadres. This raises several questions in the author's view: "Why such a massacre? Were all of them responsible for Chihani's execution?" The text also refers

⁴⁶ - Ammar Bouglaz maintained that Abbas was not tried but was executed without a trial, that is, assassinated. Dominique Farale also reported that Omar Oumrane asked Bourguiba to hand over the groups involved in gunfire on Tunisian territory. The request was accepted and Oumrane received them. When Mahmoud Cherif later asked about them, Oumrane reportedly told him that he would never see them again.

⁴⁷ - Ammar Bouglaz: founder of the Eastern Base, member of the National Council of the Algerian Revolution (1957), and member of the Military Training Committee for eastern Algeria. See Achour Cheurfi, op. cit., p. 96.

⁴⁸ - Ammar Guarram, *The External Front: A Story of Struggle from Algeria to Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt*, ed. Mounia Saker, Dar Al-Muntaha, Algeria, 2016, p. 70.

⁴⁹ - Omar Tablit, op. cit., p. 122.

⁵⁰ - Dominique Farale stated that Laghrour admitted that he and Adjoul had taken the decision and that he had placed pressure on witnesses during his questioning and trial. Farale also described him as courageous and serious and expressed regret over his execution. See Dominique Farale, op. cit., p. 161.

to the marginalization of hundreds of fighters and numerous cadres who were exiled and replaced by more compliant and loyal figures.⁵¹ It therefore interprets the episode as a broader process of internal elimination rather than solely as a response to the Chihani case.

Another accusation concerned the Villa La Cania incident. Some interpreted it as a conspiracy organized by Laghrour together with Said Abdelhay to assassinate Nememcha leaders in Tunisia.⁵² The article argues that the incident was never adequately investigated. It notes that Abbas had himself initiated reconciliation efforts to reduce the disputes that had set several leaders of Wilaya I against one another. It also suggests that some form of parallel apparatus was attempting to block reconciliation and prolong the divisions within the National Liberation Army. On this reasoning, Abbas would not have benefited from the incident regardless of its outcome.⁵³ Suspicions were also raised that he intended to assassinate representatives of the Coordination and Execution Committee in Tunisia.⁵⁴

The article notes that even some of Laghrour's opponents rejected the accusation against him. El Wardi Kettal stated: "Abbas Laghrour is completely innocent of our blood. He was planning to arrest us, not to kill some of us and wound others." The author presents this testimony as further evidence of an intention to impose control rather than to carry out a killing. Laghrour wanted to arrest El Wardi Kettal and Ezzine Abbad because of incidents that followed their departure from Souk Ahras, their expulsion of Sidi Hanni from Tebessa, and their public refusal to recognize the higher leadership.⁵⁵

Mujahid Tahar Ahmida gave a similar account. During a visit to the wounded at Farhat Hached Hospital in Tunisia, Farhi Sai reportedly told him: "You must know that Abbas Laghrour was not the one who fired at us. He is completely innocent. I order you to help him escape to Djebel Chambi, where you should hand him over to Ali Ben Ahmed Messai and ask him to take good care of him."⁵⁶ The article therefore concludes that Laghrour had no intention of eliminating the Nememcha leaders and that he was not known for intrigue or for regionalist motives that would have driven him to deception.

⁵¹ - Salah Laghrour, *Insights into Internal History*, op. cit., p. 235.

⁵² - Tarek Aziz Farhani, *Mujahid and Commander Farhi Sai (1910-1964)*, vol. 2, Dar Al-Mojaddid for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Setif, 2023, p. 348.

⁵³ - Omar Tablit, op. cit., p. 123.

⁵⁴ - Dominique Farale, op. cit., p. 161.

⁵⁵ - Mohamed Zeroual, op. cit., p. 340.

⁵⁶ - Moumen El Omari, op. cit., p. 412.

