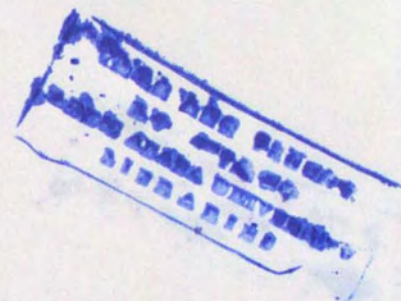


ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY: FROM VICTORY TO COLLAPSE 1977 - 1991

BY
FANTAHUN AYELE



SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND HERITAGE MANAGEMENT
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY

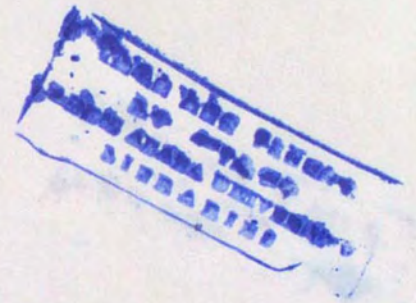
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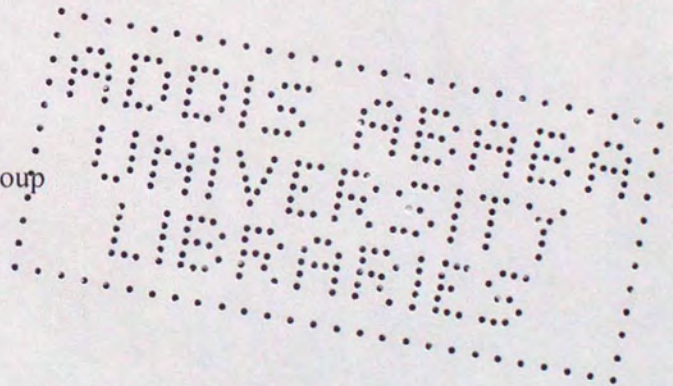
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Acronyms

ALF -	Afar Liberation Front
AOM -	Administration, Organization and Mobilization
BF -	Budget and Finance
BMME -	British Military Mission to Ethiopia
EDU -	Ethiopian Democratic Union
ELF -	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPDM -	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPLF -	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF -	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP -	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
FORA -	Fourth Revolutionary Army
FRA -	First Revolutionary Army
GDR -	German Democratic Republic
HMGs -	Heavy Machineguns
LMGs -	Light Machineguns
MAAG -	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MC -	Military Commissariat
MIDs -	Mountain Infantry Divisions
MOND -	Ministry of National Defence
MOPC -	Military Operations and Planning Command
NRTC -	National Road Transport Corporation
NCOs -	Non-Commissioned Officers
NMS -	National Military Service
NMSCDD -	National Military Service and Civil Defence Department
OLF -	Oromo Liberation Front



OTI - Operations, Training and Intelligence
POWs - Prisoners of War
SALF - Somali Abbo Liberation Front
SCBs - Special Commando Brigades
SRA - Second Revolutionary Army
TPLF - Tegray People's Liberation Front
TRA - Third Revolutionary Army
WSLF - Western Somalia Liberation Front

Transliteration

1. The seven sounds of the Ethiopian alphabet are represented as follows:

1 st order	በ	Bä
2 nd order	ቢ	Bu
3 rd order	ቢ	Bi
4 th order	ባ	Ba
5 th order	ቤ	Bé
6 th order	ብ	Be
7 th order	ቦ	Bo

2. Palatalized sounds are represented as follows:

ሸ	sh
ቸ	ch
ኸ	ñ
ዠ	ž
ጸ	j

3. Glottalized sounds are represented as follows:

ቀ	q
ጠ	ṭ
ጪ	<u>ch</u>
ጸ	Ṣ
ጸ	Ṗ

4. Germination is indicated by doubling:

ገገት	Gännät
ተደሰ	Taddäsä

ጸጋዬ .Säggayé

ለገሰ Laggäsä

5. General Examples:

ካራ ምሽግ Karra Mesheg

ሸራ Sheré

ጨጨሆ Chächäho

ጢጣ .Tiṭa

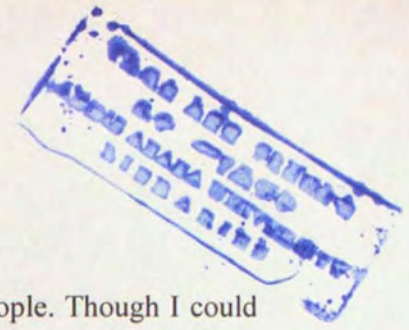
ቀጥጥጥ ቦር Qulquwal Bär

ሰኞ ገበያ Säñño Gäbya

መራኛ Märañña

ቻግኒ Chagni

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This dissertation could not have been written without the help of many people. Though I could not list all those who helped me in one way or another, a few deserve special mention.

First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to my advisor, Professor Bahru Zewde, Emeritus Professor at Addis Ababa University, for his invaluable advice and supervision. I have enormously benefited from his meticulous and critical comments on the first and the second drafts of this dissertation. On a more general level, Professor Bahru has always been my role model and a source of inspiration.

When it comes to shaping academic career, no one has more wisely and generously supported me than my intimate friend and mentor, Dr. Getnet Tizazu. Throughout my graduate school years, he taught me how to write coherently and of course with simplicity. We used to joke that his help was tantamount to offering me “Advanced Composition Courses”. That is not just a joke. I have been so fortunate to be his “student” for many years. I, thus, treasure his tremendous assistance throughout those years.

Next in line comes my old friend, Agegnehu Gebeyehu who helped me in making contacts with key informants residing in Africa, Europe and Asia. In addition, he was a source of encouragement during my sojourn in Naples, Italy.

I am also deeply indebted to Dr. Shumet Sishagne for persuading another key informant residing in the United States. He travelled a round trip of 600 kilometers just for this purpose.

Many others have supported me in a number of ways. My friends, Dr. Tsega Endalew and Tsegaye Berhe sent me invaluable books from the United States and Norway respectively. Dr. Tesfaye Tewolde was also generous enough to send me another essential book published in Asmara. Professor Alessandro Triulzi ordered for me two extremely useful works on counter-insurgency. Ato Sayid Beshir, my former student, gave me logistical support during my trips to Mt. Guguftu. Similarly, Ato Demere Anno, head of the Menschen fur Menschen Office at Alem Ketema offered me a vehicle to take me to Mt. Zoma and Ses Amba. Ato Bekele G. Tsadiq, Principal of the Meragna High School at the time, in collaboration with Ato Adane Nigus, head

of the Menschen fur Menschen Office at Meragna, gave me logistical support during my travels to Karra Mesheg. Solomon Zenebe, a history teacher at Meragna Highschool, accompanied me to Karra Mesheg. Gezahen Beyene and Getachew Tesfahun, both history teachers in Harar and Gondar respectively, helped me in arranging interviews with various informants. Brigadier Generals Tesfaye Habte Maryam and Wasihun Nigatu were very much helpful. In addition to making themselves and their personal collections available, they persuaded several key informants who could have been reluctant without their intervention for my interview. Brigadier General Haile Melesse was so cooperative that he produced a voluminous manuscript in response to my questions. My special thanks go to all these supportive people.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Ministry of National Defence, for allowing me to get access to the priceless archives. Once I was granted the permission, Captain Bekele G. Maryam was very much helpful in making the hundreds of old files available to me. I owe him a debt I would never be able to pay back. I also thank Ato Tesfamariam Tesfahunegn for his unreserved support.

My particular thanks are due to my family. My wife, Emaway Dawud, has always been trying to create the best working environment at home especially during the writeup. My kids, Ruth and Tedi have been engaged in their own reading preferring not to distract me. They all have been a source of encouragement during those years of hard work. During my stay in Addis, my nephew, Tewodros Maru, has always been helpful especially in cooking. I am indebted to him.

Finally, I would like to thank all my informants and all those who have been asking me with concern when I was going to complete my studies.

Abstract

Although the army faced security problems in many parts of the country since 1975, the real test came in 1977 when most of Eritrea fell into the hands of the insurgents and the guerrilla operation in the Ogađen developed into a full-scale invasion by Somalia. By 1977, therefore, the army appeared to be on the verge of total defeat.

The response to this national emergency had a long-lasting impact on the army's organization, operation and equipment. The conscription, training and deployment of a huge militia force within a short time and the crucial role it played in defeating Somalia came to influence the Därg's belief in military organization, placing the premium on quantity rather than quality.

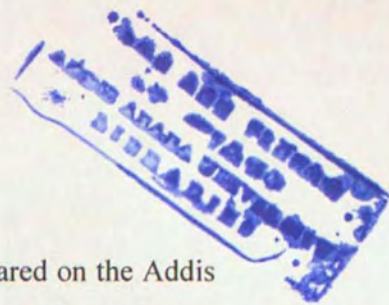
Meanwhile, the Därg's quest for a reliable arms supplier bound Ethiopia to the Soviet Union which supplied the army with enormous weaponry as well as military advisers for more than a decade. Although they significantly contributed to the defeat of Somalia, the Soviet military advisers failed to plan a successful counter-insurgency operation in northern Ethiopia.

The application of conventional military tactics and strategy in the war against the northern insurgents brought about only temporary relief. The huge campaigns, such as the Red Star and Bahrä Nägash Operations, showed that military might alone could not stamp out the insurgency. Insurgents could only lose the war when permanently isolated from the local population. The army failed to attain that fundamental goal.

Internally, the army had a number of serious institutional problems. Not only did these internal problems undermine the army's capabilities but they also demoralized the combatants. Besides, war weariness and disillusionment made the army vulnerable to the insurgents' onslaught.

The fall of Afabét in 1988 marked the beginning of the end. It was followed by the Sheré military disaster. The coup attempt that occurred soon was aborted within hours. The appointment of new commanders and the deployment of additional conscripts could not reverse the worsening military situation. The fall of Meşewa into EPLF hands in February 1990 made the collapse of the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA) imminent. Elsewhere, other army units continued to lose additional battles.

Finally in May 1991, the Ethiopian army, one of the largest and most heavily armed in Africa, disintegrated following the flight of Mängestu H. Maryam to Zimbabwe.



Preface

In 1980, when I was a high school student, I read a sensational story that appeared on the Addis Zemen newspaper. It was about an extraordinary feat of bravery of a soldier who had been serving in Eritrea. The story impressed me very much and kindled my interest in military history.

During my high school years, history and Geography were my favourite subjects. After I joined Addis Ababa University, I happily chose history as my field of study. Actually, it was my first choice among 14 fields of study. However, since the war was going on throughout my undergraduate years, I could not write on any aspect of the military. But my interest in military history was still alive.

In September 1990, I joined the School of Graduate Studies at AAU for my M.A degree. That was the time when the army was disintegrating. Days before the fall of Addis into the hands of the insurgents, pensive looking and demoralized soldiers were retreating to the capital. I still vividly remember that they were filled with despair. Soon after the collapse of the army, it became quite common to see soldiers begging in the streets of Addis. That shocked me very much. I began to ask myself why that huge army lost the war. I thought that the time has come to write on the army and I submitted a topic to the Department of History. But I was told that it was too early to write on the war. That was actually a blessing in disguise. Had I been allowed to write on it I would not have as much time as I had during my doctoral studies and I might not have been allowed to get access to the archives of the Ministry of National Defence (MOND).

I reserved the topic for my PhD dissertation. In late 2002 and early 2003, I was on a research leave. Before I joined the School of Graduate Studies for my terminal degree, I wanted to make sure whether it was possible to get access to the archives of the MOND. Then I came with an official letter to the Ministry of Defence asking for access to the archives. Initially, the letter was wrongly addressed and I had to go back to Bahir Dar and get the letter corrected and addressed to the Office of the Chief of Staff. Then after several weeks, I was finally granted permission to get into the "gold mines". That was one of the happiest moments of my life.

Rarely accessed before, these archives encompass almost everything about the army. By getting the permission renewed every year, I consulted hundreds of dead files for six years and these archives have formed the backbone of my dissertation.

The information gathered from these priceless archives has been backed up by extensive field research. With the exception of Eritrea, I have travelled widely not only to gather oral information from ex-combatants and peasants in former battle zones but also to study the topography of major battlefields so as to look into the impact of the terrain on operations. I have thus visited Karra Mara, Jijiga, Harär, Diré Dawa, Lämi, Aläm Kätäma, Märañña, Karra Mesheg, Mähal Méda, Wära Ilu, Guguftu, Dässé, Kuta Bär, Hayq, Gimba, Allamaṭa, Mäqälé, Enda Sellasé, Däbarq, Dabat, Mt. Guna, Kemer Dengay, Däbrä Tabor and Wärräta. In an attempt to get some insight about the battles fought in those places, I watched documentary films for a couple of weeks at the Ethiopian television studios.

In addition to many privates, NCOs, and junior officers, I have interviewed more than a dozen army generals, including those who led major operations and headed key sectors of military organization such as logistics and military intelligence. In a quest for hearing straight from the horse's mouth, I was able to establish contacts with the ex-president and commander-in-chief, Mängestu H. Maryam with the help of my old friend and an army general living in London. Initially, Mängestu expressed his willingness to respond to my inquiries. He did acknowledge receiving my questions and a book (entitled *Ay Meṣewa*) he requested to be sent to him along with the questions. Unfortunately, however, he later changed his mind and refused to respond. I suspect that he backed away once he saw my specific questions perhaps because most of the questions I raised required him to admit strategic mistakes committed by himself in various fronts.

In an attempt to listen to what the former insurgents have to say about the war, I have also interviewed several ex-fighters of TPLF and EPDM and a few of their commanders. It is again unfortunate that some of the ex-commanders of the TPLF, EPDM or EPRDF forces especially those who still occupy high positions in the present army are reluctant to talk about the war fought before 1991.

Even then, I have had no shortage of information at all. I have been inundated with information from archives and interviews. Such archival and oral sources have been substantiated by available published and unpublished works. In this regard, I should say, my six month stay at the University of Naples, Italy enabled me to consult those works that had been out of my reach. It

was during the same sojourn that I managed not only to get an invaluable book published in Asmara but also to interview an ex-Eritrean fighter who had come from Asmara for a conference.

One final word ! On a negative note, I need to point out my regret for being unable to travel to Eritrea in order to visit major battlefields, interview more ex-fighters and consult Eritrean archives.

Introduction

The Ethiopian revolution of 1974 set in motion probably the most turbulent period in the country's recent history. At its early stage, it had striking similarities with that of the French and Russian revolutions. Both the French and Russian revolutionaries faced internal division, domestic rebellion and external aggression. In order to defend the revolution, the new French leaders, the Jacobins, issued a decree in February 1793 to levy 300,000 men.¹ On their part, the Bolsheviks raised a huge force known as the Red Army to defend the Russian Revolution from internal opponents and external invaders.²

The Ethiopian situation was no different. In 1976/77, in addition to the threat of invasion from Somalia, the Därg faced internal division, domestic rebellion from several ethno nationalist liberation fronts and multinational opposition groups. In what looked like the act of the French revolutionaries, the Därg decided to raise a force of 300,000 men in 1977 to repulse the Somali invasion and stamp out internal rebellion.³

In 1978, the army scored a stunning victory over Somalia and regained most of Eritrea. But that victory seems to have shaped the Därg's military thinking. The Därg presumably believed that the army could prevail over its enemies by sheer weight of numbers. It, thus, raised the number of divisions from four to more than 38, with a manpower of nearly half a million men in arms.⁴

Despite its superiority in arms and numbers, the army was beaten by the much smaller rebel groups and it finally disintegrated in 1991. Since 1991, this dramatic and traumatic collapse of the army has been a puzzle to many people. However, very little has been done so far in terms of historical research that might help unknot this puzzle.

Apart from the relatively good number of works on the northern insurgents, a few studies have been conducted on the military or the army. These include the articles of Gilkes (1991, 1995), Eyayu (1994), Tekeste (1994), Bahru (2008) and Gebru (2000, 2002, 2004). Patrick Gilkes, formerly a British journalist, presented a well-researched paper entitled "Revolution and Military Strategy: The Ethiopian Army in the Ogadén and in Eritrea 1974- 1984," at the 11th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in 1991. To a great extent, Gilkes' work is based on oral information gathered through interviews conducted in Addis Abäba, Asmära, Meşewa, Harär,

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Mogadishu and London between 1976 and 1989. Gilkes attempts to give us a concise analysis of the Somali-Ethiopian war and the army's counter-insurgency operation in Eritrea. He supplements his evidence with Somali sources and those of the northern insurgents. He has, for instance, quoted an immensely fascinating diary of an Ethiopian soldier that fell into rebel hands when the EPLF overran Naqfa in 1977. In an even-handed attempt to find out the role of the Cuban troops in the defeat of Somalia, Gilkes adds Cuban accounts in the list of his few written sources.

In another article, "The Battle of Af Abet and the Eritrean Independence," Gilkes outlines the intensification of the northern insurgency following the battle of Afabét. Quite unconvincingly, however, he underscores that the 1988/89 defeats in Eritrea and Tegray "did not affect the army's overall willingness to fight" (p. 43), an assertion for which there is no corroborating evidence. Since the author fails to discuss the battle itself, one may find the title misleading and narrower in scope than what it implies.

Eyayu Lulseged and Tekeste Melake have also independently produced research papers on the army. Eyayu's article, "Some Institutional Problems of the Ethiopian Army 1974-1991," is rather sketchy. Even though he tries to look into the problems of the triangular command, recruitment, training, appointment and promotion, his data is rather limited: His work is entirely based on oral information gathered from 11 informants. In contrast, Tekeste's work, "The Battle of Shire (February 1989): A Turning Point in the Protracted War in Ethiopia," is rich with archival sources. The author does not, however, make it clear whether the TPLF sources he uses are oral or written. His article is not, however, free from bias. While praising the insurgents as "gallant combatants" (p. 966), he disparages the government's operation as "most barbaric and savage" (p. 970). Besides, throughout his paper, he uses wrong terms like "core armies" instead of army corps. Interestingly, in another unpublished paper which he produced in 1993, Tekeste avoids such flaws. His investigation in this paper of the role of the military security organization in the army is quite commendable.

In marked contrast to the works reviewed so far, studies conducted by Bahru Zewde and Gebru Tareke (two celebrated historians) are fairly exhaustive. In his article entitled "The Military and Militarism in Africa: the Case of Ethiopia," Bahru outlines the evolution of the Ethiopian army, the involvement of the military in politics and the nature of militarism and militarization. More

particularly, he surveys the expansion of the army and the introduction of the National Military Service and points out its impact on the people. He also briefly discusses the 1989 attempted coup and finds out the main causes for its failure by comparing and contrasting it with the 1960 abortive coup.

On his part, Gebru, in a rather piecemeal approach to the study of the army's recent operational history, has produced four authoritative articles on the Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977/78, the "Lash" and Red Star Operations and the Battles of Afabét and Sheré. The earliest of the three appeared in the *International Journal of African Historical Studies* in 2000 and it examines the Somali invasion and the Ethiopian counter-offensive. Although the war lasted until the defeat of Somali forces in March 1978, Gebru gives no justification for preferring the title: "The Ethiopia Somalia War of 1977 Revisited." He, however, rightly divides the Somali invasion into guerrilla and conventional phases and then moves on to the stalemated fighting and the Ethiopian counter-offensive. He, of course, modestly admits that some "aspects of the war will remain foggy until all the relevant Ethiopian and more importantly the Somali official documents are released and until veterans of the war begin to tell their own stories" (p. 636). But, he manages to present a thoroughly worthwhile analysis of the war based on archival, oral and secondary sources.

His article on the Lash Operation which appeared in *Horn of Africa* in 2001, examines the insurgency in the Ogadén and the successful counter-insurgency operation pointing out the reason for its success. A year later, Gebru produced another article, "From Lash to Red Star: the Pitfalls of Counter-Insurgency in Ethiopia 1980-1982," which appeared in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*. In that article, he gives a meticulous comparison of the two major military operations carried out by the Ethiopian army in the Ogadén and Eritrea. In setting the context, he underpins theories of insurgency and counter-insurgency operations and then dovetails those theories with the Ethiopian situation. For understandable reasons (that is, due to its complex nature and the huge preparation that preceded it), the author devotes 17 pages to the Red Star operation compared to the five page analysis of the Lash campaign. Even then, Gebru manages to pinpoint the fundamental factors for the success of the Lash and the failure of the Red Star operations using archival, oral and secondary sources.

The longest (42 paged) and probably the best researched of the four pieces of work appeared in March 2004 in the *Journal of Modern African Studies* with the title, "From Af Abet to Shire: the

Defeat and Demise of Ethiopia's Red Army 1988-89." In analyzing the internal weaknesses of the Ethiopian army and the underlying reasons for its defeat at Afabét and Enda Sillasé, Gebru has used pertinent sources from the Ministries of National Defence and Internal Affairs. Wherever necessary, he also makes wise use of oral sources to substantiate and/or corroborate archival and secondary sources. He not only reveals the major weaknesses of the army that contributed to its defeat but also expounds on the factors that enabled the northern insurgents to prevail. Like his work on Lash and Red Star, he meticulously compares the army's operations with Napoleonic and Maoist strategies. Despite its focus on operations, his gripping piece of work benefits from lucid exposition, finely crafted organization, coherent presentation and cogently argued interpretation.

In addition to the works mentioned above, two former members of the army, Tedla Bekele and Tesfamariam Tesfahunegn, have also written senior essays on the army. As his eye-catching topic, "Some Internal Causes for the Defeat of the 39th Mountain Infantry Brigade in the Northern Front 1981-1991," indicates, Tedla investigates the major engagements of his former unit and points out the causes for its collapse in 1991. He has enriched his personal experience with some interviews and a few written sources. Tesfamariam has been more fortunate than Tedla in getting access to Ministry of National Defence (MOND) archives and TPLF sources for his topic, "The Battle of Shire." But he interviewed only 9 people (2 peasants and 7 army officers). To his credit, he gives a glossary of military symbols and attaches some essential appendices.

Similarly, four former senior army officers, Generals Husséin Ahmäd (1997 E.C), Gétachäw Gädamu (1997 E.C), Kasayé Chämäda (1999 E.C) and Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam (1997 E.C) have recently produced invaluable memoirs. Husséin, who had been commander of the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA) in the last days of the Därg and who is still living in exile, begins with a six page quotation from Nelson Mandela's work, *A Long Walk to Freedom*. In trying to give a general background to the Ethiopian army, he goes back to the times of Téwodros II and that takes up one-fourth of his book. It is lamentable that Husséin gives a sketchy presentation and skin deep narration of the crucial engagements like Operations Red Star and Bahrä Nägash. He, for instance gives us only a passing remark on the fall of Afabét (1988), a turning point in the army's counter-insurgency operations.

On their part, Gétachäw and Kasayé give us graphic descriptions about the famed units they commanded. Gétachäw, commander of the Gäseṭ artillery unit, outlines the achievements and tribulations of his unit during its engagements with the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) and Somali forces in 1976/77. Similarly, Kasayé led his famed unit, the Sänṭeq Mechanized Brigade, in a number of battles in the northern theatre. In his well-received memoir, not only does he chronicle the many battles he led, but he also exposes the blunders committed by the high command.

On the other hand, Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam, who led several operations in the Ogaḍén and Eritrea and received the highest medal for his outstanding feats of bravery, has produced a vivid memoir. One might argue that the considerable factual details and eyewitness accounts of important battles provided in this book make it quite exceptional. He also gives us first hand information about the battles he himself led as well as the training and organization of the airborne division he had supervised.

Two other former members of the army, Gétachäw Yärom (1993 E.C), a junior officer, and Taddäsä Télé (1997 E.C), an NCO, have also produced their own memoirs. Although Gétachäw's work narrates some of the army's operations in Eritrea and the 1989 coup attempt, it is rather sketchy and gives no fresh data on the subject. In contrast, Taddäsä sheds light on one of the least recorded engagements, the battle of Meṣewa. Unlike his memoir on the battle of Meṣewa, however, Taddäsä's second book (1999 E.C) on the army is just a compilation of archival materials and has many flaws.

As a supplement to the existing literature, some former members of the army have put forward their commentaries and recollections in Amharic magazines. Major General Gezaw Bälaynäḥ, for instance, gives his own assessment of the army's discipline during the imperial and military regimes. On his part, Lt. Colonel Mäsfen Gäbrä Mädhén, political officer of the then 102nd Airborne Division, gives some inside information about the situation in Asmära during the abortive coup of 1989 in his articles that appeared on the *Tobyä* magazine. In the same magazine, another officer named Şägga Mogäs gives sensational information about what he believes was sabotage by the high command which led to the collapse of the army in general and

the 103rd Command Division in particular. What is interesting about such veterans is the fact that they tell us what they have personally experienced and witnessed.

Finally, government journalists who had access to classified documents have brought a couple of reports to light. Published in the book entitled "*Tärarochen Yanqätäqäta Tewled*" (*A Generation that Had Shaken Mountains*), one of the reports was written by Brigadier General Abbäbä Haylä Sellasé, commander of the 603rd Corps. Soon after the Battle of Guna (February 1990), Abbäbä was actually ordered to come to Addis Ababa and write a report pointing out the reasons for the collapse of all government defences between Mt. Guna and Baher Dar in just six days. The second report was produced by Captain Feqré Badé, who interrogated the senior officers who had planned and attempted the abortive coup of 1989. Definitely, both reports throw some light on the least known aspects of the war.

So far, with the exception of a few articles, a couple of senior essays already mentioned, no major research has been conducted on the Ethiopian army. The few studies carried out to date focus almost exclusively on the major operations of the Ethiopian army such as the war with Somalia, Operation Red Star, the battles of Afabét and Sheré. Obviously, while useful, such studies could only reveal the tip of the iceberg. A lot remains to be done to reveal in full the army's contemporary history. The various aspects of the army had remained largely unexplored. In the limited studies conducted so far, archival and oral sources have rarely been used.

What makes the current research basically different from earlier studies is the extensive use of archival and oral sources. These sources have been used not only to add much depth or shed new light on operations but also to investigate the unexplored aspects of the army like recruitment, training, equipment, organization, command and control, logistics and military intelligence.

CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND: THE ETHIOPIAN ARMY 1941-1974

1.1. Organization of the Army

The army has been, beyond all dispute, one of the oldest institutions in Ethiopia. Despite its indispensability for maintaining law and order, the army remained a traditional force for a long time. Apart from the sporadic correspondence of the medieval rulers to get technical (including military) assistance from Europe, no attempt was made to organize the army along modern lines until the nineteenth century. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that Téwodros II (1855-1868) single-handedly tried to create a well-organized, well-disciplined, and better-equipped professional army. Among other things, Emperor Téwodros was able to introduce new military titles by way of promoting the existing chain of command. It was also his intention to put the regional armies together and form a disciplined national army. Probably the most remarkable aspect of Téwodros' military reform was his determination to produce modern weapons locally. And the country did witness the production of mortars and cannons. Eventually, however, all those attempts failed to bring about the desired result.¹

Apparently, Yohannes IV did not take on board the attempts of his predecessor in creating a modern army. Even then, his army managed to acquire modern weapons through reward (from the British military expedition in return for assistance against Téwodros II) and capture (from the Egyptian invaders at the battles of Gundät and Gura).²

Likewise, Menilek II was obsessed more with the acquisition of modern weapons than the modernization of his army.³ He maintained the medieval military organization of regional forces under regional governors, which co-existed with the standing army stationed around the royal court. The latter embraced such units as the *Baldäras* (Keepers of Royal Horses), *Barud Bét* (the House of Gunpowder), and *Tämänja Yazh* (Bearers of Rifles), all eventually brought under the generic appellation of *Mähal Säfari* ("soldiers stationed at the centre"). These units of the imperial army were put under the command of a *fitawarari* who was in turn answerable to the

emperor. When the ministerial system was introduced in 1907, the *fitawrari* ended up as the War Minister.⁴

The institution of the modern army had some antecedents in Harär. *Ras* Mäkonnen is said to have organized a professional police force to maintain law and order in the town reviving an old practice of the *emirs* of Harär. Inspired by the establishment of the *Dhawaria* (as the police came to be called at the time) in Harär, Menilek brought some of the policemen to Addis Abäba and assigned them to enforce curfew in the capital. The policemen were soon joined by new recruits and, by 1916, they numbered about 300.⁵

A year later, a unit different from the police was organized. Named *Yämäträyäs Zäbäñña* ("the machinegun guards"), the new unit was probably the first force to be organized along modern lines. *Gerazmach* Gäbrä Yohannes Woldä Mädhén, an ex-NCO who had served in the British colonial army in Kenya, became the first commander of this force. According to the Ministry of National Defence (MOND) archives, *Yämäträyäs Zäbäñña* was the first uniformed army unit.⁶

In 1919, *Ras* Täfäri assigned those Ethiopians who had been serving in the British colonial army, the King's African Rifles, to train the Bodyguard in collaboration with some Russian émigré officers. The training given at home was augmented by foreign military studies. Thus, in the 1920s, some young Ethiopians were sent to the French military academy of St. Cyr. In 1924, the Bodyguard was issued with grand uniforms following Täfäri's tour of Europe. By 1928, Täfäri had about 5,000 well-trained members of the Bodyguard. It was in the same year that the *Yämäträyäs Zäbäñña* was given a new name - the Imperial Bodyguard.⁷

A year later, the Belgian Military Mission under the leadership of Major Dotheé came to Ethiopia to take over the organization and training of the Imperial Bodyguard. The Belgian officers began to train the Imperial Bodyguard in earnest and their contract was renewed until 1935. The Imperial Bodyguard was expanded with new recruits from Addis Abäba and its environs. The troops were issued green khaki uniforms very similar to the Belgian army with berets imported from Japan. But they wore no boots. Although the Imperial Bodyguard was based in the capital at Jan Méda, some of its units were stationed at various provincial outposts in Harärgé, Balé and Wälläga.⁸

On the eve of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935/36, the Imperial Bodyguard had four battalions of infantry, a company of machinegun unit, and a squadron of cavalry, which were all put under a regiment consisting of 5,000 soldiers.⁹

The Italian aggression in 1935 put the Imperial Bodyguard to a severe test. Since it had very little or no experience of actual combat, the Imperial Bodyguard stayed with the emperor as a reserve force. Although the Italians had already gained the upper hand in earlier engagements, the Imperial Bodyguard took the field in the final confrontation, the battle of Maychäw. While it failed to reverse the military situation, it had earned the admiration of even the Italian commander who remarked: "the Imperial Guard, supported by a lively fire moved against our positions, advancing in rushes and making good use of the ground, giving proof of solidity and a remarkable degree of training combined with a superb contempt of danger."¹⁰

After the fall of Addis Ababa, the Holäta cadets, together with other intellectuals founded the Black Lion Organization and fought against the Fascist occupation under *Ras* Emeru until the latter's capture. Those cadets who had been living in Addis Abäba after the Italian "amnesty" became the primary targets of the February Massacre of 1937. The precious few who had been in exile in the Sudan during the Fascist occupation were destined to occupy the highest military posts after 1941.¹¹

Soon after the restoration of his power in 1941, the emperor put the modernization of the army, a pre-war project aborted by the Italian aggression, high on the agenda. Pinning all his hopes on the British, he earnestly asked Sir Philip Mitchell, political officer of the British army in East Africa, to take up the issue with his government.¹²

The British who assumed a dominant position in Ethiopia as a result of their involvement in the war of liberation, agreed to finance, train and equip the new Ethiopian army which was to be organized into ten infantry battalions, a regiment of mounted (pack) artillery, a regiment of armored cars, as well as engineer and signal units.¹³

Before the British took over the whole responsibility, the Ethiopian government gathered the pre-war cadets and graduates of Holäla and St. Cyr, and organized the army under the newly established Ministry of War. Although it was poorly-equipped, the new army came into

existence in June 1941. When the British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME) headed by Major General Butler arrived, the groundwork had already been in place.¹⁴

When the BMME began the organization and training of the army, the main problems facing the mission were the absence of stores, lack of supplies and equipment, and shortage of clerical and technical staff. With regard to the problem of supplies, the BMME signed contracts with private firms in Addis Abäba in March 1942. For instance, Messrs Calderon, a firm later bought by Messrs Diamonds and Co., began to manufacture and supply uniforms and blankets to the army. Similarly, an Armenian resident in Addis Abäba signed a contract to produce cap badges. By the end of 1942, all the soldiers were fitted out with uniforms, but only 35 per cent of them were given berets.¹⁵

The organization and procurement of the army which was initially rather sluggish began to show marked progress. The BMME decided to strengthen the ten infantry battalions with other supporting units. According to BMME's plan, each battalion was supposed to have 75 infantrymen mounted on mules. Given the shortage of military vehicles and the limited nature of roads, the training of mounted infantry units was absolutely essential. Needless to say, if such units were to operate, pack animals should be made available. Accordingly, about 1,000 mules were bought in addition to the hundreds of mules and horses captured from the Italians. By 1942, therefore, the army possessed about 250 horses and 2,100 mules. Some of these were given to the Imperial Regiment of Artillery, a unit established in late 1941. By the end of 1942, the artillery regiment had two batteries with full strength and the third one was in the process of formation. The other unit, the Armored Car Regiment was organized in May 1942 and had 205 troops.¹⁶ There were still three other units that had to be set up: the engineering, signal and medical corps. The engineering unit consisted of a field company (with 300 men trained in field, engineering and bridge construction) and the Works and Parks Company (with 760 people). The latter was engaged in the construction of military barracks, maintenance of army headquarters, and completion of the signal school.