Laghrouir was also criticized for the Battle of Khem El Kelb, which he fought immediately after the Nememcha incident. His political opponents described it as a suicidal action through which he sought to atone for his conduct and end his own career.⁵⁷ The article rejects this reading. It argues that many of his more than 164 military operations had been equally dangerous and that he repeatedly survived them. It portrays him as a man of gunpowder and major battles who would say, if a day passed without fighting, "We have betrayed Algeria."⁵⁸ The author further contends that none of the accusations justified a death sentence and that Laghrouir was innocent of most of them. In this interpretation, his execution resulted from disputes with revolutionary leaders in Tunisia, including Krim Belkacem and Omar Oumrane, who resented his opposition to the Soummam resolutions.⁵⁹ Those leaders had themselves worked hard to secure the congress.⁶⁰ Some therefore argue that Abbas paid the price for his opposition to Soummam and thereby gave these two men the opportunity to execute him.⁶¹ Mujahid Ali Mazouz, by contrast, placed responsibility on Mahmoud Cherif because Abbas had rejected Cherif's position as a commander.⁶²

The article adds that opposition to the Soummam Congress was not the only factor. It also refers to infiltrations of the Revolution by agents working for France who sought to create conflict among the fighters. According to this interpretation, agents trusted by Omar Oumrane encouraged him to remove leaders of Wilaya I and convinced him that they were personally opposed to him.⁶³

Abbas Laghrouir therefore surrendered voluntarily. He believed that he had wronged no one and had not raised his weapon against a comrade. He also believed that fellow fighters would not betray him. The article describes his trial as brief and largely formal. The prosecutor was Mahmoud Cherif, one of Abbas's opponents, who later became commander of Wilaya I. The author notes that Cherif had not been among the earliest revolutionary commanders or among the militants of the Algerian People's Party and questions the basis for his appointment to such a senior position.

⁵⁷ - Omar Tablit, op. cit., p. 124.

⁵⁸ - El Wardi Kettal, op. cit., p. 184.

⁵⁹ - The source attributes this to Laghrouir's identity as a military fighter and his rejection of the priority of the political over the military during wartime. It also states that he opposed the later participation of politicians who had initially rejected armed struggle. He had led his region successfully despite its difficulties, but the Coordination and Execution Committee did not recognize his authority. His sharp temperament and reactions may also have contributed to the problems he later faced. See Dominique Farale, op. cit., pp. 144-145.

⁶⁰ - Tahar Saidani, *The Eastern Base: The Beating Heart of the Revolution*, Dar Al-Umma, Algeria, 2001, pp. 156-157.

⁶¹ - Moumen El Omari, op. cit., p. 418.

⁶² - Ali Mazouz, interview with Mujahid Ali Mazouz at the Mujahid Museum, Batna, 8 August 2021, 9:00-11:00.

⁶³ - Salah Laghrouir, Abbas Laghrouir: From Struggle to the Heart of the Battle, op. cit., p. 260.

Abbas was sentenced to death and placed in the custody of Ammar Bouglaz, who was charged with carrying out the sentence. Bouglaz in turn handed him over to Othman Boudjedra, known as "El Taleb," who supervised the execution in the Zeitoun area of Tunisia.

Lakhdar Boudjedra, Othman's brother, recounted the final moments. Before the sentence was carried out, Abbas asked for a few moments to perform two units of prayer before meeting God. His request was granted. He prayed, then recited Surat Ya-Sin aloud from beginning to end while Othman sat on a rock and followed the recitation. At the end, Abbas raised his hands and prayed that God would accept him among the martyrs. He then walked toward a nearby hollow, lay on the ground facing the qibla, and told "El Taleb": "Carry out what you have been ordered to do. I forgive you, because you have no power over the order. It is the system that has killed me. If you do not kill me, you may be killed. Tell Bouglaz that I forgive him as well." The execution took place on 25 July 1957.⁶⁴ The article concludes that the Revolution lost an exceptional commander who had deeply troubled the French forces.

Conclusion:

This study of Abbas Laghrour's militant and revolutionary career shows that he played an important role in several stages of political and armed struggle. These included the launch of the Revolution in the Khenchela area, the Battle of El Djorf, and the leadership of the region. His personal charisma had a positive influence on his career.

The study further presents Laghrour as one of the prominent activists of the national movement. He contributed significantly to preparations for the Revolution and to the leadership of the Aures region, where he achieved considerable success. He was also known for dedication, loyalty, strictness, comradeship, and sacrifice.

In conclusion, the article regards the execution of Abbas Laghrour and other leaders of Wilaya I as one of the serious excesses committed during the Revolution. It also considers the elimination of military commanders of this stature to have been a major strategic error by leaders of the National Liberation Front. At that stage, Algeria needed commanders of their experience and standing, a point the author notes was recognized even by the French enemy.

⁶⁴ - Omar Tablit, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.

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