The signal unit had a total of 150 men and included a wireless section (staffed by 15 Ethiopian operators) assigned to seven military outposts (Adwa, Däbrä Marqos, Dässé, Gondär, Jimma, Nägällé and Wondo), telephone and visual signal sections and a signal school.

The last unit was composed of medical corps. Dressers were trained and assigned to various army units in and outside Addis Ababa. The dressers attached to army units in the provinces were included in the payroll of the local hospitals.¹⁷

All these British-organized army units were stationed in Bägémeder, Gojjam, Harär, Jimma, Sidamo and Tegray. Several British officers were assigned to all battalions.¹⁸ Accommodation in some of the barracks, especially at Asäbä Täfäri and Däbrä Marqos, was rather deplorable. All the provincial stations had no electricity and running water.¹⁹

Despite the poor conditions of living, a significant improvement in discipline was noticeable. Such disciplinary problems as desertion (often with weapons), drunkenness, quarrelling and assaults on guards became less frequent. Troops who had been decorating uniforms and wearing them with plain clothes came to abandon such habits through time. Disciplinary cases were mainly tried by Ethiopian adjutants. It was only in rare cases that offenders were brought before British officers.²⁰

Although BMME had wielded much influence on the army, two units remained outside the British orbit: the Imperial Bodyguard and the Territorial Army. Reorganized in 1941 and put under Swedish officers, the former was kept as an elite force completely independent from the Ministry of War. By 1946, the Imperial Bodyguard had seven battalions with a total of 3,100 troops. Whereas five of its battalions were stationed in Harär and Gojjam, the remaining stayed in Addis Abäba. In the same year, the Imperial Bodyguard came to have its own officer training school set up at Bélla in the capital. Until 1960, the Imperial Bodyguard continued to receive the attention and special favour of the emperor.²¹

The creation of the Territorial Army, on the other hand, had something to do with the war of liberation and its immediate aftermath. During the war, there existed a considerable number of armed bands in various parts of the country. After liberation, these armed bands, to the government's dismay, continued to roam the countryside. The government thus organized the Territorial Army in 1941 to absorb all armed bands to prevent them from resorting to banditry. As a matter of rule, men could only be enlisted if they possessed rifles.²² The organization of the

Territorial Army was in effect killing two birds with one stone. In the first place, the government managed to boost its military power at a stroke. Secondly, it improved the country's security considerably by bringing unregistered weapons under state control.

Initially, however, the Territorial Army was loosely controlled and its members were on the whole poorly trained and ill-disciplined. In order to avoid such problems, the government wanted to bring the Territorial Army under the BMME. But the British authorities downplayed the Ethiopian request and even held up military supplies until the signing of the second Anglo-Ethiopian agreement. Once that was signed at the end of 1944,²³ the BMME agreed to shoulder the responsibility of training the Territorial Army which was not without its advantage. For instance, Lt. General Kenneth Anderson, the British Commander-in-Chief of East Africa, viewed the new responsibility of the BMME in such a way that the "strengthening of the police forces throughout the country, in to which several thousand territorial soldiers will be drafted will provide for greater tranquility in those parts of Ethiopia adjoining the Reserved Areas and Ogaden."²⁴

By 1945, therefore, 11 battalions of the Territorial Army were brought under the BMME in addition to the 10 battalions of the Regular Army. Later, General Anderson's prediction turned out to be true - many of the territorial soldiers were gradually absorbed by the regular army and the police force. The absorption of the Territorial Army into the army and the police continued until 1958 when the government decided to maintain and even expand it as a viable reserve force.²⁵

Although the BMME had agreed to bring the Territorial Army up to the required standard, there were still feelings of uneasiness on the part of the Ethiopian government. In 1945, in the very year they assumed an additional responsibility of training 11 battalions of territorial troops, the BMME officials were ordered by the British government to slash the £1 million budget of the mission by £370,000 instead of raising it.²⁶

In the eyes of the Ethiopian government, the British were becoming increasingly unreliable and uncommitted despite the signing of the 1944 agreement in good faith. In the political arena as

well, the British did more harm than good especially in Eritrea and the Ogadén.²⁷ Ethiopia's quest for a more reliable source of military assistance seems to have emanated from these unhealthy relations. The net result was the signing of the Ethio-American Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement on May 22, 1953 (Genbot 14, 1945 E.C). Lured by the immense strategic importance of Ethiopia, the Americans received a communication base and naval facilities in Eritrea. On their part, they agreed to provide Ethiopia with military assistance for a period of 25 years.²⁸ The agreement included the secondment of an American team, the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to the Ethiopian army. MAAG, which replaced BMME, was supposed to train and equip three divisions of the Ethiopian Army each with a manpower of 6,000 men.²⁹ In an attempt not to fall into the trap of a single foreign power, the Ethiopian government invited military missions from other countries.³⁰ Accordingly, the Swedes were put in charge of the Imperial Bodyguard and the air force. Following the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, the Norwegians were assigned to organize and train the navy.³¹ Likewise, an Indian military mission established and ran the Harär Military Academy.³²

The MAAG officers began their task in a fresh spirit by reorganizing the army into three divisions. The supporting units were also reorganized or expanded to include an armoured squadron, an artillery regiment, an engineering battalion and medical, ordnance and service corps.³³ By 1956, the three divisions of the army had a total of 16,832 troops. The headquarters of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divisions were located in Addis Abäba, Asmära and Harär respectively. The 1st Division was composed of three brigades (1st, 2nd and 3rd) with a total manpower of 5,385 soldiers, stationed in Addis Abäba, Däbrä Berhan, Dässé, Däbrä Marqos and Jimma. The 2nd Division had 4,557 troops divided unequally into five brigades (5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 12th), stationed at Asmära, Täsänäy, Mayhabär in Eritrea, Adwa, Kuyha, Maychäw, Wuqro in Tegray and Azäzo and Gorgora in Gondär. The 3rd Division on the other hand included four brigades (4th, 9th, 10th and 11th) with 6,890 troops. These troops were stationed in El Kärré, Nägällé, Wardér, Qäbri Dähar, Dägähabur, Harär and Diré Dawa.

In addition to combatants stationed throughout the country, the army had various supporting units with a total manpower of 4,148 men. These included adjutants and NCOs working at army

headquarters, ordnance departments, arms depots, training camps and music bands as well as communication workers, army engineers, artillerymen and medical personnel.³⁴

Such organizations of the army had to be reviewed as the independence of Somalia came closer. Cognizant of the problems on the horizon, the Ethiopian government took some precautionary measures after a meticulous study of the most likely actions of the future Somali state. One such measure was reorganizing the 3rd Division in the Ogadén into mobile units. The other measure was the reorganization of the Territorial Army into an effective reserve force. To that effect, a proclamation was issued in October 1958. According to the proclamation, provincial officials would carefully recruit the territorial soldiers from all parts of the country. After being trained, enlisted men would be sent back home and would stay on reserve until called for active service during emergency situations. They were also expected to show up once a year for mobilization exercise.³⁵

The government felt that the reorganization of the 3rd Division and the Territorial Army would not by itself guarantee the country's security and territorial integrity. A proposal to organize a fourth division was thus submitted to MAAG officials. In 1960 following the independence of Somalia and the subsequent advent of the Soviets in the Horn, the American officials approved Ethiopia's plan to establish the 4th Division. Accordingly, a ten-man committee composed of Ethiopian and MAAG officers was assigned to study the new organization of the Army and submit a proposal. In its proposal, the committee included the reorganization of the Army into four divisions with 6,000 troops each.³⁶

Before the proposal was put into effect, the Imperial Bodyguard staged an abortive coup in December 1960. Until that moment, the Imperial bodyguard had been enjoying special privileges. These included relatively generous allowances, better housing and medical facilities as well as duty free privileges. The Imperial Bodyguard also surpassed other units in training and weaponry. In addition, it was selected to send troops to Korea, a mission that added glory to its name. Such privileges provoked jealousy among army units. To make matters worse, through its decoding department, the Imperial Bodyguard vigilantly monitored the army's radio communications so as to prevent dissidence and subversive activities.³⁷

Interestingly, the conflict between the Bodyguard and other units did not annoy the emperor. After all, it was the emperor who presumably set the cat among the pigeons. It was part of his divide and rule policy to maintain animosity among the various units of the armed forces.³⁸ Commanders of the Bodyguard and the army were, for instance, selected "from men at odds with one another."³⁹ The conflict between the army and the Bodyguard was clearly evident during the attempted coup of 1960, when the two forces confronted each other. The brutal repressive measure taken against the plotters is testimony to the fact that the incident was used to settle old scores. Obviously, the commanders of the army and the air force who played key roles in aborting the coup notably Generals Märe'd Mängäsha, Käbbädä Gäbré, Isayyas Gäbrä Sellasé and Assäfa Ayana were accorded medals and promoted to higher posts. By then, it had become painfully clear to the emperor that he was quite wrong in putting so much trust on the Bodyguard.⁴⁰

Soon after the suppression of the coup, the government set out to reorganize the army. The period 1960/61 was crucial to the army in several ways. The attempted coup, the independence of Somalia and its provocative activities in the Ogadén and the beginning of armed resistance in Eritrea by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) necessitated the reorganization and expansion of the army. In the case of Somalia, for instance, only a month after its independence, it began to amass troops along the border with Ethiopia.⁴¹

To effectively deal with these problems, a study on the reorganization of the army was submitted in January 1961 and put into effect soon afterwards. The study divided the country into four military districts namely Central, Northern, Eastern and Southern Commands. The Central Command would include Shäwa, Wälläga and Gojjam. These three provinces would be placed under the 1st Division. Eritrea, Tegray, Gondär and Wollo were to be put under the Northern Command or the Second Division. Because of its future enormous challenges, the Eastern Command or the Third Division would be deployed only in Harärgé. The Southern Command or the Fourth Division would maintain law and order in Arsi, Balé, Gamo Gofa, Ilubabor, Käfa and Sidamo.⁴²

In the meantime, troops of the Imperial Bodyguard were dispersed and suspended from active service in the wake of the abortive coup. Likewise, their commanders at various levels served various prison terms. Later, the rank and file were pardoned and assigned to various army units. But, in June 1961, many of them, who had been stationed in the Ogadén, are reported to have deserted out of desperation. At the time, it was feared that such demoralized troops might cross the border into Somalia and disclose military secrets to the Somalis.⁴³

The two most disturbing developments were, however, the flow of Soviet weapons to Somalia and the outbreak of armed resistance in Eritrea. "Ethiopia was caught" Spencer sums up, "between the upper and the lower jaws of Eritrea and Somalia."⁴⁴ Taking these problems into consideration, MAAG officials approved the plan of raising the army to 28,000 (excluding the Bodyguard) by 1962.⁴⁵

In view of the growing threat from Somalia, the size of the army was raised to 30,902 in late 1963. The skirmish between the 3rd Division and guerrillas (trained and armed by Somalia) in the Ogadén in August and December 1963 was a prelude to Somalia's full scale attack. Somalia's audacious attack on Ethiopian positions in February 1964 was, however, quickly beaten off.⁴⁶

In spite of the easy victory over Somalia, the Ethiopian government did not feel complacent. The continuation of Somalia's armament programme, the intensification of the armed resistance in Eritrea in the second half of the 1960s, the hostile stance of the Sudanese government and the growing Arab support to the Eritrean insurgents pushed the Ethiopian government to seriously review its defence requirement. In response to that, in 1966, a five-year plan (1968-1972) was worked out to expand the army. According to the plan, the army (including the Bodyguard) would be raised to 46,531 by 1972. The Ethiopian military officials reasoned that the army should by far surpass the combined forces of Somalia and Sudan as a precautionary measure to repulse any future simultaneous aggression from the two hostile neighbours. By 1966, the Ethiopian army had reached 38,000 whereas the ground forces of Somalia and Sudan were estimated at 16,000 and 13,000 respectively.⁴⁷ According to a study made in February 1966, Somalia's army had achieved supremacy in anti-tank artillery and superiority in armoured

weapons. The study thus recommended that an infantry brigade, two tank companies, a field artillery with 105mm guns and an engineering battalion should reinforce the 3rd Division.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the continuous expansion of the army was becoming a heavy drain on the country's economy. Probably aware of this problem, the government decided to introduce compulsory military service. Accordingly, legal experts were assigned to draft a proclamation on the envisaged military service. In addition, a team of five army officers left for Israel, Iran and Turkey in July 1968 to study the experiences of those countries in the implementation of compulsory military service programme. Upon its return from the study tour, the team suggested a six-month basic military training to be followed by a two-year compulsory service. The team also emphatically noted that the national military service would be "less expensive" than maintaining a large regular army and would enable the government to keep a large reserve force that could be organized into "development corps."⁴⁹

After being examined by military officials, the study was submitted first to the Council of Ministers and then to Parliament in 1970. Although it was decided to begin conscription by 1971,⁵⁰ the government failed to implement it probably due to the diminishing American military assistance. While the government was working out plans for the compulsory military service, the Americans made it clear that they were shipping the last military equipment that included 18 tanks and 4 helicopters. More alarmingly, they suggested that in order to reduce the army to a manageable size, seven combat battalions and headquarters of three brigades and of a division should be dismantled. By then, 27 battalions were engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Eritrea and the Ogadén. The worst was yet to come. The flow of Soviet weapons to Somalia following the rise of Siad Barre in 1969 had tremendously increased due to the latter's socialist rhetoric. According to intelligence sources, the Somali troops had already familiarized themselves with the latest Soviet weapons, notably the T-54 and T-55 tanks.⁵¹ A study also indicated that the Ethiopian armoured units had already been "outnumbered in quantity, outperformed in quality and out-maneuvered in mobility" by that of Somalia.⁵² The study, therefore, came up with the following recommendations: the replacement of obsolete weapons (now in the hands of the infantry) by new equipment, the creation of a mechanized unit in the Ogadén, the

establishment of two airborne battalions, the modernization of the artillery units and the enhancement of the Intelligence Department's capacity and capability.⁵³

Ironically, however, when Ethiopia was in need of increased military assistance, the U.S government decided to scale down its military aid and phase out the Qañaw station. By 1973, Ethiopia was no longer a priority area for the Americans. While the emperor was desperately looking for new allies he was removed from power in 1974 by the armed forces.⁵⁴

1.2. Training and Equipment

The training of the first army unit along modern lines was started by Russian émigré officers in 1919. Between 1929 and 1935, the Belgian military mission carried out a more thorough military training. Within half a decade, the training programme run by the Belgian officers was well off the ground comprising of instructions in the use of heavy machineguns, anti-aircraft weapons and field artillery. The organization and expansion of the Imperial Bodyguard into infantry, cavalry and artillery units necessitated the training of Ethiopian officers who would be in command of those army units. To that end, General Eric Virgin, a Swedish military adviser, was entrusted with the planning and realization of a military academy. Based on the recommendation of General Virgin, a team of Swedish officers headed by Captain Viking Tamm arrived at the end of 1934 and established the Holäta Military Academy. According to Virgin's recommendation, out of the 16-month training four months would be allotted for basic courses and the rest to specialized training in such areas as artillery, infantry, communications or military engineering. Soon after its foundation, the military academy began receiving students, mainly from Täfäri Mäkonnen and Menilek II Schools.⁵⁵

Despite the interruption of their training by the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935/36, the cadets fought with gallantry against the Italians and continued the resistance under the Black Lion Organization.⁵⁶

While Ethiopia was still under Italian occupation, the British opened a military training centre at Soba camp, in Khartoum, with the intention of producing commanders of guerrilla units in

preparation for the war of liberation in Ethiopia against the Italians. The Ethiopian cadets who had been living in the Sudan as exiles joined the training programme at Soba. Some of the cadets who were to have outstanding careers in the armed forces after 1941 included Abiy Abbäbä, Aman Mikael Andom, Käbbädä Gäbré, Mängestu Neway and Şegé Dibu.⁵⁷

Following the successful completion of the war against the Italians, the Ethiopian government officially asked the British to train and equip the new army. One of the upshots of the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement signed in 1942 was the coming of the British Military Mission to Ethiopia (BMME). The BMME soon began to run a wide range of training programmes embracing infantry battalions, cavalry, artillery and armored car regiments, as well as engineering, signal and medical corps. The training offered to the infantry battalions included weapon training and mounted infantry courses. While the weapon-training course was compulsory to all troops of the army, the training in mounted infantry was given to selected infantrymen. Mounted infantrymen were also required to take courses in animal management lasting two months. Enlisted muleteers were also trained.

The training offered to the artillery included firing practice and the result was reportedly excellent. Troops of the Armored Car Regiment were also trained in foot drill and the handling of light and heavy machineguns as well as in car driving and maintenance. In addition to the basic military training, specialized courses were given to engineering, signal and medical corps.⁵⁸

The BMME was also expected to produce officers for the various units of the army. Accordingly, the Holäta Military Academy was reopened in 1941 by a Swedish mission. But it soon came to be staffed by British officers and NCOs. Initially students who had attended primary schools were admitted. Later, NCOs who had served in the army for some time were allowed to join the academy and, upon completion of an abbreviated course, they were made lieutenants.⁵⁹ The training at Holäta included rifle and machinegun handling, map reading, military tactics, sanitation and first aid. The training was also supported by practice in rifle and machinegun firing and bayonet fighting. Successful cadets were carefully selected for a two-year course similar to the Royal Military College of the British army. By the end of 1942, the number

of Ethiopian officers serving in the army had reached 148. The BMME officials were satisfied with the conduct and efficiency of Ethiopian officers.⁶⁰

When it comes to the question of equipping the Ethiopian army, the British showed their proverbial cunning. They sold weapons (captured from the Italians during the war of liberation) to the Ethiopian army at exorbitant prices. The Ethiopian government was, therefore, forced to limit its purchases to small arms. For instance, in the beginning of 1944, the Ethiopian government rejected the British offer of Sten guns and ammunition on the ground that the deal amounted to daylight robbery.⁶¹ When the Ethiopian government approached the United States for arms, the British began to pull the strings. There was much anxiety among British circles when the American officials authorized the supply of field and machineguns to Ethiopia. That consignment became the curtain raiser for future American military assistance to Ethiopia.⁶²

Again in August 1944, the British Foreign Office came to learn that the emperor had requested the American government for military supplies "sufficient to equip 45,000 men." Although the American officials were willing to supply arms only for 5,000 troops, the British tried by hook or by crook to stop the consignment of those arms. In the eyes of the British authorities, more arms in the hands of the Ethiopian army would pose a "potential danger to neighbouring British territories." When the British failed to dissuade the Americans, they came to conclude with self-assurance that the American military supplies were "too small to constitute any real danger."⁶³

In September 1947, the BMME, on behalf of the Ethiopian government, submitted to the War Office a demand for the sale of 10,000 rifles to the Ethiopian army. This time the sale of those rifles was soon approved simply because the British government had discovered that it had 290,000 tons of surplus weapons "of an obsolescent nature" in Egypt. Even to dump those obsolete rifles in Ethiopia, the British War Office made it clear that Ethiopia could only purchase those weapons on a pre-payment basis.⁶⁴

With regard to this issue, a letter labeled "Top Secret" from the British Legation in Addis Ababa sent to Foreign Office in September 1947 partly reads:

The Ethiopian Government were anxious to obtain equipment for the Army and Police... but that cash payment really was difficult for them since there was practically nothing in the till. ... I was inclined to swallow the usual hard-up story. ... I am bound to admit, however that when the Swedish Charge d' Affaires told me that the Ethiopian Government had paid about £ 77,000 spot cash for 16 second hand Swedish B-17 SAAB light bombers, I began to wonder whether we would be justified in giving special and preferential treatment to the Ethiopian government. They leave their army and police practically in rags and starve them of essential equipment and then like ... children go and indulge ... an expensive and useless toy.

If the Ethiopians can pay £ 77,000 down on the nail for some airplanes which they cannot fly, ... they can have no complaint if *we insist on a good fat deposit before we make available for them equipment which they can use and ought to buy.*⁶⁵ (emphasis added).

The emperor seems to have been dissatisfied with some of the BMME's activities on the back stage right from the beginning. One source of anxiety was the fact that he could not give orders to the BMME officers. Equally disturbing for the emperor was the reluctance of British officers to accompany Ethiopian army units in military operations. Added to that, at times, there were conflicts between Ethiopian officials and British officers mainly due to the "intransigent attitude" of the latter. As a result of all these inconveniences, the emperor demanded in the middle of 1943 the withdrawal of the BMME. The emperor's request came as a bombshell, presumably confounding the British officials.⁶⁶

But after the British were involved in the suppression of the Woyané rebellion in the fall of 1943, the emperor asked the BMME to assume an additional responsibility: the training of the Territorial Army.⁶⁷

Even then, the Ethiopian government was dissatisfied with the British policy of keeping the arms in the hands of the army to a minimum. In an attempt to find an alternative source of military assistance, the government turned to the United States. The 1953 Ethio-American Mutual Defence Agreement was therefore an outgrowth of Ethiopia's quest for a new arms supplier. The agreement provided that the American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) would train and equip a total of 18,000 troops of the Ethiopian army.⁶⁸ By 1954, American equipment destined for the Ethiopian army began to arrive. A year after the signing of the Mutual Defence

Agreement, Ethiopia received small arms, field artillery and military vehicles worth \$3,800,000.⁶⁹

Table 1.1 Weapons Possessed by the Army (September, 1958)

Unit	Type and country of origin	Quantity	
Infantry	a. Rifles- British Czech, Italian and American	NA	
	b. Carbines (American)	500	
	c. Machine guns	- Italian Light MGs	150
		- Italian Heavy MGs	40
		- American light MGs	300
d. Mortars	- Czech 83mm	32	
	- American 81mm	100	
	- American 60mm	300	
e. Wireless	- British WS No.22 - American PRC-6 - American PRC-10 - American NGRC-9	40 5 sets per company 6 sets per Battalion 5 sets per Brigade	
Armour	a. Light tanks (Czech)(old) M-24 tanks (American (new))	20 5	
	b. Armoured cars - American M-8 and M-20	28	
Artillery	a. Field guns -105mm- American - 75mm American	36 54	
	b. Anti- Tank -37 mm (old)	12	
	c. Heavy mortars -120mm- Czech -4.2mm- American	12 108	

Source: FO371/131270 Armed Forces of Ethiopia, Sept., 1958, pp.16-17.

NB. After 1953, the old Italian, British and Czech rifles were distributed to the police force.

The expansion of the army necessitated the opening of another military academy. The government did not want, however, to leave such responsibility to the Americans. During his official visit to India in 1956, the emperor asked the Indian government for a military mission which would be in charge of a new military academy. As a result, the Indian military mission arrived in 1957 to establish and run the Harär Military Academy, which eventually turned out to be a prestigious officer training institution. The mission prepared 22 books to cover the whole military curriculum in a three year period. Named after the emperor, the academy began to enroll

cadets who had completed their secondary education. The first 40 cadets began their training in May 1958. The three-year course included training in weapons, military tactics, intelligence and security, field engineering, military law, map reading, military history and military geography as well as a wide range of academic subjects. Upon completion of training, cadets were expected to start their career as lieutenants. Three successive Indian military missions ran the academy for a decade before handing over the training and administration to Ethiopian officers. Although the academy had no American staff, it received weapons, wireless equipment and vehicles from MAAG.⁷⁰

Despite the fact that the training of the army was still being carried out by the MAAG, American officials at the Pentagon held up the shipment of arms to Ethiopia in the second half of the 1950s. They stressed that Ethiopia had neither the problem of internal security nor the threat of foreign aggression, and hence no need for expanding the armed forces. They also hinted that the armed forces were eating up the country's meager resources. But that was not at all convincing to Ethiopian officials. The imminence of Somalia's independence forced the government to entreat the American authorities to resume the supply of arms. Initially the Americans brushed off Ethiopia's plea for arms.⁷¹

Cognizant of the Americans' reluctance to Ethiopia's exigent request for weapons, in 1959, the government appeared to be determined to cast its net wide in search of new suppliers of arms. In the same year, therefore, the emperor turned to the Soviet Union, probably to put pressure on American officials. Meanwhile, the Americans got wind of the promise given to Ethiopia by the Soviets with regard to the supply of weapons. At first, Ethiopia's action was viewed as an attempt to blackmail the west and force Americans to accept Ethiopian demands. But it was later discovered that the Soviets had in fact made offers to Ethiopia. The Americans forestalled the whole project by sending a high level delegation from the Pentagon to Ethiopia. The delegation was supposed to re-evaluate Ethiopia's needs for American weapons. Even before the arrival of the delegation, American officials had already decided, "to accede, to the Emperor's demands in order to keep the Russians out."

Despite the American attempt to keep the Soviets at bay, the latter made their appearance in the Horn of Africa by taking Somalia under their wing some years after its independence. The Soviet

presence in the Horn seems to have enhanced American commitment to Ethiopia at least for some time. MAAG thus agreed to train and arm the 4th Division.⁷²

Still in late 1961, however, the Minister of Defence, Märe'd Mängäsha complained to Br. General John Tolson of the U.S Army about the "inadequate supply of tanks" and light helicopters. Another unpleasant development that occurred in 1963 forced American officials to review the whole military aid package. Intelligence sources warned that the Soviets had agreed to supply Somalia with weapons worth \$80 million, sufficient to arm 20,000 troops. That was likely to upset the military balance in the Horn. In response to this Soviet-Somali accord, the Americans resumed the shipment of armoured personnel carriers (APC), tanks, automatic rifles, flamethrowers, ammunition for heavy weapons as well as tents and dry rations.⁷³

Ethiopia's worst fears were realized when Somalia made its unprovoked attack on Ethiopian border patrols in early 1964. Ethiopian forces came out victorious from the encounter. Victory over Somalia did not, however, bring about relief to Ethiopia. Some of the heavy weapons captured from Somalia were either of superior caliber or not yet possessed by the Ethiopian army.⁷⁴ To make matters worse, American military experts who assessed the army's overall capability in 1964 reported that there was a frustrating weakness in the chain of command and in logistics. Other studies also indicated similar weaknesses in the army's mobility and firepower.⁷⁵ Again in 1966, intelligence reports reconfirmed that Somalia still had overwhelming superiority in heavy weaponry. The imperial government continued to be haunted by such worrying reports and studies right up to the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.⁷⁶

1.3. Operations

Between 1941 and 1974, the army was involved in the suppression of local rebellions, counter-insurgency operations, repulsion of aggression as well as international peace keeping missions.

The first engagement that put the army's training to the test was the operation against the last remnants of Italian resistance in Gondär which was not broken until November 10, 1941. The Italians had entrenched themselves at the strategic passes of Welkefit and Qulquwal Bär (located

north and south of Gondär respectively) in an attempt to hold back the liberation forces.⁷⁷ In that operation, the 2nd Battalion of the newly organized army, despite its rather inadequate training, launched an attack on enemy positions, which the British officers described with admiration as the “most successful.” What makes that operation exceptional is the fact that the 2nd Battalion had made an arduous march (covering more than 400 kilometers from Däbrä Marqos to Gondär) before its engagement. At the same time, a company of the 1st Battalion showed “great courage and good discipline” when attacked by a band of about 500–600 “bandits” at Qobbo, northern Wollo. Similarly, in late 1941 and early 1942, other battalions successfully dealt with “banditry” in various parts of the country.⁷⁸

The courage and discipline of the army demonstrated in those operations might have prompted General Platt (one of the British commanders during the war of liberation) to propose in late 1942 the involvement of 2,500 Ethiopian troops in overseas operations. Since World War II was still raging on, the British War Office quickly approved the proposal. After getting the emperor’s consent, the War Office decided to send 2,500 Ethiopian troops to the Middle East. Although the British officials were highly embarrassed when two British newspapers disclosed the issue, they went on with the project until it was abandoned altogether in response to the emperor’s request for the withdrawal of the BMME.⁷⁹

The involvement of British officers and pilots in quelling the peasant rebellion in Tegray seems to have sustained the BMME’s association with the army. The 1943 operation against the peasants was preceded by punitive campaigns between January and July 1942 involving the regular troops and the Territorial Army. As the situation worsened, *Ras* Abbäbä Arägay, the then War Minister, led a full-scale operation concluded with the defeat of the rebels and the subsequent capture of Mäqälé in October 1943. The operation proved that the army had become a reliable force but the territorial troops lacked training and discipline.⁸⁰

For the next two decades, the army was not involved in any major operation within the country. But, the Imperial Bodyguard, the emperor’s favourite force, took part in peace-keeping missions in Korea. Driven by the realization that Ethiopia had been a helpless victim of aggression through the failure of collective security, the emperor came to play his own part in international

peace-keeping efforts in the early 1950s and 1960s. Following the invasion of South Korea by the Communist North in June 1950, Ethiopia sent three battalions in succession to Korea between 1951 and 1954. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Qañaw Battalions were put under the command of Lt. Colonels Täshomä Ergtäu, Asfaw Andargé, and Woldä Yohannes Sheta, respectively.⁸¹ These were followed by two other battalions sent after the ceasefire. What makes the Ethiopian contribution exceptional is the fact that the Qañaw troops “never lost an inch of territory which they had occupied. Never did they retreat from enemy’s attacks.”⁸² Nor did they lose a single fighter as prisoner of war.

During the Congo crisis (1960), too, Ethiopia sent the Ṭäqell Brigade to the Congo to join the UN force there. Named after the emperor’s horse name, the Ṭäqell Brigade consisted of four battalions with a total of 2,494 troops.⁸³ Unlike the Korean mission, the responsibility of Ethiopian troops in the Congo was less demanding. The UN force itself was given no definite missions. As a result, there was little or no opportunity for Ethiopian troops to demonstrate the fighting abilities they had exhibited during the Korean war.⁸⁴

After the independence of Somalia in 1960 and the beginning of the Eritrean insurgency in the following year, the Ethiopian government was left with almost no force that could be spared for foreign peace-keeping missions. The relatively peaceful period of the 1950s gave way to the troubled years of the 1960s. Following its independence, Somalia decided to go to war in order to realize its irredentist claims over the Ogadén. With Soviet backing, Somalia trained armed and deployed insurgents into the Ogadén before and after the 1964 border war. Then, in early February 1964, the Somali army attacked Ethiopian police units stationed at Togochalé, Inäguha (located north-east and south-east of Jijiga respectively), Däbägoryalé (north-east of Awaré), Férfér (southern tip of Harärgé), Yät and Dollo (both located along the Balé southern border). It was on the Togochalé front that Somalia concentrated most of its forces. As a result, an airborne company, an infantry battalion, an artillery battery (with 105 mm guns), and a mechanized platoon (with M-24 tanks) were soon sent to Togochalé by Ethiopia to reinforce the police. With close aerial support from the air force, these units began a swift counter-offensive and drove off the invaders fairly quickly. The Somali forces in the southern Ogadén were also simultaneously

beaten. Somalia was forced to accept a ceasefire and the Cairo Declaration passed by the Organization of African Union (OAU) in July 1964. The Declaration required all member states to respect existing boundaries.⁸⁵

Believing that Somalia would sooner or later launch another attack, the Ethiopian military officials prepared in late 1964 a plan named "Operation *Mäbräq*" (lightning). Kept in absolute secrecy, the plan underlined the importance of destroying Somali forces and capturing northern Somalia, around Hargesa, if the Somali government tried to make another attack. Two years later, additional operations called "Operation Wall" and "Operation Bunker" were prepared. Both plans outlined the strategies of defending the Ogadén in the event of future aggression from Somalia.⁸⁶ Although it continued to train and arm insurgents who operated in the Ogadén, Somalia did not dare to get involved in a full-scale war with Ethiopia until 1977.⁸⁷

While the 3rd Division was exercising vigilance in the Ogadén, the 2nd Division was carrying out counter-insurgency operations in Eritrea. Although the ELF began its armed resistance in 1961, its fighters in the field were too small to engage the regular troops for some time. It was only in 1964 that the government began to deploy the army. In March 1964, for instance, the Minister of Defence ordered the commander of the Ground Forces to deploy the army in Eritrea to nip the insurgency in the bud.⁸⁸

Despite some noticeable successes, the early counter-insurgency operation as a whole was characterized by indecisiveness, inefficiency and inconsistency. The troops sent out to hunt down the guerrillas were usually poorly equipped and too small to carry out a meaningful operation.⁸⁹ In addition, they were left to their own devices, "walking barefoot and looking more like a volunteer army rather than a regular force."⁹⁰ Given such self-defeating acts, one may wonder whether the government was really committed to effectively dealing with the insurgency in Eritrea. There could be no better proof of the deplorable living conditions of the government troops than a "Top Secret" letter sent to Lt. General Märe'd Mängäsha (Minister of Defence) by Lt. General Käbbädä Gäbré (Chief -of- Staff) in March 1964. The harrowing letter in short reveals that since the daily ration allowance allotted to soldiers in Eritrea was only 20 cents per head, they were forced to consume stale bread baked by themselves⁹¹ (see Appendix- I).

Likewise, the paramilitary police (who were quite often used as rapid deployment force to reinforce the army) faced similar problems especially, shortage of rations and absence of medical facilities. Even though they shared common problems and carried out coordinated operations, the army and police commanders were at loggerheads with each other.⁹²

In February 1965, during his visit to Eritrea, the emperor was briefed about the main problems of counter-insurgency in that province. It was also suggested to him that the only way to stamp out the insurgency was to train and deploy a special anti-guerrilla commando force. But, no immediate measure was taken to that effect until it was too late.⁹³

Until 1966, up to three battalions and a company were involved in counter-insurgency operations. By the beginning of 1967, however, due to the intensification of guerrilla activities, the 2nd Division was forced to deploy all its units. As the guerrillas began to operate in the highlands of Eritrea and inflict considerable damage, mainly through ambushes, the government carried out a series of punitive campaigns against them. Between February and March 1967, various units of the 2nd Division took part in a campaign named "Operation *Weqaw*" (thrash). The campaign was divided into three phases: Operations *Weqaw* I, II, and III. The overall objective of the campaign was to hunt down guerrillas and punish their supporters, mainly in the western lowlands of Eritrea. The punitive operation was attended by the devastation of property that belonged to the guerrillas and their supporters. As horror-stricken people fled, their villages were set on fire and even their domestic animals were killed. At the end of *Weqaw* Operation II, for instance, the casualty on the guerrillas' side included about 500 head of cattle and 1,800 camels and goats.⁹⁴

The campaign was followed by two other operations called "Operation *Mänter*" (weed out) and "Operation *Näbälbal*" (flame). Whereas Operation *Mänter* was conducted in June 1967, to track down the guerrillas around Meşewa, Operation *Näbälbal* took place in June/July 1967 with the intention of driving out the insurgents from Hamasén, Akalä Guzay and Särayä. The operations were preceded by a general amnesty to all guerrillas who wanted to submit to the government. The government dropped leaflets, and announced the amnesty by megaphones from helicopters and even sent out local dignitaries to persuade the guerrillas to submit. Nevertheless, only a

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handful of insurgents reacted positively to the amnesty. Upon the expiry of the deadline that had been set, the government resumed its operations.⁹⁵

In the meantime other units of the regular force and the Territorial Army were deployed in Balé and Gojjam in the second half of the 1960s. Although the Balé uprising flared up in 1963, it was after 1966 that the government stepped up its military operation until the rebellion was finally crushed in 1970. In Gojjam, too, the peasant uprising was suppressed in February 1969, a year after its outbreak.⁹⁶

Whereas the rebels in Balé and Gojjam were beaten, the Eritrean guerrillas continued to swell their ranks and enjoy external support from the Arab world as well as the Communist Bloc. The indiscriminate punitive campaigns only fanned the flames of the insurgency.⁹⁷ It was this problem that baffled government officials like Asratä Kassa, the then governor of Eritrea. For Asratä, it was hard to explain the reason why the government had failed to wipe out the guerrillas and cut off their supplies. That prompted him to ask an Israeli senior officer to plan an operation, that would enable the government to deal effectively with the Eritrean insurgency. The study submitted by the Israeli officer in February 1969 underlined the importance of alienating the guerrillas from the local population by persuasion rather than coercion; closing the border and patrolling the Red Sea coast to dry up the supplies of the guerrillas; bringing peasant hamlets together for security reasons and then carrying out protracted and persistent counter-insurgency operations.⁹⁸

Again in 1972, the new chief of MAAG, Br. General John Collins, submitted his own recommendations to the Minister of Defence. His study suggested the deployment of highly mobile units to cut off arms supplies to the guerrillas and restrict their movement by effectively using aerial and naval reconnaissance as well as land surveillance through patrols and checkpoints. In the meantime, he rejected an earlier study by MAAG experts, who had proposed the use of infra-red rays of light from helicopters to detect guerrillas at night and wipe them out through a nocturnal operation, fearing that it may be a costly undertaking.⁹⁹

At the height of the counter-insurgency operation in the early 1970s, the emperor resorted to diplomatic maneuvers. In 1971, he persuaded the Chinese government to suspend arms shipment to Eritrean guerrillas in return for Ethiopian recognition of the People's Republic of China. That was followed in 1972 by an understanding with the Sudanese president, who agreed to deny Eritrean guerrillas any support in exchange for Ethiopia's pledge to suspend assistance to southern Sudanese rebels.¹⁰⁰

During those diplomatic ploys, the government launched a series of counter-insurgency operations in Eritrea. Between April 1971 and January 1973, the army carried out no less than ten military operations. The major ones were named Operations Adwa (carried out in May, 1971), '*Asamenäw*' (convince him) (June, 1971), '*Qäsqes*' (agitate) (December, 1971), '*Qonter*' (grip) (April, 1972), '*Gebaw*' (plunge) (July, 1972) and '*Dämses*' (annihilate) (January, 1973).¹⁰¹

In 1974, the army that had been waging counter-insurgency operations for more than a decade turned against the government itself and that led to the demise of the imperial regime.

CHAPTER TWO

RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT 1977-1991

Between 1974 and 1991, the army grew from about 46,000 to nearly half a million. Since the number of young people who had voluntarily enlisted into the army was far lower than the required quota, the government quite often resorted to forceful conscription. In the mean time, new training centres were set up to accommodate the ever growing number of recruits. In the late 1980's, the overall accommodation capacity of the training centres was raised to 100,000 recruits.¹

The enormous expansion of the army was to be accompanied by a constant flow of arms. Once the government successfully replaced the United States with the Soviet Union in 1977 as the major supplier of weapons, it did not face shortage of arms until the late 1980's. But as the Cold War era came to a close, the massive flow of arms was squeezed to a trickle by the new Soviet leaders and the Därg had to look for new suppliers of weaponry. The acquisition of arms from new suppliers did not, however, help the Därg in turning the table against the northern insurgents. The fall of Afabét into EPLF hands in 1988 was followed by the loss of successive battles that led to the total collapse of the army in 1991.²

2.1. Recruitment/Conscription and Training

A year after its seizure of power, the Därg faced armed opposition in nine of the fourteen provinces. In the northernmost province, the two guerrilla groups, the EPLF and ELF renewed their insurgency in January 1975 in and around Asmära. In Tegräy, the Tegräy People's Liberation Front (TPLF), founded in 1975, took up arms against the new military government. Likewise, the Afar Liberation Front (ALF), which had emerged in the same year, began to ambush trucks along the Assäb-Addis Abäba road. In north-western Gondär, the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), formed in early 1975, began armed resistance and took control of two frontier towns: Humära, and Mätämma. In South Gondär, a former *awraja* secretary named Admasu Bälay rallied the peasants of the region behind him and took control of Däbrä Tabor.

Similarly, feudal lords and former officials of the imperial government raised the standard of rebellion against the Därg in Gojjam, Wollo and northern Shäwa soon after the March 1975 rural land proclamation. Later in the year, Somali guerrillas, armed by the Mogadishu government, began to operate in Harärgé, Balé and Sidamo.³

Confronted with these enormous challenges, the new military leaders decided to organize a well-trained and highly effective anti-guerrilla force named Nábälbal (flame). To that effect, the necessary budget was allocated, the recruitment criteria were set, the training program was outlined and the commanders were appointed. Meanwhile, the Därg managed to persuade the Israelis to train and equip the new force. According to the selection criteria, the recruits had to be: bachelors aged between 22 and 30, physically strong, spirited and capable of speaking the national language, Amharic. In addition, they were expected to have a strong feeling of nationalism and identification with the broad masses and be able to keep the secrets of their unit.⁴ Most of the recruits were drawn from the 2nd Division based in Eritrea. They were organized into ten battalions, each with a manpower of 400 men. Officers, carefully handpicked from the airborne unit, were assigned as commanders of those 10 battalions. Likewise, NCOs were given positions from the squad to the platoon level. The whole Nábälbal force was put under the leadership of Colonel (later Major General) Alämayähu Dästa and Colonel (later Major General) Asrat Berru, who were appointed as commander and deputy commander.⁵

Once commanders were assigned and recruits organized into battalions, Israeli officers began the training in counter-insurgency operation towards the end of 1975. Commanders and recruits were trained separately. The 4,000 recruits grouped into ten battalions were sent to four training centres: three battalions to Awash Arba; three to Däbrä Zäyet; two to Feché, and the remaining two, to Sänqälé, near Ambo. The eight month training aimed at producing a highly mobile anti-guerrilla force that could carry out counter-insurgency operation with small arms. The recruits were given intensive training in the use of small arms (mainly automatic assault rifles, hand grenades, machineguns, light mortars and anti-tank guns) during both offensive and defensive operations. The main tactics taught were mounting surprise attacks, ambushing guerrillas in various ways, infiltrating deep into guerrilla territory and kidnapping insurgents, searching for guerrilla fighters in villages and forests, carrying out urban operation and frisking people at checkpoints. The recruits were also trained to carry out seaborne and heliborne operation, travel

long distance on foot and survive for an extended time in deserts and forests. To get the best results, seventy percent of the training was practical and the remaining thirty percent devoted to theoretical instruction.⁶

Having gone through such a rigorous training, the Nābālbāl troops were awarded their certificates in July 1976, by Māngestu H. Maryam. The ten Nābālbāl battalions that completed training were given consecutive identification numbers from 201-210. With the exception of the 201st Battalion which was deployed to Diré Dawa, the rest ended up in Eritrea.⁷

As a result of the escalation of the insurgency in Eritrea and the growing threat from Somalia, the government recruited and trained the second batch of 10 battalions (211- 220) in late 1976. Just after completing their training, the 216th and 219th battalions were deployed in Harārgé, and the other eight battalions were sent to Eritrea.⁸

In 1977, the Nābālbāl troops deployed in both Eritrea and Harārgé entered the heat of battle. As expected, their rigorous training in counter-insurgency operation paid off. Those rushed to Diré Dawa, along with the militia, saved the town from falling into Somali hands. Similarly, their fellow troops in Eritrea fought bitterly to keep the besieged towns in government hands.⁹

The Nābālbāl force was not the only unit organized during the early revolutionary years. Once Ethiopian intelligence sources discovered Somalia's preparation to wage a full scale war against Ethiopia, the Dārg decided to raise a militia force as quickly as possible. In early 1977, the Dārg, therefore, issued a hasty recruitment programme. The peasant associations created in 1975 following the land proclamation now proved crucially important in recruiting peasants. Each peasant association was instructed to recruit as many peasants as possible to attain the national total of 300,000 men.¹⁰

Throughout the centuries, Ethiopian peasants had been effectively mobilized for the recurrent civil wars and in defence of the country against external aggression. But the situation in 1977 was so hectic that peasant associations began conscripting peasants without doing sufficient mobilization. In his memoirs, the long time commander of the famed Sānteq Mechanized Brigade, Brigadier General Kasayé Chāmāda, for instance, recalls a tragic conscription incident: "While a peasant was putting his harvested and thrashed grain into a sack, peasant

association leaders arrived and told him to get ready. Since he had no time to take it home, he left behind his grain with his small child. Sadly, that same peasant died in a certain battle."¹¹ Conversely, there were peasants who dutifully responded to the national call to arms and made themselves readily available for recruitment. For them, the revolution which had already made them owners of land, was worth defending from external aggression.¹²

The number of peasants hastily conscripted was less than half of the original target. For the first round of training, 70,500 men were recruited from all over the country. They were organized into 30 militia brigades and camped at a place called Segä Méda, renamed Taṭäq ("get armed"). Segä Méda, a sleepy grazing field near Addis Ababa was transformed into a busy training center. Thousands of tents were gathered from the *eders* (self-help associations) of Addis Abäba and pitched to shelter the recruits. Providing food for the large number of recruits was difficult and was marked by meal time stampedes.¹³

Despite serious accommodation difficulties, the Därg somehow managed to start off the training by bringing Cuban instructors and Ethiopian interpreters. Since the military situation in Eritrea and the Ogadén was absolutely critical, extended training was out of the question. The Cuban instructors were thus asked to employ a crash programme of basic military training for a period of three months. The first few weeks were devoted to drilling exercises. The Cuban drilling instructions (that required recruits to goose step in Communist army styles) were so popular at the time that young boys (myself included) used to imitate them in their playground. The training mainly focused on weapon familiarization, the employment of offensive and defensive tactics as well as political indoctrination.¹⁴

By the end of the third month, thirty militia brigades with a total manpower of 70,500 men completed their training and paraded through the Addis Abäba Revolution Square (now Mäsqäl Square) on June 25, 1977 (Säné 18, 1969 E.C). Most of them were soon deployed in the Ogadén while the rest were sent to the northern front.¹⁵

Recruitment for the second round of militia training began in September 1977. This time the target was to train 52,000 men.¹⁶ Within just a year, the government trained 61 militia brigades with a total manpower of 143,350 men, almost half of the original target.¹⁷

Although the government rushed most of the first batch of the militia units to the Ogadén, Somali forces continued to overrun Ethiopian defences. The fall of Jijiga town into Somali hands in September 1977 and the Somali assault on Diré Dawa and Harär moved the Därg to decide that an effective army unit should be quickly raised so as to beat off the invaders within a short time. Accordingly, young people were hastily recruited from all over the country to organize three paracommando brigades. The recruits were to be unmarried young men aged 18-25 with height of 165 centimeters and above. With respect to educational background, they were required to be six graders and above.¹⁸

The training of the 1st, 2nd and the 3rd paracommando brigades began in August 1977 at three centres: Lägädadi (near Addis Abäba), Awash Arba and Awasa. Originally, the training programme was designed for a year. Nevertheless, as the Somali forces reached the outskirts of Harär on November 23, 1977 (Hedar 14, 1970 E.C), in a bold thrust to take the town, all the paracommando brigades were rushed to Harär. Although their training did not yet go beyond weapon familiarization and target practices, they saved Harär from falling into Somali hands by beating off the invaders.¹⁹

The paracommando brigades stayed in the same front until the defeat of Somalia in March 1978, before being transferred to Eritrea. They took part in the 1978/79 counter-offensive against the Eritrean insurgents. Although the army regained most of Eritrea within a relatively short time, it failed to storm Naqfa, the last stronghold of the insurgents, in July 1979. At this point, the government turned to the Soviets for advice and equipment. In response, the Soviet military advisers are said to have advised Mängestu that his government should organize mountain infantry rangers specially trained in mountain warfare in order to carry out a successful counter-insurgency operation and to capture Naqfa. To the government's delight, the Soviets agreed to settle the bill for training and equipping four mountain infantry divisions.²⁰

As part of the preparation, Mängestu instructed the Ministry of Defence to set up a team to design an effective training programme, study ways of getting the required manpower and open new training centres²¹. The Ministry of Defence, however, found it quite difficult to train four mountain infantry divisions at the time owing to recruitment and accommodation problems. It was, thus, decided to recruit and train the first two divisions and later continue with the other two. The recruitment targeted mainly high school students. The minimum requirements in terms

of height and weight were 165 centimeters and 50 kilograms, respectively. Besides, recruits had to be single, aged 18-25 and had to complete primary education.²²

Recruitment was conducted smoothly on a voluntary basis throughout the country. The recruits were soon gathered at Taṭāq and organized into two divisions named the 18th and the 19th Mountain Infantry Divisions (MIDs) each with four brigades. While the 35th, 36th, 37th and the 38th brigades belonged to the 18th MID, the 39th, 40th, 41st and 42nd brigades were put under the 19th MID.²³

Training began in November 1979. The first four months were devoted to basic training including weapon familiarization and target practice. At the end of the fourth month, all the recruits were moved to Hurso, near Diré Dawa, for specialized training in mountain warfare. There, the recruits were trained in various offensive and defensive tactics with strong emphasis on practical application. The training at Hurso lasted for six months. The mountain rangers completed the ten month intensive training in August 1980.²⁴

Days after the end of their training, the 18th and the 19th MIDs were deployed in Tegray and the Ogadén respectively. Probably because of their voluntary recruitment and effective training, the mountain infantrymen were highly motivated and very eager to get involved in actual combat. One of them who served in the 19th MID recalls: "Nobody thought [the possibility] of being killed by the enemy. The mood and morale were such that the young soldiers forget [the fact] that the enemy also had training and was armed with deadly weapons."²⁵

On its part, the government was also eager to see the result of its special training programme. No sooner had the 19th MID arrived in the Ogadén than the Eastern Command launched a campaign known as the "Lash Operation." Divided into four stages, the operation aimed at putting an end to guerrilla activities in the Ogadén by driving out insurgents from all Ethiopian territory. During the first stage, Ethiopian troops swept through the frontier areas between the Ethio-Djibouti border to Enägoha and set up defence lines along the boundary with Somalia. In the second stage of the operation, various army units hunted down guerrillas by moving from the highlands of Harärgé all the way down to Dägähabur. By the time the third stage of the operation was launched, most of the guerrillas were on the run and the army met little or no resistance around Wardér, Qäbri Dähar and Godé. The final stage was carried out between November 25 and

December 5, 1980 (Hedar 16 - 26, 1973 E.C). The army finally succeeded in marching as far as the international boundary and controlling Gäladin, Mustahil, Férfér, Boh, Burkur, Dägob and Shelabo. During the Lash Operation, the 19th MID proved its effectiveness and reliability.²⁶

Likewise, the 18th MID deployed to Sheré carried out a successful counter-insurgency operation under the leadership of its able commander, Lt. Colonel (later Major General) Märdasa Lélisa. The operation began in late August 1980 and continued until early 1981. Once the division opened up the Gondär-Enda Sellasé road, it based itself in Sheré and deployed its two brigades (the 35th and the 37th) to TPLF base areas. Between February 13 and 23, 1981 (Yäkatit 6 - 16, 1973 E.C) the two brigades swept through the heart of TPLF base areas, particularly Sheraro, Dädäbit, Aşärga, Addi Da'ero, and captured the training camp, the arms depot, the medical centre and the prison of TPLF at Sur. That was another proof of the indispensability of rigorous training.²⁷

Satisfied with the successful operation carried out by the 18th and the 19th MIDs, the government began to implement a programme named "Project 73." The project aimed at recruiting and training two other MIDs: the 21st and the 22nd. By the beginning of 1981, recruitment was underway. Both divisions could not, however, start training simultaneously for the number of recruits who were to be put under the 22nd MID fell short. While recruitment continued for the 22nd MID, the four brigades of the 21st MID (the 44th, 45th, 46th and 47th) began training in early April 1981 at Taṭäq. Once the target number was achieved, the 22nd MID, made up of the 48th, 49th, 50th and 51st brigades, commenced training in the beginning of June 1981. While the two MIDs were being trained, the preparation for the huge Red Star Operation was in full swing. Due to the urgency of the military situation, the 21st and the 22nd MIDs could not go through the intensive 10 month training as their predecessors had done a year earlier. The government, therefore, shortened the training time to six months: four months of basic training followed by two months of joint military exercise.²⁸

The brevity of the training period was soon evident in the poor performance of the 21st and the 22nd MIDs during the Red Star Operation. The two divisions were rushed into the heat of battle without an earlier experience with less challenging operations. To the complete dismay of the government, the 21st MID deployed on the Kärkäbät front succumbed within days as a result of

the EPLF counter-offensive and critical shortage of water. Mängestu's claim that the disaster on the Kärkäbät front led to the failure of the whole Operation Red Star is corroborated by Brigadier General Wubätu Şäggayé, the commander of the Nadäw Command and Major General Märdasa Lélisa, commander of the 18th MID.²⁹ The collapse of the army on the Kärkäbät front enabled the EPLF to transfer its fighters from that front to Naqfa and to halt the advance of the 3rd and the 17th Divisions that had managed to come close to taking the last stronghold of the insurgents.³⁰

A year earlier, before the failure of the Red Star Operation, the government had decided to organize a new airborne unit as the country's strategic force. In 1976/77, as a result of the mutiny that occurred at Däbrä Zäyet and Asmära, the Därg had disbanded the airborne brigade and dispersed the paratroopers to various army units.³¹ But the escalation of the war in Eritrea forced the Därg to organize and train airborne troops along new lines. As usual, the Soviets were asked for advice. They suggested that the recruits should either be sent to the Soviet Union or the entire training equipment and the training staff should be brought from the USSR. They also insisted that the instruction materials brought from Israel and the American made parachutes stored at Däbrä Zäyet should be burned down and replaced by Soviet equipment. The cost of training calculated by the Soviet advisers was so staggering that the government decided to conduct it locally with available materials. Colonel (later Brigadier General) Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam (who led a courageous airborne operation in 1976 to rescue the besieged infantrymen at Naqfa) was instructed to do everything possible to train the airborne unit.³²

Recruitment began in early July 1981. According to the selection criteria set, recruits were required to be eight graders or above, with ages of 18-23 and their height 160 centimeters and above. Hospitals throughout the country were ordered to carefully screen the recruits through various examinations. Recruits had, for instance, to be free from abnormal spinal curvatures such as scoliosis (lateral curvature of the spinal column), kyphosis (curvature of the rib-bearing thoracic spine) and lordosis (curvature of the neck and lower back). In addition, any symptom of hemorrhoids, varicose, venereal diseases, and leprosy as well as sight and hearing defects could render a recruit unfit.³³

Recruits who passed all those examinations formed the 5th Airborne Brigade and were taken to Däbrä Zäyet and Awasa for training. Since the training and lodging facilities at Däbrä Zäyet

could only accommodate a battalion, training was to be conducted on a shift basis. Those recruits who completed their parachute exercises at Däbrä Zäyet were taken to Awasa for additional instruction and those who underwent some basic training at Awasa were brought to Däbrä Zäyet. The training programme had three components: basic infantry, commando training and parachute exercise. The recruits completed their training after 18 months in March 1983. They then successfully hunted down guerrillas in Balé and the Afar lowlands along the Addis Ababa-Assäb road before being deployed in Eritrea. The brigade soon proved itself to be one of the most motivated and distinguished army units.³⁴

Encouraged by the effectiveness of the airborne troops, the government decided to raise the brigade to a division level by training three more brigades. But the government found it difficult to get enough recruits for the three brigades. It solved the problem by recruiting those who could read and write from the people's militia gathered for training at Taṭäq. Once the recruits formed the 6th, the 7th and the 8th brigades, they were given airborne training for a year at Däbrä Zäyet and Asmära. With the completion of the training, the 102nd Airborne Division was born in August 1985 and was stationed in Eritrea as a strategic force.³⁵

Despite the organization and deployment of various army units, the war in northern Ethiopia continued to escalate. On the other hand, the army had been suffering from frustrating manpower depletion since 1977. As a possible way out, the government had been entertaining the idea of a national military service as early as 1979. In his letter to the Ministry of Defence sent in August 1979, Mängestu had, for instance, raised the necessity of designing training programme for the future recruits of the National Military Service (NMS)³⁶(see appendix- II).

The Därg did not need to make a thorough study on the introduction and implementation of the NMS. It only had to put into effect a study conducted and approved by the Ethiopian parliament in 1970 (see Chapter one). Having reactivated the 1970 study, the government thus issued the NMS proclamation in May 1983. In line with the proposal outlined in the old study, the proclamation required all citizens aged 18 -50 to go through a six month training to be followed by an active service for two years.³⁷ In order to implement the NMS, the government formed two parallel bodies: the Military Commissariat (MC) under the Ministry of Interior and the National Military Service and Civil Defence Department (NMSCDD) under the Ministry of Defence.

While the MC was put in charge of all recruitment activities, the NMSCDD was responsible for training and deploying national servicemen.³⁸

The government then embarked on the construction of four new training centres at Ṭollay (in Kāfa), Däddésa (Wälläga), Mäslo (Balé), and Ber Shäläqo (Gojjam). These centres were respectively named from Taṭäq 2 -Taṭäq 5, the original militia training centre of Taṭäq being number one. Although the total accommodation capacity of the five training centres was 100,000 men, the government could never achieve that target owing to shortfalls in recruitment.³⁹ Once the training centres became ready, the government carried out the first round recruitment between March 24 and April 12, 1984 (Mägabit 15 - Miyaziya 4, 1976 E.C). Then training took place in all the five centres, between April and September 1984. Out of the planned 50,012 recruits, 43,766 national servicemen successfully completed their training and entered active service for the next two years.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, training centres began to send alarming reports right from the beginning. As early as May 1984, a total of 3,185 draftees were reported to have deserted their training centres. Out of these, 385 conscripts were arrested and sent back to their respective training centres. By the time they were brought back to the training camps, they had already lost their uniforms and missed a portion of the instruction. The NMSCDD had to issue them new uniforms and arrange crash training programmes.⁴¹ Despite such problems, the government continued to draft young men for the second round of the NMS. The second round conscription took place between December 25, 1985, and January 9, 1985 (Tahsas 16 - Ter 1, 1978 E.C). Training was then given to 38,949 national servicemen in the five training centres. The second round national servicemen remained in active service between June 1985 and July 1987.⁴²

As the government resorted to forceful conscription, it faced growing opposition from the public. Since open protest was impossible, the public responded negatively to conscription in various ways: "Those who could afford it dispatched their offspring to safe havens abroad, albeit sometimes at a tender age. Those who could not sought hiding places for their children until the wave passed."⁴³ At times, opposition from parents and conscripts took dramatic forms. A certain mother, for instance, is said to have laid flat on the road to prevent a bus from taking her son to a training camp. Draftees are reported to have died while jumping from vehicles in an attempt to

escape. Still others trekked for weeks to cross the border into Kenya and the Sudan and a few are said to have been devoured by wild animals.⁴⁴ In spite of such unequivocal opposition from the public, the government went on with its conscription programme. Whether the 1984 census was primarily motivated by the NMS has to be investigated. At any rate, it helped the government to fix a quota of recruits for each administrative region. In early 1986, the government tried to draft one percent of each administrative region's population in order to raise 30,000 conscripts for the third round NMS.

Table 2.1: Quota of Conscription (1986)

No	Administrative Region	Planned Quota	Modified Quota	Reserve
1.	Addis Abäba	1,400	2,000	400
2.	Arsi	1,200	1,500	350
3.	Assäb	100	100	20
4.	Balé	900	1,000	200
5.	Eritrea	2,500	3,000	600
6.	Gamu Gofa	1,100	500	100
7.	Gojjam	2,200	3,000	600
8.	Gondär	2,200	3,000	600
9.	Harärgé	3,300	2,000	400
10.	Illubabor	900	500	100
11.	Käfa	1,700	2,000	400
12.	Shäwa	5,300	6,000	1,200
13.	Sidamo	3,000	2,000	400
14.	Tegray	2,300	3,000	600
15.	Wälläga	2,100	1,000	200
16.	Wollo	2,800	3,000	600
	Total	33,000	33,600	6,770

Source: MOND, Administration 137, *Ya 30,000 Melmeloch ya ya Keflä Hagäru Kota* (Each Administrative Region's Quota for 30,000 Recruits), 1978 E.C. p.1.

However, the government could train 28,363 conscripts for the third round NMS to be followed a year later by the training of 38,250 draftees for the fourth round.⁴⁵

With respect to the training package, the NMSCDD prepared a comprehensive schedule for six months. Below is a table showing a training schedule prepared for the third round national servicemen:

Table 2.2: NMS Training Schedule for Six Months (1986).

No	Type of Training	Allotted time in hours		
		Day time	Night time	Total
1.	Political indoctrination	100	30	130
2.	Military security	16	-	16
3.	Development work	40	-	40
4.	General military education	267	18	285
5.	Weapon familiarization and target practice	259	74	339
6.	Military tactics	211	106	317
7.	Tactical combat practice	165	90	255
8.	Out of camp practice	28	24	52
9.	Examination	24	-	24
10.	Commander's time of briefing	12	-	12
11.	Preparation time	16	-	16
12.	Public holidays	16	-	16
Total		1,154	342	1,496

Source: MOND, Operations 773, *La Sostäna Zur Seltäna Yatäzägajä Ya Temhert Program* (A Training Programme Prepared for the Third Round NMS), pp. 1-2.

Although the training programme was painstakingly prepared, conscripts were usually indifferent to it. That was mainly because of their belief that they would not stay in the army and did not want to take the training seriously. Instead, they eagerly waited for the time of their demobilization.⁴⁶

In accordance with the NMS proclamation, the first and second round national servicemen were demobilized in October 1986 and July 1987, respectively, and allowed to return to civilian life after 30 months of training and active service. But they were still liable to join the army during times of national emergency. Following the fall of Afabét into EPLF hands, the government called up the first and second round NMS reservists.⁴⁷

The implementation of the NMS did not interrupt the training of regular units. Since 1975, the government had been conducting two different types of training programmes. One of these aimed at boosting the numerical superiority of the army; and the training period for this objective was as short as three months. The other one focused on quality and produced famed units like the Nābālbāl, the paracommando, the mountain infantry and the airborne troops. Again in 1987, the government was determined to produce an intensively trained and highly motivated force named the 103rd Commando Division. The division was planned to include 10,000 troops and it was to be headquartered in Baher Dar. Colonel Gétahun W. Giorgis was appointed as commander of the commando division and he selected able officers as his staff.⁴⁸

The training programme had two parts: a six month basic infantry training to be followed by a one year commando training. Once recruitment was over, training began on January 13, 1987, at the Harār Military Academy. Having completed the basic military training, the recruits were moved to Hurso, Wondo Ṭīqa (near Awasa) and Baher Dar for commando training.⁴⁹

The training of the commando division was not, however, smooth. According to a staff officer in the 103rd Commando Division, senior officers who later staged the 1989 abortive coup were allegedly sabotaging behind the scene to demoralize the recruits. They, for instance, withheld the delivery of rations, medical supplies, uniforms, and training materials. He further claims that not only did they deploy the commandos to Tegray in March 1988 by suspending the training but also dispersed some of them to Eritrea.⁵⁰

This claim is corroborated by several retired officers. These informants concur that those senior officers who led the 1989 attempted coup were making a number of intrigues to weaken eminent army units. The 103rd Commando Division was, thus a victim of such sabotage. On the surface, interrupting training programmes and rushing recruits to battles seems a natural response during emergency situations. But when viewed from another angle, it may be regarded as a deliberate measure to incapacitate troops who could have been best fighters if allowed to complete their training. At any rate, the 103rd Commando Division suffered heavy casualty in February 1989 at the Battle of Sheré.⁵¹

Some six months before the Sheré disaster, the government once again began to recruit young men to train Special Commando Brigades (SCBs). The programme was known as "Spartakiad-81." While 81 indicates the Ethiopian year of 1981 when the SCBs were organized, the name Spartakiad (Sparta for short) was borrowed from the Soviets.⁵² Though not frequently used, the SCBs were given an Ethiopian name, Qeltuf ("swift" in Ge'ez). According to the project document, the Sparta force was the first of its kind in the country: the complexity of the training to be mastered, the weapons to be equipped with, and the operations to be carried out were thought to be quite different from previous undertakings.⁵³

The government was ambitious: the training programme was designed in such a way that one Sparta commando could wipe out 100 insurgents with guns and 10-12 guerrillas by simply throwing special daggers.⁵⁴ The criteria set required recruits to be between the ages of 18 and 23, grade 10 complete and a member of the youth association. It was also highly preferred if recruits had earlier airborne training, great interest in sports and proficiency in other nationality languages in addition to their own.⁵⁵

Once 7,830 young men were recruited for the first three Sparta brigades, training began in November 1988 at Taṭāq-II (Ṭollay) by North Korean instructors code named "Comrades 012."

Training included practicing various combat tactics, the use of silent weapons, swimming, boat sailing, jumping from a tower, descending from helicopters as well as evasion and survival tactics.⁵⁶

Table 2.3: Special Commando (Sparta) Training Programme (1986).

No	Type of Training	Allotted time in hours		
		Day time	Night time	Total
1.	Political indoctrination	100	-	100
2.	Military tactics	240	160	400
3.	Target practice	170	40	310
4.	General military education	267	18	285
5.	Physical exercise and self defence	300	-	300
6.	Engineering practices	36	4	40
7.	Map reading	30	10	40
8.	Contingency	130	-	130
Total		1,106	214	1,320

Source: MOND, Administration 5820, *Selä Spartakiad Selšana Yäqäräbä Eqed* (A Plan Submitted about Spartakiad Training), ND, pp. 1-2.

While the first three Sparta brigades (identified as 1/81/1, 1/81/2 and 1/81/3 to indicate the units of the first batch trained in the year 1981 E.C), were still being trained at Töllay, the second batch started training at Däddéssa in June 1989. Though it usually failed to achieve targets, the government planned to raise the total number of the second batch to 9,000. Among these, the Däddéssa, Mäslo and Ber Shäläqo training centres were expected to receive, 4,000, 3,000, and 2,000 recruits respectively. But the government could only train 6,300 Sparta commandos of the second batch and they were named 2/81/1, 2/81/2 and 2/81/3.⁵⁷

In a matter of two years, the government trained five batches of 15 Sparta brigades with a total manpower of 31,295 men. Among these, two brigades were merged with the 102nd Airborne Division; another brigade was dispersed and incorporated into other army units that faced serious manpower depletion. Of the remaining 12 brigades, eight were sent to Eritrea and four were put

under the Third Revolutionary Army (TRA). As a matter of fact, with the exception of 3/82/1, the Sparta brigades were thrown into battles before completing their 10 month training.⁵⁸

Despite the deployment of the Sparta brigades to various units, the government continued to lose battles. As the insurgents launched offensives in South Gondär and South Wollo in October, 1989, the government decided to draft a huge number of people to the regular army. In a letter dated October 20, 1989 (Tekemt 10, 1982 E.C), the president ordered Lt. General Addis Tädla, the new chief of staff to recruit 100,000 men for the regular army, build new training centres, continue the Sparta training at Däddésa, organize two new airborne divisions with a total manpower of 20,000 men and make instructors and materials available for training.⁵⁹

After weeks of recruitment, the government managed to draft 70,333 men, out of whom 6,436 recruits were later discharged as unfit. The remaining 63,897 conscripts started training at six training centres in early 1991. The six centres were Töllay (8,811 recruits), Däddésa (11,815), Mäslo (13,823), Ber Shäläqo (20,259), Belatté (15,147) and Milbana (a place located between Yabélo and Mégga along the Addis Ababa-Moyalé road) (478).⁶⁰

With respect to the two new airborne divisions, Mängestu is said to have asked the North Koreans for assistance but the latter declined to foot the bill. Then, the Israelis were approached. They, too, were reluctant to provide assistance to a sinking ship. As a last resort, Mängestu instructed Br. General Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam to train the planned two airborne divisions at Belatté. Named the 204th and 205th Airborne Divisions, the recruits were given training for a few months before being thrown to the Ambo front in the last days of the military government. In the meantime, the government deployed three other hastily trained Sparta brigades (identified as 6/83/1, 6/83/2 and 6/83/3) with a total manpower of 6,692 commandos to Jimma, Ambo and Fincha fronts. That raised the total number of Sparta commandos trained in six batches to 37,987.⁶¹

Side by side with the regular infantry and specialized training units at the private level, the government was also producing NCOs and officers. The military government inherited the Holäta and the Harär military academies from the imperial regime. After 1977, the Därg eliminated the prestigious status that the Harär Military Academy had been enjoying and put the two officer training schools on an equal footing.⁶² Both institutions admitted voluntarily

recruited high school graduates and trained them for 12 months in military science. Since the existing colleges and universities admitted only a very small portion of the high school leavers, the Därg had no problem of attracting young men into the officer training centres. In addition to the common courses on military science, the two academies offered specialized courses for the infantry, armoured, artillery, engineering and signal officers. Upon completion of their training, the trainees were commissioned as second lieutenants.⁶³

However, the accommodation capacity of the two academies was so limited that the government could not produce officers at a faster rate. As a result, the army had been suffering from a critical shortage of officers. In September 1985, for instance, there was a shortfall of 18,000 officers. The shortage of officers was so critical that the government decided to recruit those who performed well in their three month training as national servicemen, give an entrance examination and train them as platoon commanders at Hurso for six months. By so doing, the government planned to produce 3,000 platoon commanders per year. Even then, the shortage of officers could not be solved within a short time.⁶⁴

The other method of combating the problem was to recruit from among the militia and regular army those who had good record of serving as junior commanders at the squad or platoon level and train them as officers at Harär, Holäta and Hurso. But this recruitment and training process was not without problems. Those who came from the army and had long experience as infantrymen were taught the ABC of military science with those who came from high schools who had no experience at all. The former were, therefore, taught what they had already known and for them it was a waste of time. To make matters worse, during emergency situations, they were sent back to their units and appointed as battalion or brigade commanders without taking specialized courses in military leadership.⁶⁵

Infantrymen who were sent for officer training were recruited from various army units on a quota basis. In April 1990, for instance, the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA) based in Eritrea was ordered to recruit 2,000 NCOs to be trained at Holäta as brigade commanders. Commanders above the brigade level were sent to the Soviet Union for training.⁶⁶

The Harär, Holäta and Hurso schools were meant for the training of NCOs and junior officers. In 1985, the government established the Armed Forces Staff Academy at Bélla in Addis Abäba for

senior officers. There, advanced military science courses were offered to colonels and generals for 12 months. In April 1986, the government redesigned the curriculum of the staff academy with the help of Soviet military advisers. Instead of a one year training period, the academy was to give postgraduate courses on local, continental and global strategy, geopolitics, and defence management, and senior officers would be given a one month intensive training focusing on joint strategic military leadership. That was soon put into effect and senior officers took turns in short term training at the Bélla Staff Academy.⁶⁷

2.2. Equipment

Since 1953 the Ethiopian army had been heavily dependent on American weaponry. The Ethio-American defence agreement signed in 1953 was supposed to last 25 years. Although the strategic importance of the Qañäw station had already started to decline since the early 1970s, the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 did not bring about immediate reverses in Ethio-American relations. Despite its socialist rhetoric, the Därg seems to have realized that it would be unwise to stop the flow of American weapons by severing its relations with Washington. Two years later, however, Ethio-American relations began to get sore. In November 1976, the U.S Congress made it clear that Ethiopia was no longer entitled to receive American military assistance because of the Därg's gross human rights violation. As a follow up to that decision, on April 22, 1977 (Miyaziya 14, 1969 E.C), the new Carter administration told the Ethiopian government that it would reduce the number of MAAG staff by half and shut down the Qañäw station altogether in September, eight months before the expiry of the 25 year defence agreement. That announcement precipitated retaliatory measures. Within 24 hours, the Därg took its own preemptive actions. Accordingly, it announced the abrogation of the 1953 defence agreement and the closure of not only the Qañäw station but also all offices of MAAG, the U.S Information Service (USIS), the consulate general in Asmära and the Naval Medical Research Centre. A week later, outraged by the Därg's action, Washington cancelled a total of \$16 million

(which had been earmarked for credit and military aid) and stopped the shipment of weapons worth \$100 million.⁶⁸

According to a former Därg official, the U.S government "refused to deliver even the armaments [Ethiopia] had paid for earlier." Though both governments were to blame for the abrupt end of the Ethio-American military ties, the same official laments: "it seemed foolhardy to burn our American bridges behind us without knowing the road ahead."⁶⁹

Having severed its relations with Washington, the Därg began to look for another reliable arms supplier. The Därg appeared to have believed that only the Soviet Union could replace the United States as a major supplier of weapons. Although the first military aid agreement was signed between Ethiopia and the USSR as early as December 4, 1976, the Soviets were not yet ready to fulfill their pledge for several reasons. Firstly, though the Därg was denouncing American imperialism now and then, Ethio-American relations were still warm until the coming of Jimmy Carter to the White House in early 1977. Secondly, in the eyes of the Soviets, there were pro-American officials within the Därg and they were not certain about the future course of the Ethiopian revolution. Finally, the Soviets were heavily involved in training and equipping Somalia's armed forces and they were not enthusiastic about doing business with their partner's enemy, Ethiopia.⁷⁰

But the events that took place in early 1977 seem to have forced the Soviets to reconsider their policy towards Ethiopia. The emergence of Mängestu as head of the military government following the February 3 palace shootout, the abrogation of the Ethio-American defecene agreement, the closure of the Qañäw station and the MAAG office were welcomed by the Soviets. As a result, the second military aid agreement was signed between Mängestu and the Soviets in May 1977. By that agreement, the Kremlin officials promised to deliver weapons to Ethiopia.⁷¹

Until the arrival of Soviet weapons in significant amount, the Därg was looking for other arms suppliers so as to repulse the imminent Somali invasion. Ethiopian delegations visited Peking (now Beijing), Pyong Yang and Tel Aviv. The Chinese did supply Ethiopia with a sizable quantity of small arms. However, they were not willing to deliver heavy weapons. Similarly, the North Koreans shipped the first consignment of small arms. But they made the second

consignment conditional: it could be delivered only if the Ethiopian government closed down the South Korean embassy in Addis Ababa. The Därg flatly rejected the precondition and no more arms were shipped for several years. The Israelis, on their part, provided Ethiopia with small arms and vital spare parts.⁷²

The small arms procured from various sources were far below what the government required to withstand the Somali aggression. When the full scale invasion finally came in July 1977, the underequipped Ethiopian army was outgunned by the Somalis and lost to the invaders extensive territory in the Ogadén and several towns, including Jijiga.⁷³ To add insult to injury, the Soviets continued to supply arms to Somalia even after its aggression against Ethiopia. On September 18, 1977 (Mäskäräm 8, 1970 E.C), Mängestu, therefore, warned the Kremlin authorities that if Moscow continued to supply weapons to Somalia, Ethiopia may consider "the idea of fresh American arms supplies." The warning worked out well. In late September, the Soviets supplied Ethiopia with a considerable number of T-55 tanks, BM rocket launchers and MiG-21 combat aircraft for the first time.⁷⁴

Even then, the Soviets could not simply walk out of Somalia. For some time, they were arming both Somalia and Ethiopia. But they came to realize that they could not ride two horses at the same time. They had to make a careful choice. After considering the Därg's dependability with regard to its commitment to socialism, Ethiopia's demographic and economic capability and its historical similarity with Russia and its distinction as a founding member and seat of the OAU, the Soviets decided to embrace Ethiopia. Conversely, they slowed down fuel and arms shipment to Somalia so as to gradually terminate all sorts of deliveries. By the end of September, 1977, the Soviets were supplying Somalia only with small arms and spare parts. Then, on October 18, 1977 (Tekemt 8, 1970 E.C), the Soviet ambassador to Ethiopia, Anatoly Ratanov, made it clear that his government "had completely stopped supplying arms to Somalia and was now providing Ethiopia with defensive weapons to protect her revolution."⁷⁵

On November 13, 1977 (Hedar 4, 1970 E.C), the Mogadishu government retaliated by expelling all Soviet and Cuban military advisers from Somalia.⁷⁶ But Siad Barre's action only infuriated the Soviets and pushed them to step up their shipment of arms to Ethiopia. For the next six weeks, starting from November 26, 1977, about 50 Soviet freight ships were reported to have

unloaded 60,000 tons of weapons at the port of Assäb. Besides, several Antonov-22 and Ilyushin-76 transport planes made 225 flights to Addis Ababa between November 1977 and February 1978, airlifting Soviet military hardware worth hundreds of millions of dollars. The Soviet consignment included 80 fighter aircraft, 600 T-54 and T-55 main battle tanks, and 300 armoured personnel carriers (APCs). The massive delivery of Soviet arms was so unprecedented that the total value of the weapons shipped within a few months reached \$1 billion, "surpassing... the total value of United States aid provided to Ethiopia between 1953 and 1977."⁷⁷

The Ethiopian army was thus fitted out with Soviet weapons by the end of 1977. The army soon began a large counter-offensive. In March 1978, the army scored a decisive victory over the Somali invaders.⁷⁸ But victory was achieved through a huge sacrifice. During the Somali onslaught and the Ethiopian counter-offensive, the army lost, among other weapons 75 American made tanks, and 85 APCs, and 58 Soviet made tanks and 22 APCs.⁷⁹

Following the end of the Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977/78, the Ethiopian government signed a treaty of cooperation and friendship with the Soviet Union that was supposed to last 20 years. For the next ten years or so, Ethiopia was heavily dependent on Soviet weaponry. The Soviet shipment of weapons reached record levels on the eve of major military campaigns. In early 1982, for instance, the Ethiopian government received a huge amount of Soviet arms for the Red Star Operation. Two years later, the Soviets supplied Ethiopia with military equipment worth several million dollars for the Bahrä Nägash Operation.⁸⁰ On his part, Mängestu admitted: "Accompanied by senior officers, I left for the Soviet Union to ask for weapons. Of course, they declined to give me all that I requested. ... Nevertheless, they gave me three-fourth of what I required. Although I needed many helicopters, they gave me only two squadrons of helicopters."⁸¹ The Soviet weaponry delivered since 1977 included all sorts of arms ranging from the common RGD-5 and F-1 hand grenades to T-62 main battle tanks and the 122 mm BM-21 40 round rocket launchers.

Though not on the same scale as the Soviets, other Communist states also supplied Ethiopia with various types of military hardware. These included the eastern bloc countries such as the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, China and North Korea. All sorts of military equipment were delivered in accordance with the

agreements signed between the Ethiopian government and the Communist states. Weapons were acquired in four different ways: free of charge, cash purchase, commercial credit and state credit purchase. Between 1974 and 1991, the Ethiopian government received \$9,420,328,651 USD worth of military equipment from all Communist states. Out of this, \$727,105,228 USD worth of weapons were obtained free of charge. While arms purchased in cash amounted to \$359,654,525 USD, the commercial credit and state credit purchase stood at \$939,375,882 and \$7,395,193,016 USD respectively.⁸²

The state credit purchase was of two kinds: 50 percent or 100 percent payable within 10 years usually with 3 percent annual interest. According to state credit purchase agreements, the Ethiopian government was required to make payments in easily convertible foreign currency to the accounts of the Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of the USSR. The agreement also obliged Ethiopia not to transfer the acquired military equipment to a third party. This was not, however, always respected. Contrary to those terms of agreement, the Ethiopian government supplied arms to the two Somali armed groups, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM) as well as the Sudanese People Liberation Army (SPLA).⁸³

Weeks or months after the signing of such agreements, the Soviet embassy in Addis Ababa would notify to the MOND, the name of the vessel, its date of arrival at the port of Assäb, the amount and type of cargo loaded. The MOND was responsible to protect such ships and unload their cargo as soon as possible so that they could return safely and quickly.⁸⁴

In addition to Soviet weapons, the government was periodically sending lists of light and heavy weapons, military vehicles, ammunition as well as explosives and air bombs to the Eastern Bloc countries so as to buy arms through a bid. Once prices were submitted to the MOND, the interest rate, the time of payment and other factors were carefully considered. For instance, the lowest unit price of a 7.62 mm AKM assault rifle submitted by Poland, GDR and China were \$115, \$118 and \$150. Similarly, the least price for a T-55 main battle tank was submitted by Czechoslovakia (\$70,000), Poland (\$107,530), and GDR (\$180,000). In both cases, the GDR was selected because of the fact that the interest rate for a commercial credit purchase was the lowest (2.5 percent), the payment could be completed within 12 years and no pre-payment was required. The lowest unit prices for a BM-21 rocket were \$890 (Yugoslavia), \$900 (Bulgaria)

and \$925 (Rumania). Here again, Bulgaria was selected because it offered a ten year payment period, a 2.5 percent interest rate and required no pre-payment.⁸⁵

Arms received free of charge, purchased in cash and on credit purchase reached gigantic proportions by the mid 1980s. Among the heavy weapons given to Ethiopia free of charge at different times, 28 T-62 tanks came from South Yemen, 100 T-55 tanks from Libya, 122 T-55 tanks from the GDR and one MI-8 combat helicopter from Cuba.⁸⁶

Table 2. 4: Small Arms and Heavy Weapons Acquired Between 1974 and 1991.

No	Type of Equipment	Quantity
1.	Pistols	42,449
2.	Personal equipment	1,701,300
3.	Light machineguns (LMGs)	30,773
4.	Heavy machineguns (HMGs)	13,402
5.	Mortars	3,619
6.	Grenades and rocket launchers	14,720
7.	Man-pulled artillery guns	548
8.	Vehicle-towed artillery guns	1,188
9.	Anti-aircraft guns	2,321
10.	Main battle tanks	1,767
11.	APCs	1,665
Total		

Source: MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Delivered since 1974, 1991, pp. 7-9.

Table 2. 5: Various Types of Ammunition Delivered to Ethiopia (1974-1991)

No	Type of Equipment	Quantity
1.	Ammunition for small arms	1,542,932,310
2.	Anti-aircraft ammunition	42,480,430
3.	Launcher ammunition	2,002,800
4.	Mortar shells	3,170,484
5.	Rockets	410,420
6.	Artillery shells	2,631,333
7.	Hand grenades	3,395,590
8.	Mines	2,068,200

Source: MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Delivered since 1974, 1991, p. 10.

With regard to small arms and personal equipment, the Soviet made AK-47, AK-74 and AKM assault rifles, the RPD and RPK-74 light machineguns, the PKM and PKS general purpose machineguns as well as the 12.7mm DSHK-38 (known by Ethiopians as “Deshqa”) and the 14.5 mm ZPU-1 (corrupted locally as “Zägäw”) heavy machineguns became the standard infantry weapons in Ethiopia. Though not as numerous as the above, there were other varieties such as the Chinese, Yugoslavian and Russian SKS carbines, PPSH-41 and PPS-43 submachine guns (both Soviet made), Type 52/57 Czech machineguns, M-49 and M-56 Yugoslavian submachine guns, and Type 67-2 general purpose Chinese machineguns in the hands of the Ethiopian army.⁸⁷

The army also possessed various Soviet combat vehicles including T-34, T-55, T-62 main battle tanks, BTR-60P, BTR-60PB, BMP-1 and BTR-152V APCs. In the late 1980s, the army received several Ch'onma-Ho combat vehicles, the North Korean version of T-62 main battle tanks.⁸⁸ The anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons and artillery guns acquired by the army included RPG-7 launchers, the 76 mm ZIS-3 towed anti-tank gun, 82 mm B-10 recoilless gun, the 60 mm, 82 mm, and 120 mm mortars, the Zu-23 and the ZSU-23-24 Shilka anti-aircraft guns, the 85 mm D-44 anti-tank field gun, the 100 mm towed anti-aircraft gun, the 122 mm D-30 field Howitzer, 9P-

151 Metis, 9P-135 M-1 Fagot, GRAD-P 9P-111 Malyutka, 9P-58 Strella, as well as the 122mm BM-21 and 240 mm BM-24 rocket launchers.⁸⁹

According to the Ethiopian order of battle, each army unit was expected to be armed with a specific number of light and heavy weapons. The tables below show the optimal arms possessed by infantry and mechanized units.

Table 2. 6: Arms Possessed by Infantry Units

No.	Type of Weapons	Infantry Company	Infantry Battalion	Infantry Brigade
1.	AK / AKM assault rifles	79	167	1,233
2.	LMGs	9	27	111
3.	RPG-7 launchers	9	27	111
4.	PKM general purpose machine guns	2	6	21
5.	Pistols	15	62	284
6.	82 mm B-10 anti-tank guns	2	3	12
7.	82mm mortar	-	4	16
8.	9P-111 anti-tank rocket launchers	-	3	12

Source: MOND, Operations 135, *Ya Egraña Brigade Aquam* (An Infantry Brigade's Structure), ND, pp. 59-60.

Table 2.7: Arms Possessed by a Mechanized Brigade

No.	Type of Weapons	Quantity
1.	AK / AKM assault rifles	2,006
2.	Signal pistols	300
3.	RPG-7 launchers	84
4.	RPK LMGs	87

5.	RP-46 HMGs	21
6.	82 mm B-10 recoilless anti-tank guns	18
7.	82 mm mortar	12
8.	27 mm 2M guns	18
9.	37 mm anti-aircraft guns	12
10.	ZU-23 towed twin anti-aircraft guns	4
11.	9P- 111 Malyutka rocket launchers	9
12.	122 mm D-30 field howitzers	12
13.	T-55 main battle tanks	22
14.	BTR-60 APCs	66
15.	BRGM-2	5
16.	BRDM-110	4
17.	Binoculars	123

Source: MOND, Administration 971, *Ya Mechanized Brigade Ya Mäsarya Aquam* (A Organization of a Mechanized Brigade's Equipment), ND, p.6.

The acquisition and distribution of weapons to various army units went on more or less smoothly until 1984. Beginning in early 1984, however, the army began to lose a considerable amount of weaponry in Eritrea. In March, 1984, the EPLF destroyed the Weqaw Command at Algéna. The arms destroyed and captured by the EPLF at Algéna were estimated at 43,565,659 Birr (21,046,212.07 USD).⁹⁰

A considerable number of light and heavy weapons had also fallen into EPLF hands when the insurgents temporarily occupied Täsänäy in January 1984 and Bäréntu in July 1985.⁹¹ But none of these setbacks could parallel the Afabét disaster of March 1988. At Afabét, the army lost among other weapons many T-55 tanks, BM-21 rocket launchers, heavy artillery guns, including 122 mm D-30 field howitzers, as well as mortars and machine guns. Besides, the EPLF captured

intact ammunition depots worth millions of dollars.⁹² In the words of Mängestu, the EPLF captured "a mountain of ammunition."⁹³

The fall of Afabét was a turning point not only in the war in Eritrea but also in Ethio-Soviet relations. During his visit to Moscow in July 1988, Mängestu was told by the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, that arms deliveries would be substantially reduced. And Mängestu was urged to peacefully resolve the war in Eritrea.⁹⁴

For the Ethiopian government, the burning issue at hand was not the beginning of peace negotiations with the insurgents. What mattered most then was the procurement of weapons and the re-equipping of the army. By the beginning of 1989, the loss of arms had reached alarming proportions. Between September 1974 and January 1989, the army had already lost 188,669 small arms, 2,744 anti-tank guns, 599 anti-aircraft guns, 760 mortars, 292 artillery pieces, 380 APCs, 443 tanks and 3,929 military vehicles on all the fronts.⁹⁵

In February 1989, the army suffered another major setback in Sheré and lost a great deal of weapons. In the wake of the Sheré disaster, the Soviets decided not only to scale down arms deliveries to Ethiopia but also to reduce the number of their military advisers.⁹⁶ That forced the Ethiopian government to start peace talks with the insurgents and to look elsewhere in order to get the much needed arms. As the army continued to lose subsequent battles, the government held peace talks with the EPLF in September 1989 in Atlanta, USA, where Jimmy Carter, the former American president, played the role of mediator. Even though, it all turned out to be fruitless, follow up negotiations with the EPLF were held in November 1989 in Nairobi and in October 1990 and February 1991 in Washington.⁹⁷

Likewise, the peace talks held with the TPLF in Rome in November and December 1989 and March 1990 bore no fruit, mainly because the insurgents "were negotiating from a position of strength while the government was doing so from a position of weakness."⁹⁸

While negotiations were taking place, the government continued to import weapons from various sources, chiefly from Israel and North Korea. Ethio-Israeli relations which had been severed in 1978, were renewed in the mid-1980s. By way of smoothening the severed relations, Mängestu was reported to have given the Israelis a green light to airlift about 10,000 Bétä Israel (Ethiopian Jews) in 1984 from the Sudan. The first airlifting of the Bétä Israel was named "Operation

Moses." In return, the Israelis are said to have sold to Ethiopia in 1985 various arms worth \$20 million. Full diplomatic relations between the two countries were restored when Israel opened its embassy in Addis Ababa in December 1989. Israel continued to give military assistance to Ethiopia right up to 1991.⁹⁹

The North Korean military assistance was much more extensive than that of the Israelis. Between 1989 and 1990, the North Koreans trained 15 special commando (Sparta) brigades (with a total manpower of 31,295 men) and equipped them with personal equipment and small arms with ammunition free of charge. In 1989, North Korea also supplied Ethiopia with 72,000 mortar shells on the basis of interest free state credit purchase.¹⁰⁰

More importantly, the North Koreans helped Ethiopia establish several armament plants. One of these was the Gafat Engineering Plant (named the Elala Gäda Project) set up at Mojo. Starting from late 1989, it was meant to produce 20,000 assault rifles of the Kalashnikov generation and 1,400 LMGs annually. A total of 122,507,163 Birr was allocated for the completion of the project.¹⁰¹ The other North Korean-supported undertaking was the Hormat Project, an ammunition plant to be established at a place called Hormat near Gudär. The plant was planned to produce on a shift basis 50,000 shells for 60 mm mortars, 160,000 shells for 82 mm mortars, 30,000 shells for 100 mm artillery guns, 50,000 shells for 122 mm field howitzers, and 20,000 shells for 130 mm artillery guns annually. The government allocated 259,200,000 Birr (125,712,391.30 USD) obtained from North Korea. The ammunition plant was expected to begin actual production in 1990.¹⁰²

North Korea was also a member of the consortium of Communist states besides the USSR, Rumania, Yugoslavia and China that agreed to help Ethiopia in setting up a gigantic industry for the production of small arms and heavy weapons along with their spare parts. The heavy industry was planned to produce 7.62 mm automatic assault rifles, 7.62 mm LMGs and HMGs, various anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, mortars, 73 mm – 130 mm artillery pieces as well as T-55 main battle tanks, BTR-60 APCs, BRDM-2 and BMP-1 armoured vehicles. Although the study of the project was scheduled to be finalized in October 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew from the consortium without giving any explanation to the Ethiopian government.¹⁰³ Apparently, the Soviet withdrawal might have been part of their policy of disengagement from supporting Ethiopia militarily.

The withdrawal of the Soviet Union did not deter North Korea from supporting Ethiopia in other projects. In 1989, the Ethiopian government signed a project agreement with North Korea to set up a plant for the production of various explosives ranging from hand grenades to anti-tank rockets. The plant was supposed to begin production in 1994.¹⁰⁴

As the government was doing its best to set up armament plants with North Korean support, the insurgents continued to win major battles. In February 1990, the army suffered two major military disasters: the fall of Meşewa into EPLF hands and the overrunning of all government defences between Mt. Guna and Baher Dar by the EPRDF forces. In terms of the loss of weaponry, the battle of Meşewa was unparalleled. In the nearly 30 year war, the Ethiopian government had never lost such a huge amount of weaponry in a single battle as it did at Meşewa. Table 2.8 is indicative of this huge loss.

Table 2. 8: Weapons captured or destroyed by the EPLF at Meşewa (February 1990)

No.	Type of Weapons	Captured/ Destroyed	Ammunition Captured/Destroyed
1.	Main battle tanks	103	-
2.	APCs	62	-
3.	Military vehicles	391	-
4.	Transport vehicles	62	-
5.	Heavy artillery guns	131	16,463 shells
6.	Medium artillery guns	26	21,081 shells
7.	MB-21 Rocket launchers	14	2,440 rockets
8.	Mortars	76	22,702
9.	Anti-tank guns	157	19,788
10.	Anti-aircraft guns	131	215,488
11.	HMGs	336	4,094,689
12.	LMGs	337	-

13.	Automatic assault rifles	9,819	11,442,618
14.	Pistols	732	22,612
15.	Binoculars	135	-
16.	Hand grenades	16,682	-

Source: MOND, Administration 1439, *Ya Huasä Derejet Woqtawi Hunéta* (Current situation of the SRA's logistics), 15/6/82 E.C, pp. 6-8.

Despite the unprecedented loss of arms at Meşewa, the army still had enormous weaponry at its disposal. In 1990, the army possessed the following heavy weapons:

Table 2. 9: Heavy weapons possessed by the army (1990).

No.	Army Unit	Manpower	Heavy weapons possessed						
			Tanks	APCs	Art. guns	Mortars	Anti-air	Anti-tank	MGs
1.	First Revolutionary Army (FRA)	28,056	176	168	206	80	355	492	468
2.	Second Revo. Army (SRA)	144,628	277	112	330	376	370	2,137	4,734
3.	Third Revo. Army (TRA)	43,018	62	7	65	107	28	410	523
4.	Fourth Revo. Army (FORA)	19,331	14	14	42	28	66	43	347
5.	603 rd Corps	31,378	80	50	58	5	75	269	252
6.	Assäb Command	15,595	69	16	28	7	26	61	90
Total		282,006	678	367	729	603	920	3,412	6,414

Source: MOND Operations 493, *Bahunu Gizé Yallä Tawagi Hayl Enna Mäsarya* (Currently existing combatants and weapons), 1982 E.C., p.1.

As the insurgents came closer to achieve total victory, the army destroyed a considerable amount of its own weaponry during chaotic retreats.¹⁰⁵ In June 1990, the 3rd Division, for instance, destroyed 13 T-55 tanks, 10 heavy artillery guns, 30 mortars and 6 anti-tank rocket launchers as well as 10 Gaz-66 and 20 Ural military vehicles just before the fall of Märañña into EPRDF hands.¹⁰⁶ During his visit to Märañña in March 2006, the researcher found the town still littered with remnants of destroyed tanks, artillery pieces and military vehicles.

In the end, the Ethiopian army, one of the heavily armed ground forces in Africa, collapsed in May 1991 as the EPLF and EPRDF forces captured Asmära and Addis Abäba respectively.

CHAPTER THREE

STRUCTURE, LOGISTICS AND COMMAND AND CONTROL 1977 - 1991

Between 1977 and 1991, the army underwent dramatic organizational changes. In terms of manpower, it had enormously expanded from four divisions in 1974 to 39 divisions (30 infantry, 5 mechanized, 3 airborne and one commando) with 497,237 men by April 1990.¹ To keep such a large army on a constant war footing posed huge logistical challenges. Although attempts were made to keep the army properly supplied, the highly centralized command structure did not leave any room for independent action on the part of commanders at various levels. That contributed to the collapse of the army.²

3. 1. Organization of the Army

The Därg inherited the American system of military organization from the imperial government. This system (from squad to army levels) as well as the army ranks (from corporal to general) remained unchanged even after the advent of the Soviets.³

The Därg maintained the four divisions organized during the imperial times. The idea of creating a new force was conceived in 1975 when the Därg began to face internal and external challenges. Accordingly, in November 1975, as indicated earlier, the military government organized a new force named Năbălbă (flame). Unlike other army formations, the Năbălbă troops were organized into battalion-sized units named *hayl* (force). The total manpower of each *hayl* was 400 men.⁴

Within a matter of 16 months, the government organized 20 Năbălbă forces all of them placed under the Därg. However, the creation of the Năbălbă force outside the ground forces made other units hostile to it. The Năbălbă troops were treated as alien forces instead of being seen as comrades in arms. The problem was so serious that the government was forced to merge the Năbălbă force with the ground forces in late 1977. Subsequently, all the Năbălbă units were reorganized into the 6th Năbălbă Division.⁵

Since the Nābālbāl troops were organized as rapid deployment forces, the Dārg used them during emergency situations. In 1977, before being deployed to Eritrea and Harārgé, the Nābālbāl troops disarmed the people of Addis Abāba in the house to house search known as *asāsa*. The operation was intended to curb the urban terrorism of the EPRP. In the process, the Nābālbāl troops seized thousands of small arms and documents from EPRP members and sympathizers.⁶

Immediately after that operation, the Nābālbāl troops were sent to Eritrea and Harārgé. Those sent to Diré Dawa along with the militia saved the town from falling into Somali hands in July and August 1977.⁷

It was in response to the same emergency situation – the Somali invasion – that the government organized six other militia divisions (i.e., the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th) in 1977. While the 7th Division was sent to Eritrea, the 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th Divisions were deployed to Harārgé. The 12th Division was also moved to the southern front.⁸

Even after the defeat of Somalia, the government continued to boost the numerical strength of the army by creating four other militia brigades: the 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th in 1978/79. All the four divisions were based in northern Ethiopia.⁹

Having stationed the 8th, 9th and 11th Divisions in the Ogadén and the 4th and the 12th Divisions in the southern front to repulse any possible Somali incursion, the government organized the other army units into seven task forces (501-507). These seven task forces were assigned to wipe out all insurgents in Gondār, Tegray and Eritrea. Accordingly, a total of 86,722 troops were gathered. Between June 8, 1978 and February 7, 1979 (Sane 1, 1970 – Ter 30, 1971 E.C), the task forces launched a highly coordinated offensive in Gondār, Tegray and Eritrea. With the exception of Naqfa, all the towns in Eritrea were brought under government control.¹⁰ However, repeated attempts to take Naqfa failed. As discussed earlier at length, the government was advised by Soviet military experts that Naqfa could only be captured by specially trained mountain rangers. The government then organized four mountain infantry divisions (the 18th, 19th, 21st and 22nd) in 1980/1981. In the meantime, the 20th Infantry Division was organized and stationed at Dägāhabur.¹¹

As part of the preparation for the Red Star Operation, the Dārg created two more infantry divisions (the 23rd and 24th) raising the number of infantry divisions to 23. Then, just a month

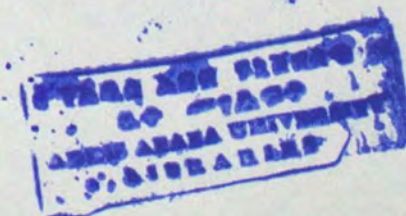
before the launching of Operation Red Star, the government reorganized the army units in northern Ethiopia into commands. As a result, five commands came into existence namely Mäbräq ("lightning"), Ma'ekälawi ("central"), Mäket ("defend"), Nadäw ("demolish"), and Weqaw ("thrash"). While the Ma'ekälawi and Mäket included two divisions each, the Mäbräq, Nadäw and Weqaw Commands were made up of three infantry divisions each.¹²

The five commands were placed under the newly created Military Operations and Planning Command (MOPC). Brought thus under the MOPC were 14 divisions (four of them mountain infantry), 15 artillery, 6 tank and 7 anti-aircraft battalions. Of the total 63 brigades, 55 were infantry, 6 mechanized and 2 paracommando brigades.¹³ Out of a total of 131,848 men placed under the five commands, only 66,749 troops took part in the actual combat during the Red Star Operation.¹⁴

Days after the launching of the operation, the Mäbräq Command was dissolved owing to the military setback on the Kärkäbät front and most of its troops were later brought under the Nadäw Command.¹⁵

Following the end of Operation Red Star in May, 1982, the country's ground forces were reorganized into two revolutionary armies and two commands. The First Revolutionary Army (FRA) was based in Harär and included five infantry divisions (the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 20th), a tank brigade, an artillery brigade, a mechanized brigade and a commando brigade. Headquartered in Asmära, the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA) was made up of 13 infantry divisions placed under the Weqaw, Nadäw, Mänṭer ("clear up"), Mäket and Sämén Me'erab (North-western) Commands. The last was based in Mäqälé. The two independent commands were the Southern Command based in Awasa and the Central Command headquartered in Addis Abäba.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the government was still organizing new army units. Thus, between 1985 and 1987, three new divisions were created: the 102nd Airborne Division and the 1st and the 2nd Mechanized Divisions. While the 1st Mechanized Division was stationed in the Ogadén, the 2nd Mechanized and the 102nd Airborne Divisions were deployed in Eritrea.¹⁷



With the formation of new units, reorganization of the army continued. Accordingly, in February 1985, the North-Western Command, which had been placed under the SRA, was, thus, divided into two independent commands: the Tegray Command based in Mäqälé and the North-Western Command headquartered in Gondär. Whereas the Tegray Command was assigned to carry out counter-insurgency operations against the TPLF, the North-Western Command had security responsibilities in Gondär and Gojjam.¹⁸ In the same year, the government created the Western Command to curb the activities of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in western Ethiopia.¹⁹ Two years later, the North-Eastern Command was organized and based in Wollo. It included the 1st and the 5th Infantry Divisions.²⁰

Six months after the separation of the North-Western Command from the SRA, the latter waged two major military campaigns known as the Red Sea and the Bahrä Nägash Operations. During Operation Red Sea, launched in August 1985, the army successfully regained Bäréntu and Täsänäy. But Operation Bahrä Nägash failed to attain its objective – the capture of Naqfa. The only achievement was the recapture of Algéna in October 1985. Following the end of the Bahrä Nägash Operation, the SRA was reorganized into five commands namely Bärged (“open forcefully”), Nadäw, Mänter, Barka and Mäket. However, due to logistical problems and fear of EPLF onslaught, the Bärged Command was withdrawn from the desolate spot, Algéna, and replaced the Barka Command based at Aqordat in early August 1986. The SRA had now four commands with 12 divisions (10 infantry, 1 airborne and 1 mechanized) and 3 other separate mechanized brigades. A year later, the Bärged Command was dissolved as a result of serious manpower depletion and the SRA was left with three commands: Mänter, Mäket and Nadäw.²¹

Within a span of five years three commands were dissolved in Eritrea, mainly because of heavy casualties. In response to the escalation of the war, the government continued to form new divisions. Accordingly, in the fall of 1987, it organized the 103rd Commando Division. By November, 1987, the manpower of the ground forces had reached 250,752 men.²²

Table 3.1: Manpower of the Ground Forces (November, 1987)

No.	Armies/Commands	Allocated Manpower	Existing Manpower	Difference
1.	Ground forces various departments	8,243	19,711	+ 11,468

	and military schools			
2.	FRA	68,063	44,174	- 23,889
3.	SRA	131,380	95,682	- 35,698
4.	Southern Command	22,157	12,756	- 9,401
5.	Central Command	6,578	4,243	- 2,335
6.	Tegray Command	31,745	26,586	- 5,159
7.	North-Western Command & 103 rd Commando Division	34,043	25,637	- 8,406
8.	Western Command	6,578	5,723	- 855
9.	North-Eastern Command	43,611	16,240	- 11,879
Total		352,398	250,752	- 101,646

Source: MOND, Administration 747, *Ya Sementu Ezoch Yäsäw Hayl* (Manpower of the Eight Commands), Hedar, 1980 E.C., P.1.

As can be observed from the table above, with the exception of non combatants who staffed the various departments of the ground forces and military schools, all the eight commands faced a substantial shortfall of troops. Among the eight commands, the FRA and the SRA faced roughly 35 and 27 percent shortfalls respectively. That was primarily because of the casualties they suffered from constant engagements with the insurgents.²³

Worse still, the SRA suffered a major blow in March 1988 - the destruction of the Nadäw Command. Shocked by this unprecedented loss, the government reorganized the army into 13 corps (601-614). In the meantime, two new armies came into existence through the amalgamation of existing commands. These were Third Revolutionary Army (TRA) and the Fourth Revolutionary Army (FORA). The North-Western, Tegray and North-Eastern Commands were respectively renamed the 603rd, 604th and 605th Corps and formed the TRA. Likewise, the Southern, Central and Western Commands were designated respectively as the 611th, 612, and 614th Corps and formed the FORA.²⁴ Among the remaining army corps, the 601st, and the 602nd were placed under the FRA and the rest (i.e., the 606th, 607th, 608th, 609th and 610th) were based in Eritrea under the SRA. In addition, the government organized the 3rd and the 4th Mechanized

Divisions and they were identified as “Project-80” Task Forces. By July 1988, therefore, the total manpower of the ground forces had reached 388,926 (see the table below).²⁵

Table 3.2: Manpower of the Ground Forces (July 1988).

No.	Armies/Commands	Allocated Manpower	Existing Manpower	Difference
1.	Ground forces various departments and military schools	8,243	49,841	+ 41,598
2.	FRA	51,861	36,635	-15,226
3.	SRA	152,077	163,192	+11,115
4.	TRA	109,388	104,938	-4,450
5.	FOR A	25,519	23,040	-2,479
6.	Project – 80 Task Forces	23,732	11,280	-12,452
	Total	370,820	388,926	+18,106

Source: MOND, Administration 747, *Ya Aratu Ezoch Yäsaw Hayl* (Manpower of the Four Commands), Hämlé, 1980 E.C., pp. 1-2.

While the number of non-combatants doing a wide range of activities in the various departments of the ground forces continued to swell, the FRA and the two mechanized divisions still faced a serious shortfall. The latter was in particular short of about 53 percent. But, following the destruction of the Nadäw Command, the government recalled the national military reservists into active service and that enabled the SRA to overcome its alarming manpower depletion.²⁶

In February 1989, the army suffered another setback in Sheré and the 604th Corps disintegrated. In the wake of the Sheré disaster, the government continued to expand the army. Thus, between 1989 and 1991, seven infantry divisions (25th - 31st), two airborne divisions (the 204th and 205th) and a mechanized division (the 5th) 18 Sparta brigades came into existence. The last two infantry divisions (the 30th and the 31st) were made up of ex-POWs who had been captured and later released by the EPLF and the EPRDF.²⁷

Despite the continuous expansion and restructuring of the army, the basic military organization from squad to division remained unchanged throughout the period under discussion. At the bottom of the army's hierarchy was *guad* (squad) which included 9-12 men. Three or four squads form a platoon known by Ethiopians as *yamäto* (literally hundred). A platoon usually includes 28-32 soldiers and it is led by a second lieutenant. The next units in the bottom-up hierarchy above the platoon are *shambäl* (company) and *shaläqa* (battalion). The Ethiopian names *shambäl* and *shaläqa* literally mean captain and major respectively, referring to the commander instead of the army unit. A company is made up of 3 - 4 platoons or about 90 - 120 troops. A battalion in turn consists of 3-4 companies with 300-400 soldiers each. Again 3 - 4 battalions form a brigade which normally consists of 2,000 – 3,000 troops. In the Ethiopian army organization, the brigade can carry out operations independently. Above the brigade is the division which consists of 8,000 – 12,000 men or 3 - 4 brigades. Though difficult to maintain, the ideal manpower is 9,836 men for an infantry division, 11,463 soldiers for a mechanized division and 11,802 paratroopers for an airborne division.²⁸

Table 3.3: Number of Officers, NCOs and Privates in Various Army Units.

Army Unit	Number of Officers	NCOs and Privates	Total
Infantry Division	972	8,864	9,836
Infantry Brigade	190	1,909	2,099
Battalion	33	393	426
Mechanized Division	1,153	10,310	11,463
Mechanized Brigade	246	2,300	2,546
Mechanized Battalion	34	438	472
Airborne Division	1,007	10,795	11,802
Airborne Brigade	199	1,487	2,486
Airborne Battalion	32	432	464
Tank Brigade	227	1,544	1,771
Tank Battalion	27	114	141
Artillery Brigade	128	1,157	1,285

122 mm Artillery Battalion	19	203	222
130 mm Artillery Battalion	22	230	252

Source: MOND, Administration 972, *Ya Tāwagi Kefloch Aquam* (Organization of Combat Units), ND, pp. 1-2.

As we go higher in the army hierarchy, the number of infantrymen declines with a proportional increase of supporting units like tank, artillery, anti-aircraft, engineering, reconnaissance, communications, and medical teams. Frequent reorganization of the army was effected above the division level. Between 1977 and 1991, divisions were put under commands, task forces, corps and armies at different times.²⁹

In principle, all these army units were to be led by the commander of the ground forces. In practice, however, the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC) chaired by Māngestu controlled all activities of the ground forces. Side by side with the commander of the ground forces were the Political Department, the Military Security and the Inspector General. The Political Department was in charge of the indoctrination of combatants with Marxism-Leninism. The Military Security would carefully watch over any form of dissent in the army. The Inspector General, on the other hand, was to evaluate the combat effectiveness of the army, investigate causes of military defeats and finally charge those responsible for disasters.³⁰

Contributing to the army's success or failure were four main departments under the commander of the ground forces. These were Operations, Training and Intelligence (OTI), Administration, Organization and Mobilization (AOM), Budget and Finance (BF) and Logistics.³¹ The OTI main department prepared plans of operation, gathered intelligence about insurgents and external enemies and looked after the training of combatants. The AOM main department, on its part, handled administrative issues, kept records of the army's manpower and supervised mobilization. While the Budget and Finance main department dealt with all financial matters of the ground forces, the Logistics department was responsible for the timely provision of supplies to all army units throughout the country.³²

Under the four main departments, there were six supporting departments namely, medical service, engineering, communications, artillery, anti-aircraft and tank and armour.³³ One of the

serious problems the army faced was the critical shortage of medical personnel. According to the 1980 organization guideline, physicians were to be assigned to army units above the brigade. In practice, however, nurses and health assistants were attached to various army units. Assigning physicians was not possible even at the division level. Physicians were only available at the armed forces hospitals in Addis Abäba, Asmära and Harär. Originally, the army was training its own nurses. But that was abandoned after 1982 owing to administrative problems. The ground forces then began to employ civilian medical personnel. Even then, the shortage of medical personnel remained chronic. By 1979/80, there were only 360 nurses and physicians in the army.³⁴

The other supporting unit consisted of the combat engineers. The combat engineers usually advanced before the infantry in order to clear minefields, construct roads and bridges, dig water wells and build military camps. They were also required to lay anti-personnel and anti-tank mines at strategic passes and around military camps to prevent the enemy from intruding under the cover of darkness and mounting a surprise attack. During times of emergency, combat engineers were, however, expected to fight as infantrymen.³⁵

While the combat engineers move before the infantry and make its advance easier, the artillery supports it from behind by bombarding enemy defences and lines of advance from a distance. The artillery units in the Ethiopian army were organized into batteries (equivalent to an infantry's company), battalions and brigades. Tank units, on the other hand, were structured into battalions and brigades. During engagements, they were expected to advance along with the infantry. Attached with the infantry were also anti-aircraft units organized into batteries and battalions.³⁶

This intricate organization could only operate smoothly if there exists constant communication. The communication unit was staffed with personnel trained not only in sending and receiving coded radio messages but also in intercepting and deciphering enemy communications.³⁷

Organized in a more or less similar pattern were other formations, mainly the mechanized, airborne, commando and special commando units. What made the mechanized formations different from other infantry units is the relatively high concentration of tanks and APCs. By 1991, there were five mechanized divisions.³⁸

Unlike the mechanized divisions, the airborne, the commando and the special commando units were light infantry formations (armed with light weapons). In theory, they were meant for special missions like demolishing targets behind enemy lines, relieving besieged infantrymen or mounting swift assaults. In practice, however, they were used as other infantry units until 1991. While the airborne and commando units were raised to division level, the special commandos (Sparta) were organized into brigades. By 1991, there were one commando and three airborne divisions and 18 Sparta brigades.³⁹

3.2. Logistics

Logistics can be defined as “the business of moving, supplying and maintaining military forces.” It is “one of the most crucial elements” which determines the outcomes of military operations. Obviously, “soldiers who run out of food, fuel or ammunition will cease to fight.”⁴⁰ The role of logistics is so crucial that it “make[s] up as much as nine-tenths of the business of war.” As one soldier puts it, “the more I see of war, the more I realize how it all depends on administration and transportation.”⁴¹ The soldier’s observation is in fact in agreement with Field Marshal Erwin Rommel’s contention on the indispensability of logistics and logisticians. Rommel rightly admits: “In fact the battle is fought and decided by the quartermasters before the shooting begins.” “The bravest men can do nothing without guns, the guns nothing without plenty of ammunition; and neither guns nor ammunition are of much use in mobile warfare,” Rommel further notes, “unless there are vehicles with sufficient petrol to haul them around.”⁴²

Despite their central contribution to the success of war, logisticians are usually overshadowed by military commanders. As one writer correctly puts it, “logisticians are a sad, embittered race of men very much in demand in war, who sink resentfully into obscurity in peace.”⁴³ There has, thus, been a tendency to ignore the role of logisticians for “logistics is a troublesome work. It is all labour and no glory.”⁴⁴

Logistics and logisticians had a similar fate in Ethiopia. In both oral and written narratives of military campaigns, there has always been a strong tendency to overemphasize the operational aspect and ignoring the logistical dimension. Reports and informants alike, for instance, tend to ignore the role of the huge logistical preparation that played a crucial role in the defeat of

Somalia in March, 1978 and the army's stunning victory in Eritrea between June 1978 and February 1979. These are just two examples. It was the Logistics Department which kept the army fed, equipped and moved around during those years of constant fighting.⁴⁵

The Logistics Main Department (LMD) was placed under the Vice Minister of Defence for Logistics and Finance, a position held by Major General Abbäbä W. Maryam between 1977 and 1991.⁴⁶

Among other things, the LMD was in charge of:

- Purchasing and distributing food to the army and keeping a reserve;
- Ensuring the existence of an adequate supply of fuel and lubricants for the army;
- Making sufficient number of vehicles available for transporting food and fuel and depots for storage;
- Acquiring various types of arms, ammunition, and explosives through purchase and aid; distribute them to the army in collaboration with the Operations Department and keep a record of weapons lost or destroyed;
- Importing communication and electronic equipment and distributing them to the army;
- Acquiring engineering equipment and distributing them to army units; supervising construction and maintenance activities;
- Coordinating surface, air and sea transport and using all available means of transport during emergency situations;
- Preparing agreements for the purchase of various equipment from other countries and following up their acquisition; and
- Acquiring spare parts for various equipment imported from different countries.⁴⁷

Placed under the LMD were six departments namely engineering, logistics, foreign aid, purchasing, military store and transport.⁴⁸ This elaborate organizational structure was not limited to the higher echelons of the MOND. All units from army down to the platoon level duplicated this structure. As a matter of rule, soldiers were provided with rations for three days along with a basic load of ammunition under operational conditions. According to the LMD, a basic load meant 120 bullets. In order to avoid logistical breakup, reserves of all the necessary supplies

were kept in the rear of each army unit. Uniforms and quarter master equipment such as water canteens, belts and field caps were given once in six months.⁴⁹

The food provided to the army was of two kinds: ready-made or canned and freshly cooked. During engagements, rations were usually distributed to troops. At times of relative peace, freshly cooked food was served.⁵⁰

The LMD had been purchasing canned food from various suppliers. While beef stew was bought from meat factories based in Addis Abäba, Asmära and Gondär, *shero wot* (cereal stew) and vegetable soup were purchased from factories named Chandris (located in Addis Ababa and Diré Dawa) and Sopral (Asmära). On its part, the Ethiopian Livestock Resources Development provided the LMD with marmalade and tomato sauce.⁵¹

Along with such canned food, soldiers were also given galettes (hard biscuits) produced by flour factories. The amount of such ready-made food supplied to soldiers was not, however, satisfactory. Higher army formations were, therefore, given bread-baking machines to enable them to distribute fresh bread to troops. The baking machine given to the TRA in 1988 could, for instance, produce 2,000 loaves of bread within just an hour. In addition, private bakeries in Asmära, Mäqälé, Gondär and Dässé were supplying fresh bread to the army on contractual basis. The price paid to private bakeries for a quintal of bread varied from 100 Birr in the late 70's and early 80's to 60 Birr in the late 80's.⁵²

The amount of bread given to each soldier was 710 grams. That was later reduced to 510 grams. On the other hand, the amount of sugar given to each soldier was raised from 50 to 150 grams.⁵³

There were times when soldiers were denied their daily rations and forced to be starved up to 48 – 72 hours. That was the fate of the infantrymen of the 15th Battalion and of the 98 airborne troops (parachuted to reinforce them) besieged at Naqfa between September 1976 and March 1977. The EPLF guerrillas that laid siege on the Naqfa garrison cut off supply routes and positioned anti-aircraft guns around Naqfa to prevent air support. As a result, the government could neither send supplies overland nor drop them by airplanes from lower altitudes. The only workable solution was to put food, medical supplies, radio batteries and ammunition in bundles and parachute them from higher altitudes. There were times when the parachuted supplies were diverted by wind to areas controlled by the guerrillas. For instance, out of 11 bundles dropped on

December 14, 1976 (Tahsas 5, 1969 E.C), nine of them were taken by the guerrillas. Similarly, on January 2, 1977 (Tahsas 24, 1969 E.C), the guerrillas managed to take six of the seven bundles dropped to the besieged troops.⁵⁴

Expectedly, fierce fighting took place when parachutes fell on no man's land. As the guerrillas repeatedly attempted to storm the garrison, the besieged troops were losing many fighters every day. There were no medical supplies to treat the wounded. On several occasions, the besieged troops ran out of food and starved for three days. Their suffering was so unbearable that they asked the government to bomb them along with the guerrillas. Finally, on March 22, 1977 (Mägabit 13, 1969 E.C), 53 infantrymen and 22 airborne troops broke through the siege and joined the army at Afabét ending the logistical nightmare.⁵⁵

The government faced similar logistical problems during the Somali invasion. Following the outbreak of the war, the Logistics Department tried hard to keep the troops supplied in the remote garrison towns of the Ogadén. It was during this time of trouble that two DC-119 planes made a risky flight at night to Awaré to supply the army with the much needed fuel and ammunition at the end of July 1977. They evacuated children and women on their return flight.⁵⁶

As the Somalis overran most of the garrison towns in the Ogadén, the government had to evacuate troops and supplies to Harär and Diré Dawa. In the meantime, the Logistics Department rushed the militia units to various fronts with all available means of transport. It was during this time of national emergency that women of Addis Ababa and other major towns did a remarkable job in preparing various types of food for the militia.⁵⁷

By the end of 1977 and early 1978, the Logistics Department had another pressing task: unloading the enormous number of weapons shipped from the Soviet Union and moving them to the various fronts. That was one of the testing times for the Logistics Department. In the final analysis, the victory over Somalia would not have been possible without the huge logistical support to the army.⁵⁸

Soon after the defeat of Somalia, a huge logistical preparation was carried out to launch a large scale counter-offensive against the northern insurgents. On May 29, 1978 (Genbot 21, 1970 E.C), the NROC set up its advance headquarters at Mäqälé. The army named the Second Revolutionary Liberation Army (SRLA), later renamed the SRA, was divided into seven task

forces with a total manpower of 86,722 combatants. Although the northern theatre was stretched from the Gondär-Humära-Täsänäy road to the Mäqälé-Asmära road and from Meşewa to Qarora, the Logistics Department successfully transported troops and supplies to various fronts. Needless to say, it was this logistical backup that enabled the army to sweep through Gondär, Tegray and Eritrea as far as the Sahel Mountains within a relatively short time.⁵⁹

Similarly, a fairly good logistical support was provided to the army during the Lash Operation carried out between August 26 and December 5, 1980 (Nähasé 20, 1972 – Hedar 26, 1973 E.C). Since the army was busy in Eritrea between 1978 and 1979, the government had to postpone the Lash Operation by two years to avoid a two front operation. That enabled the Somali army to control Féfér, Gäladin, Mustahil and Shelabo areas between 1978 and 1980.⁶⁰

The Lash Operation thus aimed at dealing a final blow to the Somali army and Somali insurgency in the Ogadén. What made Operation Lash particularly challenging was the vastness of the operational area that stretched from the Ethio-Djibouti-Somali border to the southern and eastern tips of the Ogadén.⁶¹

As troops marched through the arid lowlands of the Ogadén, water became so scarce that several soldiers died of dehydration. The Logistics Department averted a much more disastrous situation by supplying water by helicopters in October 1980.⁶² The army concluded the operation with marked success in December 1980 without facing a serious logistical difficulty.⁶³

As much as good and timely supply of provision contributed to military success, logistical breakdown hampered operations. Such a problem occurred in February, 1981 when the 18th MID swept across the main TPLF base areas. Between February 13 and 23, 1981 (Yäkatit 6 – 16, 1973 E.C), units of the 18th MID captured TPLF's training camp, medical centre and arms depot in Dädäbit, Addi Da'ero and Sur. As the troops advanced to Aşärga, they faced a critical shortage of rations, ammunition and radio batteries. As a result, they had to suspend their operation and send an urgent message to the army in Gondär asking for a swift delivery of supplies. But, Colonel (later Brigadier General) Tariku Ayné, in charge of the North-western Command, was not in his office and his whereabouts could not be traced for several hours. Hours later, a helicopter took off from Gondär, landed at Aksum for refueling and finally dropped five quintals of ammunition and some radio batteries from a height of 40 meters. Soon afterwards,

another helicopter, which had been undergoing maintenance, did not only deliver rations, ammunition and radio batteries but also evacuated wounded soldiers. The considerable delay helped the insurgents to regroup and to put up a strong resistance. By the time the mountain infantrymen resumed their offensive it was no longer possible to advance with the same pace as before.⁶⁴

A year later, the government launched the Red Star Operation. The Operation posed probably the greatest challenge to the Logistics Department. In order to closely supervise and coordinate logistical activities, the Vice Minister of Defence for Logistics and Finance and the heads of logistics departments at various levels opened offices in Asmara. They held morning and evening meetings to evaluate daily logistical activities and to make urgent decisions.⁶⁵

Logistical problems began to crop up soon after the launching of the Operation. On the Kärkäbät front, the major logistical problem was the scarcity of water. To avoid dehydration, each soldier was to carry two canteens of water. The operation on that front was thus named "Yä Hulät Kodda Zämächa" ("a campaign of two canteens"). Deployed on the same front, the 21st MID tried to advance forward. But it soon met well-informed insurgents entrenched at a strategic pass. The EPLF fighters managed not only to hold up their positions but also to mount outflanking counter-offensive. Instead of positioning a larger force around its watering point, the MID had stationed only a platoon. The insurgents found it easier to eject the small force there and capture the water well. The Division soon faced a critical shortage of water. A number of troops died from dehydration. The shortage of water was thus one of the main factors for the collapse of the Kärkäbät front which in turn contributed to the failure of the entire Red Star Operation.⁶⁶

On the Algéna front, the logistical situation was relatively better. There, the 15th and the 23rd Divisions of the Weqaw Command received various supplies by several helicopters and 100 camels.⁶⁷ As the troops captured mountains, camels could no longer be used. The other alternative was to use donkeys. The areas controlled were, however, so barren that there was no forage for the donkeys. The helicopters, on the other hand, were busy evacuating the wounded. The army had, therefore, to use human labour to transport water uphill.⁶⁸

Water was not the only problem. The shoes distributed to the Weqaw troops were found to be of low quality and unfit in size for many troops. The Command had thus to send back 2,000 shoes for replacement.⁶⁹

On the Naqfa front, too, logistical problems had a serious impact on the operation. As the 3rd Division was advancing to Naqfa on February 22/23, 1982 (Yäkatit 15/16, 1974 E.C), it ran out of rations, water and ammunition. That was soon reported to the Nadäw Command. The much needed supplies were flown by helicopter. But the foggy weather prevented the helicopter from landing or dropping supplies. Probably aware of the logistical crisis, the insurgents counter-attacked the 3rd Division and pushed it back to Tiksi.⁷⁰

The Nadäw Command had also faced shortage of artillery shells and helicopter fuel. It can thus be argued that such logistical problems contributed in one way or another to the failure of the operation.⁷¹

Following the inconclusive Red Star Operation, logistical problems continued to get worse and to greatly hamper the army's operational readiness in Eritrea. In late 1983, the army in Eritrea faced a near crisis situation in terms of logistics. In a letter written on November 24, 1983 (Hedar 14, 1976 E.C), to the Vice Minister for Logistics and Finance, Brigadier General (later Major General) Räggsa Jimma, the Commander of the Army in Eritrea expressed his frustration at the logistical crisis in the following terms:

At the moment, many of the military vehicles under the [Northern] Command are out of order due to land mines and long service. As a result, it is no longer possible to: (a) transport troops and supplies; (b) move artillery pieces and anti-aircraft guns; (c) distribute water and fuel to each front; (d) evacuate the wounded and the sick. ...Subsequently, a very serious problem has been encountered in carrying out operations. ...Out of the total number of vehicles that had been operational, 696 vehicles, 43 APCs, and 39 tanks have gone out of service. What impact would all this have on logistical support and operational readiness is not difficult to perceive (see Appendix- III).⁷²

The letter made it clear that while 354 vehicles, 19 tanks and 17 APCs were permanently disabled beyond any chance of repair; 342 vehicles, 26 APCs and 20 tanks might be maintained

with the necessary spare parts. Unless the higher officials took urgent measures, the letter warned, the army might be forced to give up the areas, regained with so much sacrifice, to the insurgents.⁷³

Not only did such problems occur in the northern theatre, they also struck the Logistics Department at the centre. Between July and November, 1984, the total amount of undelivered food stored in Addis Abäba reached 97,521 quintals. Out of these, 64,116 quintals should have been shipped to the Northern Command and 13,737 quintals to the Eastern Command. Similarly, the Logistics Department failed to transport 7,220 quintals of rations to various fronts during the same period. This was attributed to the shortage of trucks. On top of that, the department failed to buy in time 7,509 quintals of *téff*, 12,091 quintals of wheat flour, 3,980 quintals of barley flour, 7,086 quintals of macaroni, 3,908 quintals of lentils, 5,254 liters of edible oil and 950 quintals of tomato sauce for the army's consumption. These logistical problems emanated from the shortage of vehicles, space problem for storage, incompetence in storing, loading and unloading, absence of timely supervision and follow up and failure to train the staff in logistics management.⁷⁴

The most acute problem the various army units as well as the Logistics Department reported was the critical shortage of trucks. In 1984/85, the SRA, for instance, put the problem at the top of the list of difficulties it encountered.⁷⁵

One of the army formations greatly affected by the logistical problem was the Nadäw Command. While the shortage of vehicles remained a chronic problem, the Nadäw Command was allocated 3,900 Birr in February, 1985 to buy 30 donkeys for moving supplies to areas inaccessible by truck. Later in June, 1985, the Logistics Department earmarked 13,000 Birr to the SRA for the purchase of 400 pack animals that could be used to transport supplies.⁷⁶ One can imagine the huge disparity between the transportation capacity of 400 donkeys and the SRA's daily needs of various supplies which reached 400 tons by the end of the 1980s.⁷⁷

The LMD tried to solve the problem of transportation by using private trucks. The owners of private trucks were quite often instructed through the National Road Transport Corporation (NRTC) to put their trucks at the disposal of the LMD for a specific period of time. By 1986, out

of the total number of 527 trucks assigned to transport various supplies to the SRA, 430 (about 82 percent) of them belonged to private owners.⁷⁸

The heavy reliance on private trucks was not without problems. In the first place, the private truck owners were not given payments in time for the transport services they rendered. It usually took more than five months to process the payment, for it would pass from an army unit to the Ministry of Finance through the Logistics and Finance Departments and the MOND. In addition, the deployment of trucks to various fronts was rather risky. On several occasions, trucks were blown up by land mines. As a result, private owners were naturally reluctant to make their trucks readily available for the army. They could not, however, turn down orders, for their permits to operate trucks were liable to suspension by the NRTC.⁷⁹

Even then, they could create serious problems. Once they reached Asmāra, drivers would usually hide their trucks somewhere or leave them in garages up to six months under the pretext of maintenance. The drivers are even reported to have been employed part-time elsewhere. It was this serious problem which prompted Major General Rāggasa Jimma to write a letter labeled "Very Urgent," and "Top Secret" to the Chief-of-Staff, Major General Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam. Written on May 15, 1986 (Genbot, 7, 1978 E.C), the letter strongly reminded the Chief-of-Staff to implement an earlier recommendation – the replacement of private trucks by government vehicles. General Rāggasa expressed his frustration in his concluding remarks: "We have come to believe that the seriousness of the situation has not been given due attention. Owing to the failure to take urgent measures, we have reached a dangerous situation where we could not move troops on reserve or transport supplies. ... A decision that would be taken once things are out of hand is worthless" (see Appendix -IV).⁸⁰

The logistical crisis affecting the SRA continued unabated. As a result of transportation difficulties, the SRA was left with combat rations that could only last for just 24 hours in November 1986. The other problems reported included shortage of uniforms, personal tents, ration bags, water canteens, jerry cans and cooking utensils.⁸¹

While the SRA continued to suffer from almost all sorts of logistical problems, the only difficulty the FRA reported was the chronic shortage of mechanics who could maintain tanks and

artillery pieces.⁸² On its part, the North-Western Command requested for the dispatch of spare parts and mechanics so as to maintain the tanks and APCs of the 4th Mechanized Division.⁸³

The request for spare parts was not, however, peculiar to the 4th Mechanized Division. In all the army units, there was a constant demand for spare parts ranging from small arms to heavy weapons. Whenever requests for spare parts were submitted to the Soviet Union, the response was not always encouraging. It was not uncommon to have requests rejected, being notified “out of production” or even being given no response or clarification.⁸⁴

Table 3.4: Ethiopian Ground Forces Spare Parts Requirement Submitted to General Engineering Department (GED), USSR.

Year of Request	No. of Items Requested	Accepted No. of Items	Out of Production	Not Accepted	Unable to clarify	No response
1985	2,307	1,783	205	195	124	-
1986	2,075	1,511	157	327	61	19
1987	2,041	265	330	352	97	997
Total	6,423	3,559	692	874	282	1,016

Source: MOND Finance 182, Ground Forces Annual Spare Parts Requirement, 1987, P.1.

Table 3.5: Ground Forces Spare Parts Requirement Submitted to General Technical Department (GTD), USSR.

Year of Request	No. of Items Requested	Accepted No. of Items	Out of Production	Not Accepted	Unable to clarify	No response
1985	1,228	470	25	119	202	412
1986	1,884	400	16	54	48	1,365
1987	322	-	9	11	1	302
Total	3,434	870	50	184	251	2,079

Source: MOND Finance 182, Ground Forces Annual Spare Parts Requirement, 1987, p.1.

Of the total number of items submitted to GED and GTD between 1985 and 1987, only 55 and 25 percent respectively were considered for delivery.⁸⁵ Thus, because of the shortage of spare parts, a number of tanks, APCs, artillery guns and other weapons remained unrepaired for months. That tremendously affected the combat readiness and effectiveness of the army. The combat competence of the mechanized units in the Ogadén was, for instance, reported to be "dangerously low" in 1985.⁸⁶

The SRA's combat effectiveness was also very much affected by the unavailability of spare parts in sufficient amount. Although the problem was still rife, the SRA launched two major operations in 1985 in quick succession. The first one, Operation Red Sea, was carried out to regain Bäréntu, which had fallen into EPLF hands for the first time on July 6, 1985, following a 24 hour ferocious fighting. Before the launching of Operation Red Sea, in late July and early August, the Logistics Department transported, 4,834 troops from the SRA, 741 soldiers from the Southern Command, 1,295 cadets from the Hurso and Holäta military schools and 21,369 national servicemen of the second round to Asmära by air, sea and land transport. Obviously, the timely movement of troops contributed a great deal to the success of the operation.⁸⁷

The army regained Bäréntu on August 25, 1985 (Nähasé 19, 1977 E.C). In an attempt to maintain the strategic initiative, the government decided to launch the Bahrä Nägash Operation in October 1985. Since Operation Bahrä Nägash was an afterthought, the EPLF was given a breathing space of 46 days until the government worked out details of the offensive. That enabled the insurgents to recover from earlier losses and get ready for the impending government offensive. Unlike the August offensive, considerable delays in transporting troops from Meşewa to Mälka Fatuma and the shortage of transport helicopters to move paratroopers to the Algéna front contributed a lot to the undoing of Operation Bahrä Nägash.⁸⁸

In the years that followed, logistical problems continued to rock the army. The principal problem was the ever increasing number of combat and transport vehicles that became defective mainly due to the shortage of spare parts and mechanics. That was the burning issue explained to Mängestu during his visit to various army units in early 1988. Mängestu, however, believed that the whole logistical problem should not be reduced to the shortage of spare parts and mechanics. For him, the problem rather emanated from the absence of an efficient logistical management

system and the failure of the logistics personnel to carry out their duties. He emphasized that instead of dealing with the problem, people in the Logistics Department were trying to justify that the shortage of spare parts was the mother of all problems. For him, that was tantamount to treason.⁸⁹

Actually, Mängestu was right in pointing out the absence of an efficient system of management particularly in the Logistics Department. Three ad hoc committees formed some months earlier to investigate the problems of the ground forces' manpower administration, finance and transport systems proved the same thing.⁹⁰ Probably, Mängestu was quoting those findings. He then instructed the Commander of the Ground Forces to set up a committee that could identify all military vehicles and weapons which had been temporarily disabled due to the shortage of spare parts and those that could not be repaired.⁹¹

In the wake of the Afabét disaster, the SRA, for instance, reported that out of the 3,361 military vehicles at its disposal, 1,136 of them were out of order. Among these vehicles, 503 were destroyed, 222 were permanently disabled and the rest (411) could be repaired if spare parts were available. The SRA, thus asked the Logistics Department to deliver new military vehicles and weapons to replace losses. However, its request was not always satisfactorily answered. For example in 1988, in response to its request for 500 Ural-375 trucks, it received only 88 vehicles. The SRA again asked for the delivery of 150 Gaz-66 trucks in the same year. But it received only seven military vehicles. The heavy weapons and small arms delivered to the SRA were also far lower than the requested quantity.⁹²

The other army formation struck by logistical crisis was the Tegray Command. In his urgent and top secret letter to the Defence Minister, Brigadier General Addis Agellachäw, Commander of the Tegray Command, stressed the absence of artillery units, the critical shortage of anti-aircraft guns, heavy machineguns, anti-tank guns, hand grenades and ammunition as well as fuel and rations.⁹³

The TRA, which was created in April 1988, inherited some of these logistical problems, the critical one being the shortage of water canteens. That was, however, solved later when imported canteens were replaced by local plastic products. Soon after its creation, the TRA allocated 31 vehicles for the 603rd Corps, 24 for the 604th Corps and 18 for the 605th Corps. On its part, the

Ministry of Transport and Communications assigned a total of 70 N-3 trucks on a permanent basis to the TRA.⁹⁴

In spite of the efforts made to tackle the problem, SRA's logistical difficulties were far from over. Between July 1987 and June 1988, the Logistics Department arranged 794 flights and 72 sea voyages to transport 47,760 tons of food, 1,000 tons of uniforms and quartermaster equipment, 21,898,469 litres of fuel and great quantities of light and heavy weapons to the SRA. Even then, the SRA reported a shortage of military trucks, light and heavy machineguns and RPG-7 launchers.⁹⁵ Similarly, between March 19 and September 26, 1988 (Mägabit 10, 1980 – Mäskäräm 16, 1981 E.C), the Logistics Department coordinated 380 Boeing Jet and 234 Antonov-12 flights to Asmära and 62 sea voyages by commercial ships from Assäb to Meşewa to transport 80,786 troops, 206 vehicles, 124 tanks and APCs, 48 artillery guns, as well as 1,260,342 quintals of various supplies. By September 1988, the SRA was made up of 156,578 troops. In order to feed those troops, the SRA required 93,947 quintals of food per month. In addition, the SRA consumed 63,600 quintals of ammunition, 2.7 million litres of fuel, and 18,900 quintals of other supplies on a monthly basis. With regard to medical care for the wounded and the sick, only 8,000 hospital beds were available in Asmära, Meşewa and Kärän.⁹⁶

Although the Logistics Department was attempting to keep the SRA supplied, there were still serious shortages of rations (especially biscuits and canned food), sugar and tea as well as ammunition, uniforms and quartermaster materials. With respect to medical care, the SRA also reported a shortage of internists, dentists and opticians as well as stretchers, beds and pyjamas. Besides, the food provided for the wounded was so insufficient that they could not recover quickly.⁹⁷

While requests for the provision of all sorts of supplies were reaching the Logistics Department, the TRA launched a huge campaign in June 1988 known as Operation Adwa. Initially, units of the TRA performed pretty well. It was during the third phase of the operation that serious logistical problems began to crop up. At this stage, troops of the 603rd Corps were ordered to converge on Dansha from Gondär, Däbarq, Humära and Mätämma. The troops from Mätämma shambled for more than 10 days through thick forest before reaching the Angäräb River, which created another obstacle. Troops had to wait there until an engineering team arrived that helped

them in crossing the river. Once they reached Dansha, troops were ordered to march on foot to Kaza and Dājāna without the support of tanks and artillery guns. Since the operation was carried out during the rainy season, many troops died during the retreat while trying to cross rivers. Whereas some managed to reach Gondär, most of the troops retreated to Humära.⁹⁸

A more disastrous situation occurred in February 1989, when the army at Humära was ordered to evacuate the town and return to Gondär by way of Mätamma since the Humära-Gondär road had been cut off by the insurgents. The army destroyed a considerable quantity of its own property before evacuating Humära. But there were no vehicles in sufficient numbers to evacuate the troops. Thousands of troops had to walk long distances along inhospitable lowlands without enough water. Many died from dehydration. It was during this tragic evacuation that a civil servant who could not resist the suffering of his family killed his wife and children before taking his own life.⁹⁹

In the same month, the 604th Corps was destroyed at Enda Sellasé. The three man committee formed to investigate the reasons for the destruction of the army corps underlined that, among other things there had been logistical problems such as the shortage of rations, ammunition, explosives, hand grenades, radio batteries, fuel and medical supplies.¹⁰⁰ Once the TPLF severed the Asmära-Enda Sellasé and the Gondär-Enda Sellasé supply routes, the high command should have been aware that it was a strategic mistake to station a large army in Sheré.

A year later, the army suffered two more disasters: the defeat on the Guna front and the loss of Meşewa. On the Guna front, while fighting was still going on, the 603rd Corps Command destroyed its own arms depot. According to Brigadier General Haylé Mälläsä, the party secretary for South Gondär, that explosion could have destroyed the town. Fortunately, that did not happen. The explosion was so powerful (and very similar to the arms depot destruction of Bäqlo Bét in Addis Abäba that occurred in June 1991) that it brought down a helicopter.¹⁰¹ During the battle of Meşewa, too, the fall of the ammunition depots into EPLF hands subjected the army at the port to a merciless artillery bombardment. In terms of logistics, the capture of Meşewa by the EPLF was probably the greatest blow the army suffered throughout the entire war.¹⁰²

Thereafter, the army in Eritrea had only been supplied by airplanes. It was a great challenge for the LMD to supply the SRA (whose daily requirement of food, ammunition and fuel had reached 400 tons) solely by air. In the first week of June 1990, the SRA was, for instance, left with supplies that could only last for 10 days.¹⁰³ The situation was so critical that Ethiopian Airlines was forced to cancel its international flights and assign its passenger and cargo planes to transport supplies to Asmara.¹⁰⁴ On June 3, 1990 (Genbot 26, 1982 E.C), the SRA's Logistics Department reported that it had no food in its stock and requested for the arrangement of more flights to transport the much needed food for the army (see Appendix-V).¹⁰⁵

To make matters worse, the intensification of the war and its expansion to Wollo, Gondär, northern Shäwa and Asosa brought about serious logistical challenges. At the end of March 1990, for example, the Freight Transport Corporation (FTC) was instructed to assign trucks that could transport a total of 70,653 quintals of supplies to Diré Dawa, Kombolcha, Gondär, Asosa, Gambélla and Däbrä Berhan.¹⁰⁶ The shortage of trucks became more critical than ever before. As a result, food and other supplies for the 603rd Corps had to be transported by air to Baher Dar.¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, the deployment of hundreds of trucks to various war fronts brought about a grave strain on the national economy. The situation was so serious that all army units were ordered to return trucks to the Ministry of Transport and Communications as soon as they had transported the required supplies to their respective destinations.¹⁰⁸

In 1990, the Logistics Department paid a total of 1,958,387.24 Birr to all truck owners for the transport services they rendered.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the Logistics Department earmarked money for renting pack animals so as to transport supplies to troops stationed in those areas of northern Shäwa that were inaccessible to trucks.¹¹⁰

It was in this part of Shäwa that the last government offensive was launched in May 1990 with the intention of encircling and annihilating the insurgents. To that end, the 3rd Division advanced from Guguftu to Karra Mesheg. The 3rd Division, which was supposed to encircle and destroy the insurgents, fell into their trap and its supply lines were severed. It then faced a chronic shortage of rations and ammunition. Its commander, Colonel Säräqä Berhan, repeatedly asked his superiors to urgently deliver the badly needed supplies by helicopters. To his complete dismay and disappointment, the helicopter that landed at Märañña brought uniforms and shoes

instead. Finally, on June 15, 1990 (Säné 8, 1982 E.C), the 3rd Division was decimated by the insurgents after five days of ferocious fighting and the remaining hungry troops retreated to Däbrä Berhan.¹¹¹

For the eleven months that followed, the Logistics Department tried to keep the demoralized troops supplied. In practical terms, however, that was only an attempt to delay the advance of the insurgents to Asmära and Addis Ababa.¹¹²

3.3. Command and Control

Between 1977 and 1991, by virtue of his authority as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Mängestu was in full control of the army. All major decisions with respect to the deployment of army units, the launching of offensives and counter-offensives, promotions, demotions or disciplinary actions had to be approved by Mängestu. Army commanders at various levels felt powerless to make their own decisions. Sadly enough, "commanders even had to request permission from the commander-in-chief to move a brigade or any larger force."¹¹³ Even during critical moments, Mängestu was not willing to give plenty of rope to commanders. In March 1988, for instance, while the EPLF forces were advancing to Afabét in a pincer offensive after severing the army's supply route, Brigadier General Wubätu Şäggayé, Commander of the SRA, could not use the 102nd Airborne Division to reinforce the Nadäw troops. Interestingly, at that moment, the Airborne Division was idly stationed in and around Asmära while the Nadäw Command was being annihilated by the EPLF.¹¹⁴

The Defence Minister or the Commander of the Ground Forces, too, had to get Mängestu's approval for operational decisions of that sort. While the Ministry of Defence was left to deal with administrative affairs of the armed forces, command centres were set up at different times to lead major operations. The first of such centres was the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC) created on August 27, 1977 (Nähasé 21, 1969 E.C), to coordinate operations against the Somali invaders and the northern insurgents. Headed by Mängestu, the NROC was in charge of mobilizing the country's resources for the war effort, deploying army units to various fronts and coordinating their operations.¹¹⁵

Just four days after the formation of the NROC, Mängestu showed up at Jijiga to boost the morale of the troops defending the town from Somali onslaught. Nevertheless, the Ethiopian resistance collapsed in a couple of days and Jijiga fell into Somali hands. On that crucial day, jet fighters were showing aerobatics over Revolution Square in Addis Ababa to mark the third anniversary of the Revolution while they were badly needed to strike Somali positions around Jijiga.¹¹⁶ The high command was preoccupied with the celebration in the capital instead of trying to avert the imminent fall of Jijiga into Somali hands. The NROC blamed dissidents for agitating troops to retreat and several privates and officers were executed in September and November 1977.¹¹⁷

Then, in December 1977, the Supreme Military Strategic Committee (SMSC) was set up in order to map out a successful counter-offensive against the Somali forces. Composed of Ethiopian, Soviet and Cuban high ranking officers, the SMSC, did work out an operation plan for the liberation of all occupied areas from Somali control that was successfully put into practice.¹¹⁸

Following the defeat of Somalia, the NROC established its advance headquarters at Mäqälé at the end of May 1978 to coordinate the counter-insurgency operation to be carried out in northern Ethiopia. The army's counter-offensives were thus closely supervised by Mängestu, who stayed in Gondär, Mäqälé and Asmära for a while.¹¹⁹

The NROC continued to coordinate the army's operations until the end of 1979. By 1980, however, both the NROC and the SMSC were dissolved¹²⁰ and gave way to a new command centre named the Military Operations and Planning Command (MOPC) in early 1982. The MOPC was headed by Mängestu and included senior officers of the armed forces. It was set up to coordinate the army's operations during the Red Star Operation.¹²¹

Just before the launching of Operation Red Star, the high command committed a serious blunder that contributed considerably to the failure of the whole campaign. Instead of deploying battle-hardened troops who could endure hardship on the arid and sandy lowlands of the Kärkäbät front, it threw new trainees of the 21st MID (who had just completed their training but had no earlier experience of actual fighting) to that inhospitable area. Worse still, division and brigade commanders on the same front ordered the troops to advance forward without sending out small bands to reconnoiter the areas ahead. As the troops surged forward, they fell on the insurgents'

ambushes. When the insurgents suddenly mounted frontal and outflanking assaults, the inexperienced mountain infantrymen were in complete disarray. The platoon that had been guarding the only water point was easily unseated by a larger EPLF force. As a result, many troops died of dehydration. Although the Kärkäbät disaster was of its own making, the high command put the main blame on Colonel Wubshät Mammo, Commander of the 21st MID and put him to death.¹²²

The collapse of the Kärkäbät front, thus, contributed a lot to the failure of the whole operation.¹²³

3.3.1. The Triangular Command

The first step towards the institution of the triangular command structure took place with the creation of the Military Security Department (MSD) in 1980 within the Ministry of Public and National Security, later renamed the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). With the advice of the Soviet intelligence organization, the KGB, the MSD closely watched any form of dissension in the armed forces, infiltration by the insurgents and agents of foreign intelligence and carried out counter-intelligence activities.¹²⁴

The second organization that was to fit into the triangular command structure was the Political Administration of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (PARAF). Although political commissars had been attached to army units since the early years of the Revolution, the PARAF was founded in 1983 and placed under Captain Läggäsä Asfaw.¹²⁵ While the MSD was entrusted until 1991 to Brigadier General Abbäbä G. Mäsqäl, one of Mängestu's trusted course mates of the Holäta Academy, the PARAF was taken over from Läggäsä and consecutively placed under Major General Gäbräyäs W. Hanna (a close companion of Mängestu), Major General Mäsfen Gäbrä Qal (a graduate of the Sandhurst Academy who served as Operations Officer during the Somali-Ethiopian war) and finally Brigadier General Fälläqä Eshäté.¹²⁶

Copied from the Soviet Union, the triangular command was thus established to bring the armed forces under the complete control of the commander-in-chief. In theory, the three officers - the military commander, the political commissar and the security officer - had separate responsibilities and they were supposed to forge a harmonious working relationship. The army

commander was to be in charge of military operations. While the political commissar was concerned with the political indoctrination of combatants, the security officer was expected to watch out, under the cover of ensuring the welfare of troops, any form of dissidence within the army and to do counter-intelligence work.¹²⁷

In practice, however, the triangular command structure bred mistrust, rivalry, mutual recrimination and conflict. Usually, in comparison with the military commander, the security officer and the political commissar were much more junior in rank as well as in military experience. But by virtue of their political loyalty and party affiliation, they quite often interfered in the decisions of the military commander. The fact that both the political commissar and the security officer were not answerable to the military commander exacerbated the unhealthy relationship within the triangular command. They could rather report about the performance and outlook of the military commander to their respective superiors: the political commissar to the PARAF and the security officer to the MSD.¹²⁸

Especially after the foundation of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) in 1984 and the party structure was laid down in every army unit, political commissars gained the ears of the higher officials. That resulted in emboldening them to take more power into their hands making the military commander feel more desperate and helpless. In theory, all operational matters were to be decided by the military commander. But now, political commissars who in some cases had little or no knowledge of map reading began to sit together with the military commander, discuss plans of operation and counter-sign top military secrets.¹²⁹ Army commanders were thus stripped off their independence and authority. As a result, they were scared of taking initiatives even at times when there appeared a greater chance of scoring a military victory. This kind of feeling was more evident especially among those commanders who were not members of the WPE.¹³⁰ Sadly enough, "for a general, success was as dangerous as failure." On his part, Mängestu seemed unprepared to see the emergence of an army "hero." Under such circumstances, it was difficult for the army to win a military victory as commanders were afraid of taking initiatives. In an attempt to have complete control of the army, Mängestu thus deprived commanders freedom of action.¹³¹

Mängestu's doing was, however in conflict with conventional military wisdom. For Napoleon, for instance, the singleness of military command should be "the first necessity in war." He

advises a government in power to "have entire confidence in its general; allow him great latitude."¹³² Karl Von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theorist, on his part stresses: "I do unquestionably state that when men become locked in battle, that there should be no artifice under the name of politics which should handicap your own men, decrease their chances of winning."¹³³

Contrary to pieces of advice given by military strategists, Mängestu himself was crippling the able army commanders while he conferred exalted positions to his confidants, who happened to be mainly his fellow Holäta course mates and those who had served with him in the 3rd Division before 1974. Unfortunately, "for all their political reliability, the cronies did not always make good generals."¹³⁴ Lamentably, the capable generals were not usually trusted by Mängestu. As a result, they were closely watched by the political and security officers intensifying the mistrust and conflict within the triangular command.¹³⁵

It was this sort of rivalry and conflict within the triangular command that eventually led to the Afabét disaster. The discord between military commanders on the one hand and that of the political and security officers, on the other, intensified following the appointment of Brigadier General Tariku Ayné as commander of the Nadäw Command in January 1987. The new commander is reported to have flouted orders coming from the commander and deputy commanders of the SRA. He was even accused by Mängestu of dismantling the triangular command within Nadäw and of demoralizing troops.¹³⁶

The government attempted in vain to normalize relations within the Nadäw Command by executing Tariku on February 15, 1988 (Yäkatit 7, 1980 E.C). But that worsened the crisis.¹³⁷ Four weeks later, the EPLF destroyed the Nadäw Command and captured Afabét. The Afabét military setback is a clear illustration of how political meddling could lead to disaster. Though it was introduced with the intention of controlling the army, the triangular command brought about division and insubordination among the Nadäw troops that made them vulnerable to the EPLF onslaught.¹³⁸

The Sheré military disaster that occurred a year later can also be partly attributable to political meddling of that kind. Some 20 days after the fall of Afabét, the government created the TRA with its headquarters at Mäqälé. Within a month, Captain Läggäsä Asfaw was appointed as the

overall administrator of Tegray.¹³⁹ Lāggāsā acted not only as martial administrator of the region but also as the de facto commander of the TRA. His knowledge of military tactics and strategy was so poor that he ordered units of the 603rd Corps to converge on Dansha and then march to Kaza and Dājāna during the rainy season without the support of tanks and artillery guns. Eventually, the government offensive turned into a rout.¹⁴⁰

Worse still, neither Lāggāsā nor General Mulatu Nāgash, the TRA commander, could anticipate that another military disaster was in the making in Sheré. They stationed units of the 604th Corps in Sheré without safeguarding the army's supply routes. According to plans of Operation Aksum, the 10th Division of the SRA was to open up the Asmāra-Enda Sellasé road and safeguard the supply route for the 604th Corps. But the mistrust and animosity between Lieutenant General Täsfayé G. Kidan, the martial administrator of Eritrea, on the one hand, and Lāggāsā and Mulatu, on the other, prevented the SRA and the TRA from launching a joint operation against the insurgents. General Täsfayé transferred the 10th Division from Rama to Meṣewa without informing either Lāggāsā or Mulatu. The TPLF soon sealed off the army's supply route and in February 1989 destroyed the 604th Corps. Following the annihilation of the 604th Corps, Māngestu was quick to put the blame on the two martial administrators and General Mulatu:

“The two leadership bodies do not seem to have realized that they were working for one country ... and for one objective. [General] Täsfayé viewed the failure of the operation in Tegray and the damage inflicted [on the army] as an embarrassing setback for General Mulatu and Lāggāsā Asfaw. While he was delighted to see Lāggāsā [and Mulatu] being criticized and embarrassed, he does not seem to have realized that those dying and sustaining damage are the sons of Ethiopia.¹⁴¹

Māngestu himself is also to blame for appointing martial administrators and commanders in Tegray and Eritrea who were at odds with each other. In fact, Māngestu explicitly admits that he had appointed commanders “with the intention that one would spy on the other” so as to avoid conspiracy against him.¹⁴² But that did not prevent the senior commanders of the armed forces from attempting a coup in May 1989.

3.3.2. The 1989 Abortive Coup

Although the idea of toppling Mängestu had existed as early as 1984/85, it was after the Afabét disaster that the senior officers believed that the situation was ripe to stage a coup.¹⁴³ According to Mängestu, Major General Mare'd Negussé, the chief-of-staff of the armed forces, was the leading conspirator who persuaded three other key officers to join him: Major General Abära Abbäbä, chief of operations, Major General Dämessé Bulto, commander of the SRA, and Major General Fanta Bälay, former commander of the air force and subsequently Minister of Industry.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, other sources indicate that the attempted coup was conceived and masterminded by General Fanta.¹⁴⁵

In any case, the conspirators were waiting until an ideal situation presented itself to stage the coup. In the meantime, they were taking measures that would worsen the military setback without arousing Mängestu's suspicion and precipitating his wrath. In hindsight, Mängestu accused the leaders of the abortive coup of sabotaging the army's operations so as to create a suitable situation for their objective.¹⁴⁶ There is now adequate evidence that supports Mängestu's claim. The sabotage included delaying and interrupting the training of commando units and deploying army units to areas suitable to interception or annihilation by insurgents. In 1987, for instance, the government decided to urgently recruit, train and equip the 103rd Commando Division. The chief-of-staff was put in charge of the project. But, the recruitment and training programmes were considerably delayed for several months.¹⁴⁷ Although training was underway after much pressure, the recruits were made to suffer from logistical problems, the major ones being the shortage of rations, uniforms and shoes.¹⁴⁸

With the intention of getting first hand information, Mängestu visited the commandos stationed near Baher Dar in February 1988. While briefing Mängestu, Colonel Gétahun W. Giorgis, commander of the commando division, explained the serious logistical problems. That irritated the chief-of-staff who later sent Colonel Gétahun to lead a poorly planned operation that nearly cost his life.¹⁴⁹

In the end, the commandos were not only deployed to Tegray and Eritrea before completing their training, but they also dispersed and some were forced to join the 102nd Airborne Division to supplement losses.¹⁵⁰

In his memoir, Brigadier General Kasayé Chämäda also exposed how the senior army commanders were trying to see the demise of eminent units such as the Sänṭeq Mechanized Brigade and the 102nd Airborne Division by deploying them to the death traps of the insurgents.¹⁵¹ Disappointed by the sabotage of the senior officers, Brigadier General Tämäsgän Gämächu, commander of the 102nd Airborne Division, wrote to the Inspector General on May 1, 1988 (Miyaziya 23, 1980 E.C), out of desperation, requesting to be relieved from his position.¹⁵² On the contrary, he was ordered to lead his army through the sandy plains of Ma'amido where water was in absolute scarcity. This poorly planned operation was aimed at recapturing Afabät from the east. The operation was a complete disaster and the airborne division lost its commander as well as many combatants.¹⁵³

The army based in Tegray was also subjected to systematic sabotage. When the TRA was created in April 1988, its intelligence department was not properly established. The TRA was thus left in complete intelligence blackout with respect to the movements of insurgents in Tegray. In January 1989, the Defence Minister ordered the chief-of-staff to visit the TRA and report to him about the army's situation. Twenty days before the Sheré disaster, the chief-of-staff reported:

Since the enemy around Säläkläka has suddenly disappeared, the intended operation in May Berizo has been cancelled. While two rebel brigades are reported to have moved to Şä'ada Medri and another one to Da'ero Täcklay, the whereabouts of other brigades are unknown. For the time being, the rebel brigades whose whereabouts remained unknown are four. These brigades may launch attacks along the Adigrat, Humära, Gondär, Däссé-Mäqälé roads or on Mäqälé town.¹⁵⁴

Under such circumstances, the TRA could not foresee the military disaster which was about to be delivered by the insurgents. That finally came on February 19, 1989 (Yäkatit 12, 1981 E.C), when the TPLF captured Enda Sellasé by destroying the 604th Corps.¹⁵⁵ While discreetly committing such sabotages, the conspirators of the attempted coup managed to establish contacts with leaders of the insurgents in an attempt to negotiate a ceasefire. That was brokered through the so-called Free Ethiopian Officers Movement (FEOM) created in 1986 by officers captured by

the EPLF at various battles and kept as POWs. The FEOM is reported to have links with actively serving officers in the army.¹⁵⁶

Once a ceasefire was agreed upon to be effected at the time of the coup attempt, the conspirators were ready to topple Mängestu. Immediately after Mängestu's departure for a state visit to the German Democratic Republic on May 16, 1989 (Genbot 8, 1981 E.C), the leaders of the attempted coup held their meeting at the MOND. Since they committed some serious blunders, the attempt was doomed from the start. In the first place, instead of holding a meeting in broad daylight in the heart of Addis Abäba, the coup leaders should have neutralized the presidential guard stationed in the national palace and controlled key places like the TV and radio stations, the airport, the telecommunication centres as well as the army HQs in Addis Ababa and elsewhere. Secondly, instead of using forces stationed nearby, they chose to transport airborne troops from Asmära to the capital. The operation was so disorganized that Brigadier General Qumlachäw Däjäné, who arrived in Addis at the head of the airborne troops lost contact with the coup leaders. Thirdly, since the conspirators were too confident to suspect that Colonel Täsfayé W. Sellasé, the Minister of Internal Affairs (who had given a tacit approval to the plot), could betray them at the eleventh hour. They did not even station a reliable force around the MOND building. As a result, they were soon surrounded by the presidential guard. That heralded the failure of the coup attempt in the capital.¹⁵⁷

Despite the abortion of the coup in Addis Abäba, commanders of the SRA in Asmära continued to broadcast through the Asmära Radio that Mängestu had been overthrown. Troops of the SRA were able to intercept the radio conversation between the SRA commanders and the EPLF leaders. For combatants, that was treason punishable by death. More particularly, troops of the 102nd Airborne Division, who had lost their commander and many of their friends through sabotage, found a perfect opportunity to punish the senior officers. Accordingly, Major General Dämessé Bulto and more than a dozen other senior officers were brutally murdered by angry combatants and junior officers of the SRA.¹⁵⁸ Paradoxically, despite their rich experience and competence in military leadership, the senior officers failed to stage a successful coup. That prompted observers to comment: "If that is the best they could do it is not surprising the army has done so badly in Eritrea."¹⁵⁹

In addition to those killed, hundreds of officers suspected of being involved in the coup attempt were detained. A year later, 12 army generals were sentenced to death. Those officials who still remained loyal to Mängestu asked him to change the death penalty to imprisonment. But he rejected all mediation efforts. Eventually, the army was left without experienced commanders.¹⁶⁰ Even Mängestu himself admits: "in fact, after the death of General Dämessé Bulto, there was no one in the north [to lead the army]."¹⁶¹

Following the failure of the coup attempt, Mängestu appointed loyalists who had been away from military responsibilities for several years as commanders. For instance, Addis Tädla, who had been on non-military duties for more than a decade, was promoted to Lieutenant General and made chief-of-staff of the armed forces.¹⁶² Similarly, Wubshät Däссé was made Major General and appointed commander of the SRA. Likewise, Embibäl Ayyélä was promoted to Major General and became commander of the ground forces.¹⁶³

The deterioration in military leadership, together with war weariness, erosion of morale and discipline, worsened the military situation in 1990 and 1991. Although the government continued to throw new recruits into the various fronts, combatants preferred to retreat or surrender in mass to the insurgents. In this regard, there was a wide spread slogan among conscripts: "While to be conscripted is my obligation, to surrender is my right."¹⁶⁴

Eventually, the army crumbled completely following the flight of the commander-in-chief to Zimbabwe in on May 21, 1991.

CHAPTER FOUR

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE 1977 - 1991

Military intelligence is the acquisition of timely information, about "an actual or potential enemy or area of operations." Military intelligence is basically divided into strategic and combat intelligence. Strategic intelligence reveals the "capabilities and vulnerabilities" of an internal opponent or external enemy that may pose a threat to national security. Combat intelligence, on the other hand, is current information about an enemy, his manpower and firepower as well as the topography of an area used to plan and carry out an operation.¹

An army without intelligence is bound to be surprised by its enemy at any time. A military operation conducted without timely and accurate intelligence about an enemy is very likely to be doomed from the start. In contrast, "if you know what the enemy is up to while concealing your own plans, your chances of success increase immensely."²

4. 1. Organization of the Military Intelligence Department and Its Activities

Having realized the indispensability of intelligence, the imperial government had set up a military intelligence section in the 1950s. All army units from division down to the battalion level had military intelligence sections. The importance attached to military intelligence was so high that officers were sent to Israel and the United States for training in military intelligence. Until 1974, these well-trained intelligence officers were able to efficiently and satisfactorily gather strategic and combat intelligence about Somalia and the Eritrean guerrillas.³

Serious problems began to surface in 1977 as the army experienced unprecedented expansion without a proportional increase in the number of military intelligence officers. The army's meteoric numerical increase, coupled with its engagements on several fronts posed huge challenges to the handful of intelligence officers. The over-stretched and under-staffed military intelligence department tried to cope with the ever demanding situation.⁴

For quite some time, the military intelligence department was largely neglected by the military government. It was only in late 1981, as part of the preparation for the Red Star Operation, that the government reorganized the department. Even then, military intelligence received secondary

attention. Accordingly, instead of being organized as an independent department, the military intelligence branch was reduced to the status of an appendage, or a sub-section in the Operations Main Department.⁵

The new structure bred resentment among military intelligence personnel, who now came under army commanders and operations officers. One major source of conflict was the allocation by army commanders of meager resources for intelligence purposes.⁶ That smaller army units below the brigade were left without military intelligence sections was another structural problem. The justification given for depriving squads, platoons, companies and battalions of the vital intelligence support is rather feeble. They were believed to be incapable of conducting independent operations. Funny enough, battalions were deployed to accomplish a given mission without intelligence support.⁷

According to the new structure implemented in late 1981, only brigades, divisions, corps and armies were expected to have their own military intelligence unit. As we go higher, the military intelligence unit gets more intricate. At an army level, for instance, the military intelligence department included six main sections namely reconnaissance, agent deployment, POWs and defectors interrogation, education and research, topography and intelligence evaluation and dissemination.⁸

Complex as the military intelligence might look, it was characterized by tons of intelligence flaws. The reconnaissance section, for example, consisted of silent patrol and combat reconnaissance sub-sections. The silent patrol units were required to get deep into enemy territory and kidnap enemy personnel for the sake of gathering intelligence. But due to linguistic and cultural barriers, soldiers could not stay behind enemy lines undetected. In an attempt to overcome such problems in Eritrea, a silent patrol force made up of 150 ex-EPLF fighters who had defected to the government and some other carefully selected Eritreans was created in 1984. After being trained by airborne instructors, the silent patrol force was deployed to EPLF held areas. At times, the force managed to bring back vital intelligence by kidnapping EPLF fighters and capturing documents.⁹

The combat intelligence units, on the other hand, were sent out in search of the enemy to bring back intelligence about his disposition and if necessary to test his strength through brief

skirmishes. However, the combat reconnaissance units of even the higher army formations were ill-equipped, under-staffed and poorly-trained. Although they were organized in platoons and companies, they usually faced a critical shortage of manpower especially combat engineers, drivers, mechanics, and communication personnel. In theory, they were supposed to use reconnaissance armoured vehicles like BRDM-2 and BTR-60. But army commanders quite often used such military vehicles for escorting purposes.¹⁰

Worse still, the combat reconnaissance units were given obsolete radios whose spare parts were unavailable. Some of them had served for 23-30 years.¹¹ Writing to the Vice Defence Minister for Logistics and Finance on March 6, 1988 (Yäkatit 27, 1980 E.C), the Chief of Military Intelligence, Brigadier General Taddäsä T. Haymanot, lamented that the military intelligence unit was not in a position even "to properly and satisfactorily use those equipment that had been used during World War II."¹² As a result, the reconnaissance units were unable to detect the electromagnetic emissions and locations of the insurgents' communication equipment. Crippled by such problems, reconnaissance units were, in most cases, forced to retreat after provoking the insurgents to open fire without gathering intelligence about command posts, fortifications, or disposition of fighters and weapons.¹³

Those areas that remained out of the reach of the reconnaissance units were left to the air force for aerial reconnoitering. But, the insurgents usually restricted their day time movements to a minimum and camouflaged their heavy weapons, arms depots and other underground installations to avoid detection. To make matters worse, there were no trained personnel in aerial photo analysis.¹⁴

The other branch with similar problems was the agent deployment section usually known as covert operation. Like other branches of military intelligence, covert operation required special training. Unfortunately, however, the military intelligence school based at Hurso had already suspended its training programme in advanced military intelligence, in POWs interrogation, aerial photo analysis and aerial reconnaissance for a decade since 1974 due to the shortage of instructors and teaching materials.¹⁵ It was only in 1984 that the intelligence section began training officers in the collection, evaluation, interpretation and dissemination of strategic and combat intelligence. That was an attempt to somehow mitigate some of the glaring problems of military intelligence.¹⁶

In the same year, 47 officers were trained by Soviet military intelligence experts in covert operation. They were soon assigned to recruit and deploy local agents in the Central Command, the FRA and SRA fronts. A year later, some of the trained officers were sent to the Southern and Western Commands on a similar mission.¹⁷

The main objective of using local agents in intelligence gathering was to plant local people in areas controlled or influenced by insurgents in order to get current information about their movement, disposition as well as their intentions. Since they knew the culture and spoke the language, local agents could gather vital intelligence about the insurgents without much difficulty. In the Ogadén, for instance, local (Somali) agents had managed to gather strategic and combat intelligence.¹⁸

In the northern theatre as well, some attempts were made to gather intelligence through local agents. In 1984, the military intelligence department set up local agent recruitment and deployment stations at Täsänäy, Bäréntu, Kärän, Qarora, Adi Qäyeh, Asmära (in Eritrea), Sheraro, Weqro, Chärchär (in Tegray), Tälämt and Mätämma (in Gondär). It was decided to pay a local agent 2,870 Birr monthly or 34,440 Birr annually, an attractive incentive in those days for gathering timely intelligence.¹⁹ As shall be seen a little later, though not implemented, that was at least the allocated sum.

However, the recruitment and deployment of local agents, particularly in Eritrea, was very difficult and highly complicated. By and large, neither the military intelligence nor the security personnel could uncover the underground EPLF cells. As a result, they were not able to know who was who in Eritrea. Still, the military intelligence set up its own clandestine cells by carefully recruiting local agents. But the military intelligence personnel were not in a position to ensure that these cells were free from double agents and EPLF infiltrators. For instance, there were 47 local (Eritrean) agents deployed to gather intelligence about the EPLF. Later, six agents were reported missing. Presumably, they might have gone over to the EPLF once they accomplished their mission. Two other agents were neutralized by the EPLF: one was kidnapped and the other was shot dead by EPLF's underground assassination squad.²⁰

In spite of such problems, a few local agents managed to penetrate deep into EPLF-controlled areas and gathered essential intelligence about the insurgents. But, for such a risky business, they were not paid the promised amount. Although the government had authorized the payment of an attractive sum to local agents, some of those Eritreans who were gathering vital intelligence received as low as 75 Birr per month. Since the whole operation was carried out in absolute secrecy, there was no way of ensuring the money allocated for local agents was free from misuse and embezzlement. Low payment was, therefore, one of the reasons which made some of the local agents less committed in their missions. In 1990, seven Eritrean agents were fired mainly due to their weakness and lack of commitment in intelligence gathering. Obviously, there was every possibility for these ex-local agents to disclose the clandestine intelligence network. The military intelligence personnel should have been aware of the fact that the dismissal of agents could put the whole covert operation in jeopardy.²¹

The intelligence work by the interrogation department was even much more flawed. Unlike the covert operation section, it was staffed with people without special training in interrogation techniques.²² If well treated and skillfully handled, POWs and defectors could give crucial information about the enemy. But military intelligence officers quite often failed to realize that mistreatment, intimidation and insensitivity shown to POWs and defectors may backfire. In 1985, a defector to the Central Command, for instance, told intelligence officers that the EPLF had already deployed a force to Mt. Asäbot to blow up the Awash Bridge. Based on that wrong intelligence, the Central Command was duped to deploy troops to the area.²³

The Asäbot incident shows how wrong intelligence could misguide military intelligence officers and army commanders. As a matter of fact, every bit of information obtained from various sources needs to be evaluated for its "pertinence, reliability and accuracy."²⁴ Evaluation helps intelligence officers to "separate the wheat from the chaff." Instead of accepting whatever information gathered, intelligence officers are advised to believe that "all overt information is grist for the intelligence mill ... trained personnel are required to cull it in order to find the grain of wheat in the mountain of chaff."²⁵

The intelligence evaluation and dissemination section was supposed to act as the "intelligence mill." Before being disseminated to officials and commanders concerned, the information coming from reconnaissance units, local agents, POWs and defectors as well as radio

interception personnel should be recorded, evaluated and interpreted. But that was not always the case. If intelligence officers received a warning about an immediate threat to national security, the information would swiftly be sent to concerned bodies without being processed.²⁶

Apart from such emergency situations, the information gathered from various sources was evaluated and analysed before being used as intelligence. In most cases, however, by the time it reached commanders and officials, it would lose its validity due to considerable delay in evaluation and interpretation. Commanders frequently complained that they were receiving historical records about insurgents but not current intelligence.²⁷

Intelligence of strategic nature was passed on to the education and research section. This section was supposed to conduct research on strategic intelligence to find out capabilities and vulnerabilities of insurgents as well as hostile neighbouring states. Such a research would help the government formulate and shape its defence policy.²⁸

The last section attached to the military intelligence was the radio interception branch. The radio interception personnel were supposed to intercept, study, and decipher enemy signal communications. This section, too, was crippled by the shortage of code analysts, multi-lingual experts and cryptographers. As a result, the section found it very difficult to decipher the intricate communication codes of the TPLF and EPLF.²⁹

4.2. Some Limited Achievements of the Military Intelligence Department

Despite its multi-dimensional problems, the military intelligence department occasionally enjoyed some remarkable successes. One such success that can be singled out as an exceptional achievement was the disclosure of Somalia's plan to invade Ethiopia some six months before the full scale Somali offensive. A certain army officer registered as a civilian staff of the Ethiopian Embassy in Mogadishu was gathering combat and strategic intelligence about Somalia's armed forces. Following the outbreak of hostilities, the Ethiopian air force did a remarkable job of intelligence-gathering by undertaking risky missions. Fighter and reconnaissance planes flew deep into Somalia's air space and took vital aerial photographs of airfields, ports, military depots and convoys, which were bombarded in due course.³⁰

Another success in intelligence-gathering was achieved in the northern theatre. The Ethiopian Embassy in Khartoum and the Consular Office at Kassala occasionally managed to gather essential intelligence mainly about the ELF, EPLF and TPLF. Using Embassy and covert operation sources, the military intelligence department succeeded in identifying the precise geographical positioning (latitudes and longitudes) of EPLF command headquarters, radio stations, arms depots, field hospitals, garages, workshops, prisons, and flour mills. However, these critical targets were either deliberately hidden in mountain side tunnels or located inside Sudanese territory to avoid air strikes.³¹

In 1980, a significant incident occurred that revealed the activities of EPLF further. That was the defection of Täcklay G. Maryam, an EPLF Central Committee member in charge of internal security, to the government. Nick-named "Aden" due to his short sojourn in the capital of South Yemen, Täcklay brought with him priceless information about the EPLF. This included the Front's political and military organization, intelligence network, disposition of its fighters as well as the underground headquarters, workshops, hospitals, arms depots, and other installations. Täcklay even handed over minutes of the EPLF Central Committee meetings held in 1979. Although the military intelligence personnel were excited by Täcklay's inside information, they were struck with surprise to learn that those EPLF POWs detained at Sämbäl prison had maintained contacts with EPLF clandestine cells in Asmära.³²

Frightened by the revelation of particularly its critical targets, the EPLF had to "relocate every one of them from command headquarters to the workshops, schools, hospitals and prisoner-of-war camps" as a precaution against aerial bombardment.³³

Likewise, the military intelligence department succeeded in uncovering the manpower and fire power of TPLF, EPDM, OLF, and ALF as well as the organizational structure of the TPLF, its political leaders and military commanders, its dealings with foreign companies for the purchase of weapons and the exact locations of its arms depots.³⁴

In addition to gathering intelligence about their order of battle, the military intelligence department at times succeeded in uncovering the insurgents' plan of operation. On several occasions, the military intelligence warned commanders of impending attacks by insurgents. But, commanders quite often failed to prevent the looming military disaster. Four months before the

fall of Afabét, the military intelligence branch of the SRA, for example, discovered that the EPLF was planning to mount a major offensive against the Nadäw Command after cutting off its supply route. That was presented at the November 1987 meeting of army commanders held in Asmära. Nevertheless, the senior commanders discarded the intelligence as groundless. According to the chief of the military intelligence at the time, some senior commanders, especially those who were later involved in the 1989 coup attempt, were indifferent to such vital intelligence.³⁵

Days before the attack on the Nadäw Command, the EPLF preparation became more visible to the military intelligence section of the SRA. Intelligence officers received reports about the transportation of arms by the EPLF to the areas close to Afabét. Soon after receiving such reports, the commander of the SRA, Brigadier General Wubätu Şäggayé, discerned that the EPLF was ready to mount a major offensive. He warned the Nadäw Command of the impending danger saying: "... It appears that this concentration of the enemy is intended to hit Nadäw from the rear and ... to close off the Keren-Af Abet road."³⁶ That was exactly what happened 24 hours later. Although the military intelligence personnel warned beforehand about the danger on the horizon, no effective measure was taken to save Nadäw from destruction.³⁷

Some six months after the destruction of the Nadäw Command, SRA's military intelligence received another warning of an EPLF-planned attack on the naval base at Meşewa. The information was obtained from a local agent on the military intelligence's payroll. The information was received ten days before the attack. The military intelligence department dutifully and immediately warned the naval headquarters, the SRA, the Operations Department and the 6th Division of an impending EPLF attack on the warships at the naval base.³⁸ This time, too, no measure was taken to tighten the security around the naval base. On September 7, 1988 (Pagumé 2, 1980 E.C), at 0300 hours, six EPLF speed boats attacked the naval base. Before that incident, it was the navy's regular routine to perform sea patrols in three rings. It is in fact quite a puzzle to note that the navy suspended its regular patrolling activities on that particular night instead of stepping up security measures. The other thing that leads us to suspect some sort of sabotage is the fact that the navy's radar detected the EPLF boats only when they were trying to escape after mounting the attack. Although the damage on the naval base was reported to be

minor, it is indicative of another failure to make use of timely intelligence submitted in advance by the military intelligence.³⁹

On two other occasions, the military intelligence unit received reliable and accurate information, about the EPRDF's plans to launch an operation on the Guna and Lämi fronts. The intelligence about the second offensive on the Guna front was obtained from the radio interception section. On January 9, 1990 (ፕጥ 1, 1982 E.C), the radio operators intercepted a coded message transmitted by the EPDM leader, Tamrat Layné, to his companions named Taddäsä, Helawé and Osman. When deciphered, the message revealed that the insurgents were planning to launch a second offensive on the Guna front by transferring fighters from the Kuta Bär and Hayq fronts.⁴⁰ The intelligence was soon disseminated to the 603rd Corps. It was after six weeks that the insurgents launched the second offensive on the Guna front. The 603rd Corps had ample time to get ready for the impending onslaught. Despite an earlier warning by the military intelligence, commanders once again "successfully" failed to prevent another military disaster.⁴¹

Three months after EPRDF's second offensive on the Guna front, the military intelligence department was alerted by local sources about a planned attack on the 102nd Airborne Division at Lämi. Just two days before that attack, the warning was confirmed by an EPRDF fighter captured during a reconnaissance mission. In spite of this vital intelligence at hand, the Airborne Division suffered almost 50 percent casualty during the three day fighting that took place between May 22 and 24, 1990 (Genbot 14 – 16, 1982 E.C).⁴²

The preceding incidents clearly show success on the part of the military intelligence in uncovering the intentions of the insurgents and failure of army commanders in making use of timely intelligence.

4.3. Major Intelligence Failures

History provides us quite a lot of extraordinary cases of intelligence failures. This may lead us to accept what Richard Betts declares: "intelligence failures are not only inevitable, they are natural."⁴³ Israel is believed to have an intelligence service with proverbial efficiency and competence. And yet, it failed to warn the Israeli government about the impending surprise

attack by Egypt and Syria that took place on October 6, 1973.⁴⁴ Even more surprisingly, the intelligence services of the most powerful nation on earth, the United States, failed to prevent the 9/11 attack on its territory.⁴⁵

If such world class intelligence services are struck by intelligence failures of one sort or another, it might not thus be that surprising to find out similar setbacks in the Ethiopian military intelligence set up. One major intelligence failure that brought about disastrous consequences was the inability of the intelligence officers to uncover the clandestine ELF and EPLF cells entrenched in Asmāra and other towns. In the 1970s, these underground ELF and EPLF members were smuggling money (from government banks, using forged documents), medical supplies, spare parts, shoes and clothes (from state-owned factories) mainly out of Asmāra undetected. In addition, they gunned down several army officers in Asmāra.⁴⁶

It was with the help of these secret cells that the EPLF later mounted commando attacks on government targets in Asmāra. The first one in a series of operations was carried out in the night of July 15, 1977 (Hämlé 8, 1969 E.C), when EPLF fighters stormed the Sämbäl Prison in Asmāra and freed about 800 political prisoners.⁴⁷

Nine years later, the TPLF mounted a similar nocturnal raid on Mäqälé prison and freed nearly 1,300 political prisoners.⁴⁸

In both cases, the military intelligence personnel received no information whatsoever about the planning of the operations. They were as stunned as the general public when they heard the news.⁴⁹

Again in 1984, the military intelligence department failed to sense that a much more dangerous operation was in the making in Eritrea. This time, the EPLF leaders were planning to destroy all military aircraft at Asmāra airport. Undercover EPLF members and agents working in the air force and the air traffic control section as well as those who had been living around the airport were assigned to compile and submit reports about the main targets. In the meantime, the EPLF was training commandos in absolute secrecy for the operation.⁵⁰ While EPLF members were smuggling messages out of Asmāra, a letter containing a hand drawn-sketch map of the airport with some notes fell into the hands of the military security people at a certain check point. The letter was written by an EPLF undercover agent who had served in the Ethiopian air force for 21

years and who was at the time a member of the Commission for Organizing the Party of Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE).⁵¹

The military security and intelligence officers failed to identify the writer of the message. Even then, the message should have been a clue to figure out that the EPLF was planning an attack on the airport. At about the same time, the veterans stationed around the airport were complaining that, since they had sight problems at night due to old age, they should be replaced by younger soldiers. Sadly enough, despite the clues at hand, the officials and commanders in Asmara failed to tighten the security around the airport.⁵²

Aware of the deficiency of military intelligence and military security, the same EPLF undercover agent possibly kept on preparing another sketch map of the airport and successfully smuggled it out of Asmara. Once the planning of the operation was over, the commandos entered Asmara in various guises. A few of them were even allowed to get into the airport under the pretext of welcoming a guest from Addis Abäba.⁵³

Finally on May 20, 1984 (Genbot 12, 1976 E.C), just before midnight, 16 EPLF commandos slipped into the airport without much difficulty and carried out their mission within 18 minutes. According to EPLF sources, the commandos destroyed 28-33 airplanes.⁵⁴ Even though one might argue that the EPLF claim was exaggerated, MOND's classified documents reveal that a total of 18 military aircraft were put out of action (10 destroyed and 8 damaged).⁵⁵

Strangely enough, the military intelligence and security personnel were not able to learn from this monumental intelligence failure. Following the commando attack, no measure was taken to tighten the security around the airport. No wall was built to protect the military aircraft not only from view but also from attack. Nor were the residential houses around the airport relocated. The nearby Asmara-Mändäfära road was not diverted away from the airport. To make matters worse, the manpower of the 15th Veterans' Brigade had already declined from 2,961 to 884 men. In 1986 alone, 327 veterans were discharged from the brigade due to old age. By 1986, therefore, the security of the airport was in even worse situation.⁵⁶

Making the most out of such security and intelligence failures, the EPLF commandos penetrated the airport zone once again and fired B-10 anti-tank and RPG-7 shells for 30 minutes on the night of January 14, 1986 (ፒፕ 6, 1978 E.C). This time, they mounted their attack from a distance

of 500 meters and could only destroy one MiG-21 fighter jet and damage five others.⁵⁷ But the EPLF claimed that its commandos had destroyed a total of 44 military aircraft.⁵⁸

The commando raids on Asmāra airport are the results of intelligence incompetence and lack of imagination to figure out the intentions of the insurgents. Ironically, there were also occasions when the military intelligence personnel were duped by wrong information deliberately fabricated by the insurgents themselves. Two typical incidents are perhaps worth mentioning in this regard. On January 7, 1985 (Tahsas 29, 1977 E.C), three TPLF brigades mounted a surprise attack on the small government force (with only 327 men) stationed at Dabat. A week earlier, the insurgents deliberately fed the military intelligence in Gondär wrong information through their agents, warning that the TPLF was ready to attack Addis Zämän and block the Addis Abäba-Gondär road. On January 3, an army was deployed to the areas between Addis Zämän and Ebennat. It was after the attack on Dabat that the military intelligence came to realize that the information it had received was just a decoy.⁵⁹

Dismayed by this intelligence failure, the then Chief-of-Staff, Major General Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam communicated his frustration to the North-Western Command in the following manner: "Our difficulty of gathering intelligence is becoming a problem with no solution. Our problem is not only the failure to get accurate intelligence but also the deployment of troops based on wrong information. When the rebels planned to attack Dabat, they fed us wrong information. ...As a result, we deployed the army... to an area where there was no threat."⁶⁰

Having failed to overrun the army's defences, the insurgents withdrew from Dabat after six days of fierce fighting.⁶¹

The Dabat incident could have been a lasting lesson not to deploy army units based on unconfirmed intelligence coming from local agents. Nevertheless, the intelligence failure observed in the North-Western Command was repeated in a neighbouring army formation, the Tegray Command. Nearly two years after the attack on Dabat, the military intelligence section of the 17th Division based in Sheré was duped by wrong information received from a local informer who was later found to be a double agent. The double agent reported that a TPLF force estimated to be a battalion and two companies was stationed at Sänqata. The information should have been critically evaluated for accuracy and reliability. But based on this unconfirmed report, Brigadier

General Ar'aya Zär'ay, commander of the 17th Division, deployed the 19th Brigade to the area. The insurgents who had been kept informed about developments ambushed the brigade at a strategic pass near Endabaguna on November 8, 1987 (Tekemt 28, 1980 E.C). The brigade suffered heavy casualties. The division commander was held responsible for the disaster and was given strong warning.⁶²

Despite the exchange of angry letters between commanders concerning the Endabaguna incident, the intelligence failure in Tegray worsened following the formation of the TRA in April 1988. The TRA's military intelligence service was so weak that it could not even find out the location of the TPLF brigades and divisions.⁶³ Having discovered the infiltration of the army based in Sheré by the TPLF, the military security arrested some students, teachers and soldiers.⁶⁴ But neither the military security nor the military intelligence services could uncover the smuggling of fighters and arms into Enda Sellasé by the TPLF days before the battle of Sheré in February 1989. Arms were, for instance, smuggled by fighters who entered Enda Sellasé disguised as peasants selling firewood and straw.⁶⁵ The intelligence and security people could not sniff out all these activities that had been taking place under their noses. In fact, such intelligence failures contributed considerably to the disintegration of the 604th Corps. The ad hoc committee set up to investigate the causes for the destruction of the 604th Corps pointed out intelligence failure as one of the contributing factors.⁶⁶

4.4. Counter-Intelligence

Counter-intelligence is an essential aspect of military intelligence. Gathering intelligence about the enemy may be pointless without guarding one's own secrets and protecting one's own personnel from hostile intelligence infiltration. The principal purpose of counter-intelligence is, therefore, "to safeguard information, personnel, material and installations against the espionage, sabotage or subversive activities of foreign powers and dissatisfied or dissident groups or individuals which constitute a threat to the national security."⁶⁷ The counter-intelligence personnel are thus required to "locate, identify and neutralize" such threats.⁶⁸

The Ethiopian military intelligence establishment was no different from this conventional system. Until 1980, the military intelligence department was also performing counter-intelligence activities. In 1980, the Military Security Organization (MSO) was created under the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the support of the KGB, the Soviet secret service. Once the MSO inserted itself in the military hierarchy from the brigade level upwards, it took over counter-intelligence activities from the military intelligence department.⁶⁹

Officers who received specialized training in military security and intelligence at Hurso and in the Soviet Union were attached to army units as military security personnel. Among other things, they were expected to protect the army from infiltration by insurgents, recruitment by foreign secret services, hostile propaganda and control plots, mutinies and to stop desertion of troops to the insurgents.⁷⁰

The military security service was, however, in a rather bad shape to carry out this huge and challenging task. Above all, the military security department that spread its tentacles in the armed forces was understaffed. For instance, there was only one security officer in a brigade.⁷¹ By 1989, there were only 550 security personnel in the ground forces⁷² whose manpower had reached nearly half a million, 497,237 men to be exact.⁷³ In terms of ratio, that would mean there was one security officer or NCO to vigilantly follow up the activities of 904 government troops and watch out an unknown number of infiltrators.

The problem was compounded by the intricate intelligence network of the insurgents and their undetectable infiltration techniques as well as effective counter-intelligence measures. These advantages enabled the insurgents to always enjoy an edge over the government military intelligence and security services.⁷⁴

Some of the intelligence and counter-intelligence techniques employed by the insurgents are worth discussing in order to illustrate the challenges of the military security service. Perhaps the most serious challenge of the military security personnel was to crack down the underground cells maintained by the insurgents in urban centres and their innumerable infiltrators and agents planted in the armed forces as well as in various government offices. All these clandestine members, infiltrators and agents kept on feeding the insurgents with all sorts of intelligence. The

government itself admitted that its security services had failed to untie the intelligence knot of the insurgents.⁷⁵

Conversely, the classified documents explicitly acknowledge the exceptional success of the insurgents, more particularly the EPLF, in training and employing females for intelligence gathering. There is now conclusive evidence supported by the Eritreans themselves confirming that the EPLF was using females in all walks of life including housewives (married to military personnel), bar ladies, waitresses, civil servants, daily labourers, etc to spy on the armed forces⁷⁶ (see Appendix- VI). A retired army general has this to say by way of corroboration: "Any force left in the field long enough will take girlfriends and mistresses, forming complex local bonds. In Eritrea, the beautiful bar girls and waitresses usually worked for the EPLF passing on careless gossip and boastful pillow talk. The Eritreans were very good at using their women."⁷⁷ With the wisdom of hindsight, another notable general regrets: "When we went to bars for a drink, we took with us our offices [i.e., our secrets], forgetting the fact that the people around us, including the guards and waitresses, were EPLF informers. Obviously, when one got drunk, one would disclose military secrets."⁷⁸

In addition to agents working in bars and hotels, the insurgents are reported to have employed shoe shine boys, street vendors, shepherds, priests, craftsmen, as well as individuals who pretended to be insane, for intelligence gathering.⁷⁹ For instance, an ex-EPRDF spy confesses that disguising himself as a shoe shine boy, he gathered intelligence about the army for four months at Woldya and for three months in Dässé. During that period, he had access to army headquarters. Since he was given some training in cartography, he could prepare sketch maps locating the disposition of troops and weapons. While doing this, he had never been suspected by the military security personnel.⁸⁰

The military security service also failed to discern that the insurgents could smuggle female fighters into some strategic towns for the purpose of intelligence gathering. In 1990, the EPRDF sent two female fighters on a special mission to Aläm Kätäma and Lämi. The fighters disguised themselves as peasant women going to town on a market day. Once they entered Aläm Kätäma, they were employed as daily labourers by local beer sellers. Since the local beer houses were frequented by soldiers, they began to gather bits and pieces of information while roasting grain and grinding *gesho* (a plant whose leaves are dried, ground and added as ingredients to raise the

alcoholic volume of local beer). Every night, they recorded what they had gathered on strips of paper that were carefully hidden inside the rags of their dresses. During their return trip, they were worried by the tight security on their way. To avoid suspicion, they decided not to wear panties like peasant women. In order to pass the check point unsuspected, they rolled, slightly chewed the pieces of paper and then inserted them inside their vaginas. That worked fine. On another mission to Lämi, they put their small pieces of paper inside the fresh butter they bought and successfully smuggled out intelligence about the airborne division stationed there. The security personnel were not aware of these missions.⁸¹

The military security also found it difficult to protect the army from infiltrators and agents working for the insurgents. Infiltration had reached such an astonishing degree that even the president's office was not immune from it. At one point, both Mängestu and Brigadier General Taddäsä T. Haymanot, the MOND's Chief of Military Intelligence, could not help being dumbfounded by EPLF's ability to access information about a harsh exchange of words between the president and Major General Fanta Bälay, which was highly private and confidential.⁸²

The MOND's classified documents shed some light on the EPLF methods of recruiting agents and infiltrating the army. According to these documents, the EPLF used to carefully study those privates, NCOs, and officers who were addicted to drinking and committing adultery and painstakingly approach them by making their preferences readily available so as to milk vital intelligence from them.⁸³ The military security personnel quite often tried to track down such members of the army who were in touch with the insurgents. But, on the whole, they failed to cut off such secret links.⁸⁴

There were also senior army commanders and operation officers who leaked information to the insurgents either out of hatred for Mängestu or due to some other personal motives, such as sympathy for the insurgents, and war weariness. The military security personnel were thus trying to protect the army from subversion and infiltration. Ironically, however, the army had already been betrayed by some of its commanders. Yevgeny Sokurov, a KGB officer who was training commandos near Asmara, reveals:

[The] disillusioned members of the SRA's high command ... were deliberately sabotaging the war effort. No matter how secret the operation, it was becoming known to the separatists. The commanders were supplying the separatists with information about their activities

because they wanted to damage Mengistu's regime, even if it meant the slaughter of their subordinates.⁸⁵

Some disgruntled operation officers were also reported to have been selling out plans of operation to the insurgents. In one of the operations around Meşewa, an EPLF briefcase full of top secret documents fell into the hands of airborne troops. One of the documents dealt with negotiations on the amount to be paid for an operation officer who had already agreed to hand over a plan of operation, along with a topographical map, to the EPLF.⁸⁶

Apart from such secret dealings, there were occasions when the army's secrets were exposed by its own personnel. As the army was approaching its demise, military discipline reached alarming proportions. The problem came to engulf radio operators. In 1989, there were frequent reports about ill-disciplined radio operators who used plain language to transmit top military secrets.⁸⁷ By intercepting these messages, the EPLF and TPLF were warning their fighters to take the necessary precaution whenever fighter or reconnaissance aircraft took off. The radio operators and crypto analysts of the insurgents are said to have been able not only to decipher almost all coded messages but also identify army commanders by their voice.⁸⁸ The situation was becoming so hopeless that some top secrets were falling into the hands of the insurgents before reaching government army units.⁸⁹ The military security was expected to punish those responsible for the breach of confidentiality. But, the classified documents do not give us any clues about corrective measures taken by the military security.

Still another responsibility of the military security was to protect combatants from hostile propaganda. Whenever government defence lines were within its reach, the EPLF used to place megaphones on trees and hills and try to broadcast its propaganda so as to erode the will of government troops to fight.⁹⁰ After 1988, EPLF and TPLF radio programmes began to attract listeners even among government soldiers. Although listening to hostile radio propaganda could result in severe punishment by the military security, combatants continued to do so until 1991.⁹¹

On the other hand, the government itself allowed hostile propaganda to take effect among the rank and file by redeploying ex-POWs who had been captured and released by the insurgents after being politicized. The propaganda these ex-POWs spread is reported to have undermined the fighting spirit of many combatants and led them to believe that surrender was not at all

dreadful. Between 1989 and 1991, more and more troops were taking that option thereby precipitating the collapse of the army.⁹²

CHAPTER FIVE

OPERATIONS 1977-1991

5.1. The Somali-Ethiopian War of 1977/78

Since its independence in 1960, the Republic of Somalia had been dreaming of unifying all the Somalis living in the Horn of Africa. Although the Republics of Djibouti and Kenya have also a sizable Somali population, it was the Ogadén region of Ethiopia that became the main target of Somalia's irredentist claims. Just four years after its independence, Somalia attempted to grab the Ogadén. But the dream of seizing the Ogadén was frustrated when the Somali invaders were swiftly beaten off by the Ethiopian army in 1964. Since then, Somalia had been biding its time until an ideal situation came up to realize its dream.¹

Such an opportunity presented itself for Somalia in 1977 as the new military government of Ethiopia was beset by what it looked like insurmountable difficulties. At the centre, the EPRP waged urban terrorism against the Därg while the latter itself was locked in internal power struggle. In northern Ethiopia, the Eritrean insurgents overran several garrison towns and besieged Bäréntu, Meşewa and Asmära. In north western Gondär, another opposition group, the EDU was waging armed struggle against the Därg. In addition, the ALF, OLF and TPLF contributed to mounting tension by carrying out ambushes and small scale operations.²

Worse still, as pointed out earlier, the United States which had been supplying military hardware to the Ethiopian armed forces for the preceding 24 years, cancelled Ethiopia from the list of recipients of American weaponry. This abrupt decision was effected by the new Carter administration, which accused the Därg of "horrendous human rights crimes."³ It seemed abundantly clear to the Somali government that, by 1977, the Ethiopian army was overstretched, under-equipped and highly vulnerable to external invasion. For Somalia, it was a golden opportunity to rout the Ethiopian army and take the Ogadén.⁴

The Ogadén lowlands stretch from Karra Mara Mountains in the north to Féfér in the south, and from the Wabé Shäbällé River in the west to the tip of the Ethio-Somali border in the east. Inhabited by the Ethiopian Somalis, this vast and arid stretch of land got its name from the largest clan, the Ogadén. In 1977, the Somali government was determined to occupy areas well

beyond the Ogadén as far as Sidamo and the Awash River, where pockets of Somali minorities exist.⁵



Fig. 5.1. The approximate areas Somalia wanted to take during the 1977/78 war.

Adapted from Expedia Maps: www.comp-archaeology.org/EthiopiaMap.gif

Before launching the full-scale invasion, the Mogadishu government created the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Somali Abbo Liberation Front (SALF) in 1975. Trained and armed by the Somali government, the WSLF and the SALF were respectively placed under Somali's Northern Command based in Hargeisa and the Southern Command stationed at Baidoa. The guerrillas received orders from Lieutenant General Muhammad Ali Samatar, the Somali Minister of Defence.⁶ Although the guerrillas operated as "the irregular units of the Somali army," the Mogadishu government tried to deceive the outside world that their movement was a home-grown insurgency.⁷

Whatever the Somali government claimed, the guerrillas were trained and commanded by Somali officers. Training included assaulting and ambushing army and police units, laying land mines and destroying tanks.⁸ With regard to their zones of operation, while the WSLF was

supposed to carry out guerrilla activities in the Ogadén and highland Harärgé, the SALF was assigned to harass government outposts in Balé and Sidamo. However, their zones of operation usually overlapped and that led to rivalry between the two guerrilla groups. Both groups are reported to have started operations in early 1976. While operating in the Ogadén, the WSLF faced no problem of winning the support and sympathy of the Somali population due to its ethnic, religious and cultural affinity. The SALF, however, found it difficult to mobilize the rural population of southern Ethiopia mainly owing to the popularity of the land proclamation issued by the Därg in March 1975. Guerrilla operations were attended by demolishing government structures, harassing isolated army and police units and terrorizing the local population. More particularly, guerrillas slaughtered Christian settlers in Harärgé, Balé and Sidamo and looted or destroyed their property.⁹

By the end of 1976, the guerrillas stepped up their operation throughout the Ogadén and in the lowlands of Balé and Sidamo. The police and army units scattered in the remote corners of Harärgé, Balé and Sidamo were ill-prepared to beat off the guerrillas. They had to retreat to garrison towns like Godé, Wardér, Awaré, Qäbri Dähar, Dägähabur, El Karré, Filtu and Nägällé. The guerrillas were mostly armed with AK-47 and M-16 assault rifles. Once they attacked isolated police posts and army units, they swiftly dispersed to avoid reprisal air strikes by the Ethiopian air force. The steady flow of arms from Somalia encouraged the guerrillas to intensify their operation. According to MOND reports, by 1977, the guerrillas were estimated at 63,000 men.¹⁰

The guerrillas began to disrupt surface transport from and to garrison towns. Military as well as civilian vehicles were either ambushed or destroyed by land mines. Moving along the Harär-Jijiga (105 kilometers) and the Jijiga-Dägähabur (167 kilometers) road became increasingly dangerous. On February 11, 1977 (Yäkatit 4, 1969 E.C), for instance, the guerrillas ambushed military vehicles along the Jijiga-Dägähabur road, killing 25 and wounding 24 soldiers. Similarly, sometime later, they intercepted a police unit near Filtu in south eastern Sidamo and killed all members. The garrison towns in the Ogadén as well as in the lowlands of Balé and Sidamo were in most cases put under siege. In April 1977, the WSLF guerrillas took control of Sägäg in the heart of the Ogadén.¹¹

The military situation in Eritrea was no better. By early 1977, the insurgents had already captured most of the garrison towns and tightened the siege of the provincial capital, Asmara. The army on both fronts was on the verge of collapse. Worse still, the power struggle within the Därg had undermined military leadership in the periphery. On February 3, 1977 (ፕጥ 26, 1969 E.C), however, Mängestu H. Maryam emerged as undisputed head of the military government by summarily executing seven Därg members. Then, the government began to take swift measures to avoid the army's total defeat on both fronts. One of such measures was embarking on the training of a huge militia force at a new camp named Taṭäq ("get armed") set up a few kilometers west of Addis Abäba.¹² A year earlier, the Därg had gathered tens of thousands of peasants from the northern provinces and sent them off to the northern front to wipe out the Eritrean insurgents. The peasants had received no training in counter-insurgency and they were armed with obsolete rifles. As a result, they were decimated by the insurgents even before crossing into Eritrea. The peasant march, known as the "Raza Operation" was thus a complete failure.¹³

In an attempt to rectify earlier mistakes, the government brought Cuban instructors to train the new people's militia at Taṭäq. Once peasants were recruited from all over the country, training began by the end of April 1977. In two rounds between April 1977 and January 1978, the government trained and deployed a total of 143,350 militiamen.¹⁴ But, the Därg had publicly declared that it was training a red army of 300,000 men,¹⁵ probably to boost the morale of the troops fighting on both fronts and to terrify the Somalis as well as the northern insurgents.

Arming the people's militia was a serious challenge for the government at a time when Ethiopia had no major arms supplier. The United States had already terminated the shipment of American weapons to Ethiopia by the end of April 1977.¹⁶ The American government is even said to have denied Ethiopia of the arms it had already paid for.¹⁷

The freezing of American arms deliveries forced the Därg to make an immediate deal with the Soviet Union. Accordingly, during his visit to Moscow, Mängestu signed a military aid agreement with the Soviet leaders in May 1977.¹⁸ However, the agreement did not lead to immediate shipment of arms to Ethiopia. Until the acquisition of Soviet weaponry, the Därg tried to purchase arms from China, North Korea and Israel.¹⁹

Though the Därg managed to procure small arms from several sources, it pinned its hope on the Soviet Union for the delivery of heavy weapons. Despite the signing of the second Ethio-Soviet agreement in May 1977, however, Ethiopian intelligence sources, as discussed earlier, revealed that the Soviets had continued to deliver weapons and spare parts to Somalia and Soviet military personnel were still actively serving as advisers in Somalia. This news filled the Därg officials with dismay.²⁰

Emboldened by the continuous flow of Soviet arms to Somalia, the WSLF guerrillas under the command of a Somali officer attacked the Diré Dawa airfield and damaged several airplanes on May 31, 1977 (Genbot 23, 1969 E. C). This was an attempt to incapacitate the Ethiopian air force for the impending full scale invasion.²¹ On the next day, the guerrillas blew up three bridges along the Addis Abäba-Djibouti railway. Since the bulk of the country's import-export trade passed through the port of Djibouti, the attack was intended to strangle the Ethiopian economy.²²

While such terrorist attacks were being carried out, the Mogadishu government had already amassed men and arms for a full scale invasion. According to Ethiopian military intelligence, by July 1977, Somalia had 18 infantry, 10 motorized, 4 artillery, 3 tank, 3 commando and 2 mechanized brigades put under 4 commands. These 40 brigades were armed with 344 tanks, 736 artillery guns and mortars, 340 armoured vehicles and were supported by 49 combat aircraft. In terms of manpower, apart from the 63,000 guerrillas, there were 50,000 regular troops and 80,000 militia and 15,000 policemen.²³

Arrayed against such a huge force were 3 infantry brigades, a mechanized brigade, 2 tank and 2 artillery battalions, 2 air defence batteries with a total manpower of 9,722 regular troops and 498 policemen. These army and paramilitary units were scattered all over the vast plains of the Ogadén. While the 10th mechanized brigade was stationed at Jijiga, the 5th, 9th and 11th infantry brigades were respectively based at Godé, Qäbri Dähar and Dägähabur. In addition, an infantry battalion was stationed at each frontier outpost such as Awaré, Wardér, Gäladin and Mustahil. All these army units were placed under the 3rd Division headquartered in Harär.²⁴

The Somali government appeared to have believed that its forces could easily overrun the defences of those isolated units in the Ogadén. Although preparation for a full scale invasion was

in full swing, the Soviets assured the Ethiopian government that Somalia would not attack Ethiopia. Taking the Soviet assurance for granted, the Ethiopian government transferred the 9th mechanized battalion based at Jijiga to Eritrea. Likewise, the Gäset artillery unit of the 3rd Division was moved to Gondär to fight off the EDU forces that had already advanced as far as Tekel Dengay, not far from Gondär town. The 33rd infantry battalion was also taken from the Ogadén and deployed in the Afar lowlands to hunt down guerrillas. The 6th and 25th infantry battalions had already left the Ogadén two years earlier to south Gondär to crush the forces of *Gerazmach* Admasu Bälay, former secretary of Däbrä Tabor *Awraja*, who had raised the standard of rebellion in 1975 against the Därg. The transfer of all these army units to other fronts further weakened Ethiopian defences in the Ogadén and created an ideal situation for the Somali invasion.²⁵

The MOND classified documents reveal that the full scale Somali invasion came on Tuesday July 12, 1977 (Hämlé 5, 1969 according to the Ethiopian calendar). The date of the invasion was not, therefore, July 13 or July 23 as several authors have been trying to tell us. The four-pronged Somali offensive was directed to Diré Dawa, Jijiga, Godé-Qäbri Dähar and Nägällé.²⁶

At the beginning of the invasion, the Somalis enjoyed numerical and technical superiority in main battle tanks, artillery guns, armoured vehicles and combat aircraft. For instance, Soviet-made T-54 and T-55 main battle tanks "had bigger guns, better armour, greater range and more maneuverability than Ethiopia's aging M-41 and M-47 [American made] tanks."²⁷ Similarly, Ethiopia's American made 155mm artillery pieces were outmaneuvered and outranged by Somalia's Soviet made 122mm D-30 field howitzer guns. Over the years, the Soviets had been arming Somalia's armed forces with the latest weapons. Somali commanders calculated that their stockpiles of Soviet arsenal would enable them to successfully wage the war for six months. They anticipated that once they learnt of the invasion, the Soviets may terminate the flow of arms and spare parts to Somalia. The Somali objective was thus to occupy the whole of the Ogadén and the neighbouring Somali-inhabited areas by December 1977, before the suspension of Soviet arms could have a serious impact on their offensive. The Somali calculation was almost fairly accurate and the anticipated Soviet arms cuts turned out to be right.²⁸



Fig. 5.2. The Somali offensive in July-August 1977

Adapted from web map: www.usask.ca/agriculture/soilsa/Ethiopia-map.jpg

The Somali lightning offensive was accompanied by mechanized assaults, artillery barrages and air strikes. Though immensely outnumbered and outgunned by the Somalis, the Ethiopian army units stationed at Wardér, Qäbri Dähar and Godé managed to resist the assailants for 12 days with the close support of the air force. Since the Somalis had cut off supply routes between Harär and the garrison towns, it became increasingly difficult to reinforce and supply those isolated army units in the Ogadén. The evacuation of civilians from the garrison towns was equally challenging. Soon after the fall of the Godé airport into Somali hands, the government rushed a militia brigade and an infantry company to Godé to reinforce the army there. However, whether by accident or design, the 79th militia brigade received wrong bullets which rendered the reinforcement useless. Having suffered heavy losses, the army at Godé retreated in disorder to Dänan on July 14, 1977 (Hämlé 7, 1969 E.C). While moving to Qäbri Dähar to join the 9th Brigade, troops of the 5th Brigade were informed about the evacuation of the garrison town. They were rather ordered to retreat to Sägäg. But they got lost in the wilderness and it was only

through the guidance of airplanes that they could finally reach Harär. The battalions at El Karré and Imi were also told to retreat to Bäré and Ginir.²⁹

The 22nd Battalion at Wardér also retreated to Awaré on July 26, 1977 (Hämlé 19, 1969 E.C), after inflicting heavy damage on the Somalis. Likewise, the 3rd battalion at Gäladin made a tactical retreat and entered Awaré on July 29 destroying Somali contingents on its way. The 40th battalion, which had been stationed at Awaré, was unable to make an orderly retreat and suffered heavy losses. Its remnants managed to make their way to Harär through Jijiga along with the 3rd and 22nd battalions. However, the proximity of Awaré to the border made reinforcement of the army units or the evacuation of civilians very difficult. The Ethiopian jet fighters could not stay in the area for an extended time due to the danger of being shot down by Somali combat aircraft or anti-aircraft weapons. Civilian airplanes could not make day time flights to the area for similar reasons. On a mission that seemed impossible, two DC-119 airplanes landed at night to unload fuel and ammunition and they managed to evacuate women and children on their return flight.³⁰

The situation for the other units was equally precarious. The 9th brigade retreated after inflicting heavy damage on the Somalis. The 2nd tank battalion in particular destroyed several Somali tanks before leaving its positions. Although the troops were told to swiftly move to Dägähabur to reinforce the 11th brigade there, they rejected the order, complaining that their families should first be evacuated. Then, instead of moving to Dägähabur, they retreated to Harär through Sägäg, Fiq and Babbillé. The 5th battalion at Mustahil also marched a long way along the border to Dolo, then to Filtu and Nägällé, before ending up in Addis Abäba.³¹ The retreating troops had enormous challenges. They walked an average distance of 400 kilometers along with children and the elderly through the arid lowlands of the Ogadén. They trekked through routes and passes full of ambushes and land mines. That took them 22 days' arduous trip to reach Harär. But the 11th brigade based at Dägähabur continued the resistance under the command of Colonel Eshätu Mäkonnen. Among the 31 Somali tanks rolling toward Dägähabur, the 11th brigade destroyed 26 of them and it held its position until July 31, 1977 (Hämlé 24, 1969 E.C).³²

As the Ethiopian forces withdrew from several garrison towns, the Somalis were in control of a sizable portion of the Ogadén. Just four days after the beginning of the invasion, the Somalis made a deep thrust and tried to take Diré Dawa through a surprise attack. The Somalis seemed to be well aware of the enormous strategic importance of Diré Dawa. In addition to being a major

industrial town, Diré Dawa is located at a vital intersection between the Addis Abäba-Djibouti railway and the Addis Abäba-Harär road. More importantly, the second largest airfield and several military depots were also found in Diré Dawa. The capture of Diré Dawa by the Somalis would, therefore, be a great strategic victory which could determine the course of the war in favour of Somalia. To that end, the Somalis deployed an infantry brigade, two artillery battalions, a tank battalion, a BM rocket battery and three brigades of the WSLF guerrillas on the Diré Dawa front. The invaders launched the attack on Diré Dawa on July 16, 1977 (Hämlé 9, 1969 E.C), at 0400 hours.³³

Led by Lt. Colonel Täkaleñ Negussé, the defenders (the 78th Brigade, the 7th Infantry Battalion, the 216th Näbälbal (flame) Battalion and the 752nd Militia Battalion) were enormously outnumbered and outgunned by the Somalis. The battle raged until 1100 hours and the Somalis pushed the defenders back to the suburbs of the town. At that critical moment, reinforcements arrived from Harär. With close air support, the troops from Harär helped the defenders to turn the tide. Through a counter-offensive, they drove the Somalis back 20 kilometers and captured various weapons.³⁴

Once they were beaten off, the Somalis delayed the second assault on Diré Dawa until they controlled the garrison towns in the Ogadén, southern Sidamo and Balé. Thus, between July 30 and August 8, 1977 (23/11/69 – 2/12/69 E.C), the Somalis captured Dolo, El Karré and Filtu. Within a matter of 3-4 weeks, the Somalis succeeded in penetrating 700 kilometers deep into southeastern and 300 kilometers into southern Ethiopia. The Somalis completed the first stage of their offensive with tremendous success by the middle of August.³⁵

The second stage of the Somali offensive aimed at concentrating their forces around Jijiga, Harär and Diré Dawa to take control of these major towns. The Somalis launched the second major assault on Diré Dawa on August 16, 1977 (Nähasé, 10, 1969 E.C). The Mogadishu government deployed to the Diré Dawa front two motorized and two infantry brigades, a tank brigade with 49 tanks, an artillery brigade with 62 guns and an air defence battery with 18 anti-aircraft weapons. All these units were put under the command of Brigadier General Mohammad Nur Galal. But the Somali advance was not without problems. While marching on Diré Dawa, the Somalis were clearly seen from the air. Taking off from the Diré Dawa air base, the air force repeatedly

bombed Somali columns.³⁶ Despite repeated air strikes, the Somalis continued their advance to Diré Dawa. But the mountains to the east of the town prevented them from deploying their tanks and armoured vehicles. As a result, they were forced to make a detour to the west and move from Haräwa along the railway to the town. The defenders of Diré Dawa had already been reinforced by the 2nd Militia Brigade and a tank battalion. However, torrential rain made roads muddy and that immobilized tanks and armoured vehicles.³⁷

The Somalis began assaulting Ethiopian positions at 0500 hours with tank and artillery shells. Not only did Somali artillery barrage throw the population into panic, it also destroyed the air traffic control tower at the airport and damaged the cotton, meat and cement factories. At that moment, nature was on their side. The foggy weather prevented the Ethiopian air force from bombing Somali positions and halting the Somali advance.³⁸ That helped the Somalis to intensify their close-in offensive toward the town. As the Somalis tightened the noose around Diré Dawa, all the airplanes were transferred to the Däbrä Zäyet air base. As a result, Somali tanks rolled to the Diré Dawa airfield and blew up the Total fuel depot nearby. Of the two tanks Ethiopians possessed at the time, one was disabled by mud. At that critical moment, reinforcements arrived from Harär with two tanks and BRDM armoured vehicles. The battle continued to rage around the outskirts of the town for several hours. The Somalis were very close to capturing the town. While fierce fighting was going on, workers of the cotton factory in particular and the dwellers of the town in general provided vital support to the army. Cart drivers in particular played a crucial role in evacuating the wounded and moving supplies to the defenders. In the meantime, the weather showed some improvement. Fighter jets from Däbrä Zäyt relentlessly struck Somali positions and decimated more than a dozen Somali tanks. That tipped the balance in Ethiopia's favour. At 1500 hours, the Ethiopian army mounted a counter-offensive. The Somalis were thrown back by 22 kilometers along the railway and pushed back in the direction of Jaldéssa by 18 kilometers. The army soon built defence lines at Elbah and Hämärka, northeast of Diré Dawa. During the retreat, the Somalis left behind all sorts of light and heavy weapons including tanks and artillery guns. The failure of the Somalis to effectively use their artillery to get maximum effect, their inability to use vantage ground, the staunchness of the defenders, the patriotic resistance of the people of Diré Dawa and the close air support by the air force contributed to the defeat of the invaders.³⁹ Given the huge strategic importance of Diré Dawa, the successful defence of the town "was a sweet victory for the Ethiopians."⁴⁰

As the war entered a critical stage, the Därg took a series of measures. One of these was the establishment of the National Revolutionary Operations Command (NROC) under the leadership of Mängestu H. Maryam in July 1977. The NROC set up two regional commands – the Northern Command in Asmära and the Eastern Command in Harär under the leadership of Colonel (later Major General) Haylu G. Mikaél and Colonel (later Brigadier General) Eshätu Mäkonnen respectively.⁴¹ Secondly, the Ethiopian government urged the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to officially denounce Somalia's flagrant and unprovoked aggression against Ethiopia. The OAU dutifully authorized its mediation committee to pass a resolution on the Somali-Ethiopian war. Accordingly, in its meeting held in Libreville between August 5 and 9, 1977 (Hämlé 29 – Nähasé 3, 1969 E.C), the mediation committee composed of eight member states "reaffirmed the inviolability of African frontiers," thus supporting Ethiopia's stand. The OAU's position had its own impact on Somalia's foreign relations.⁴²

Thirdly, on August 20, 1977 (Nähasé 14, 1969 E.C), Mängestu made a national call urging the Ethiopian people to take up arms against the Somali invaders.⁴³ That was followed three weeks later by a call of arms to all veterans under the age of 60 to enlist in the army. At the same time, the people of Diré Dawa, Harär and Jijiga were urged to rise up in arms against the invaders. While all medical personnel were asked to volunteer to treat the wounded on the war front, government and private organizations were told to put all their public and freight transport vehicles at the NROC's disposal.⁴⁴

As the government was trying to rally the masses to the defence of the country, the Somalis again concentrated their forces on the Jijiga front in August 1977. They soon formed a task force under the command of Brigadier General Ahmed Salhan with the purpose of capturing Jijiga and the strategic Karra Mara Mountains. The task force included 5 motorized brigades, 2 tank brigades (with 124 tanks), 3 infantry brigades, a commando brigade, and 6 artillery battalions (with 72 guns).⁴⁵

Confronting this huge force were the 10th mechanized brigade and 2 tank battalions with 42 tanks put under the command of Lt. Colonel Haylé Täsfa Mikaél. Though greatly outnumbered and outgunned by the Somalis, the mechanized units around Jijiga managed to defend their positions with the support of the air force until mid-August 1977. Then, the 92nd Militia Brigade arrived in mid- August to strengthen the defences around Jijiga. Failure to overrun Ethiopian defences

forced the Somali commanders to change their tactic. Instead of committing all their forces to frontal assaults, they deployed the 3rd motorized brigade and thousands of the WSLF guerrillas behind Ethiopian lines to cut off the Harär-Jijiga supply route. That manoeuvre forced the 10th Mechanized Brigade to send back some of its units along the Jijiga-Harär road. The Somalis came to discover that the mechanized units were now overstretched and could not withstand their persistent onslaught. On August 30, 1977 (Nähasé 24, 1969 E.C), by employing intensive artillery barrage, fierce tank assault and heavy aerial bombardment, they captured Jijiga and forced the Ethiopian army to retreat to Adäw, a small town on the western foot of Mt. Karra Mara.⁴⁶ Despite the army's failure to hold out its position, the air force destroyed more than 20 Somali tanks and artillery pieces.⁴⁷

Following a brief rehabilitation and much agitation, Ethiopian forces counter-attacked the Somalis and liberated Jijiga on the next day. The Somalis left behind several tanks and other heavy weapons. As the army entered Jijiga, Mängestu arrived in Harär to boost the morale of the fighting men and give orders on the spot. On September 1, 1977 (Nähasé 26, 1969 E.C), after being briefed by an intelligence officer about the situation, Mängestu proceeded to Jijiga at the head of the 18th Infantry Battalion and the 3rd Division advance headquarters. The 3rd Motorized battalion also moved to Jijiga as a rearguard. On his way, Mängestu met a Somali force that had slipped behind Ethiopian lines to cut off the Jijiga-Harär road. The small army under his command fought its way from Fäfäm to Adäw. Mängestu triumphantly entered Jijiga followed by the 3rd Motorized Battalion. While Mängestu was in Jijiga, all Somali artillery guns fell silent and the day was quite peaceful. That enabled Mängestu to inspect Ethiopian defence lines by helicopter. Before leaving Jijiga by helicopter, Mängestu ordered the army to heroically defend Jijiga.⁴⁸

But Mängestu's orders went unheeded as the Somalis launched a fresh and a more determined offensive on September 9. They continuously hailed BM rockets and artillery shells on Ethiopian positions. At that critical moment, opponents in the army who are reported to have affiliation with opposition political organizations began to agitate troops to abandon their positions and turn against the military government. The agitation brought about anarchy and retreat. Some units are said to have killed their commanders. To make matters worse, the radar that had been installed on the summit of Mt. Karra Mara was destroyed by Somali fire. That undermined the capability

of the Ethiopian air force to track down Somali combat aircraft. The destruction of the radar station triggered a mass retreat to Adäw. At that point, the army could not get the much-needed close air support for the jet fighters were showing aerobatics in Addis Abäba to mark the third anniversary of the Revolution. When the Somalis began to target Adäw with artillery shells, the army continued its full retreat to Qoré.⁴⁹

On September 12, 1977 (Mäskäräm 2, 1970 E.C), the Somalis captured Jijiga town. The third anniversary of the Ethiopian revolution was celebrated on the same day with bitterness and humiliation. But why did the army lose the battle at Jijiga? Political parties that were opposed to the Därg, mainly the EPRP and *Meison*, did have members and sympathizers in the army. The agitation of such soldiers had of course contributed to the Ethiopian defeat. But it was not the sole reason for the defeat. Equally important is the fact that there was an enormous disparity in fire power. The Ethiopian troops could not endure the Somali rocket and artillery barrage to the end. In addition, there was no cohesion among the various units of the army. The militia units were at odds with the regular troops. The latter "received larger and better rations and their monthly paycheck was four times fatter than that of the militia." That resulted in mutiny and reluctance to fight off the Somalis. A combination of all these factors led to the Ethiopian defeat at Jijiga.⁵⁰

Worse still, on September 13, Mt. Karra Mara, which had huge strategic importance, fell into Somali hands. Colonel (later Lieutenant General) Täsfayé G. Kidan was assigned to coordinate the fighting around Jijiga. In a letter to Mängestu, he claimed that he was left behind at Karra Mara by the retreating troops. But the truth is quite different. He was not at Karra Mara during those perilous moments. He was the one who ordered the army to retreat. Mängestu's orders that Mt. Karra Mara should be defended at all costs were simply ignored not only by the retreating troops but also by his own commanders.⁵¹ It was, however, possible to finally halt the panic-stricken troops at Qoré, a place located midway between Jijiga and Harär. As the Somali artillery shells fell in their midst, the troops at Qoré were once again in a state of panic. The 3rd Division, which had already set up its advance headquarters at Qoré, began to take harsh measures against retreating soldiers. In addition, on September 13, the troops at Qoré held a meeting and vowed not only to defend their positions but also to shoot retreating soldiers on the spot. In the

meantime, air force pilots were given a free hand to strike friendly troops in case of retreat. Those blamed for the retreat from Jijiga were executed to avoid similar setbacks.⁵²



Fig. 5.3 Somali-controlled areas in September 1977

Adapted from web map: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/Africa/Ethiopia_rel99.jpg

The execution of dissidents did stabilize the Qoré defences set up on a relatively high ground to enable the army to halt Somali advances. By mid-September, the NROC designed a plan known as “Operation Awrora” to defend Harär and Diré Dawa towns, to safeguard the Addis Ababa-Harär road and to reopen the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway. While Operation Awrora was being designed, the Somalis were preparing trenches and placing land mines at strategic passes between Qoré and Mt. Karra Mara to make Ethiopian counter-offensive difficult. However, by suspending their offensive for a week, the Somalis not only lost the momentum but also allowed Ethiopians to strengthen their defences and bring in fresh troops to Qoré.⁵³ Qoré was now defended by the 2nd, 4th, 10th, and 12th artillery battalions, the 3rd tank battalion, the 4th air defence battery, the 3rd, 5th, 18th and 33rd infantry battalions, the 021 veterans battalion, a company of engineers and the 3rd auxiliary unit.⁵⁴ When a Somali mechanized brigade made a

frontal assault on September 20 to overrun the Qoré defences, it was quickly beaten off. The commander of the Somali mechanized brigade later admitted that his unit had "suffered 60 percent casualties."⁵⁵ Again on September 26, 1977 (Mäskäräm 16, 1970 E.C), a Somali task force bypassed Qoré from the south and attempted to manoeuvre Ethiopian units in the rear. Nevertheless, led by its new commander, Colonel Yelma Gezaw, the 3rd Division, repulsed the Somalis.⁵⁶

While the army was fighting hard to stop the Somali advances, the Därg kept on pressing the Soviets to deliver substantial amount of arms to Ethiopia. The Soviets responded in affirmative: they supplied Ethiopia with T-55 tanks, multiple BM rocket launchers and MiG-21 fighter planes in late September 1977.⁵⁷ Two weeks later, the Därg received another good news: the termination of Soviet arms delivery to Somalia. The Soviets were thus committed to help Ethiopia.⁵⁸

The Ethiopian army that had long been acquainted with American weapons had to familiarize itself with the new Soviet military technology. That was achieved fairly quickly. Not only did the militia units get acquainted with Soviet weapons but they also gained considerable "combat experience." In tandem with that, as a gesture of socialist solidarity, South Yemen sent in late September two armoured battalions to Ethiopia. By October 1977, with the assistance of the South Yemeni troops, the first tank unit armed with Soviet made T-34 main battle tanks was ready for combat.⁵⁹

While all such developments boosted the morale of Ethiopian troops, the Somalis began to run into difficulties. Until the fall of Jijiga into their hands, the Somali army had been unreservedly supported by the Ethiopian Somalis living in the Ogadén. As the Somali forces tried to move beyond Jijiga, however, the support they had been enjoying vanished into thin air and they found themselves in "hostile territory." Unlike the inhabitants of the lowlands, the highlanders regarded the Somalis as invaders and they began to harass them in every way possible. Besides, the landscape beyond Jijiga proved unsuitable and difficult for Somali mechanized operation. To make matters worse, as they penetrated very deep into the interior, their supply lines were overstretched across 700 kilometers in the southeast and 300 kilometers in the south. These overextended supply lines were targeted by the Ethiopian air force, which had already reigned

supreme in the skies. As a result, Somalia's two month long lightning offensive gave way to stalemated fighting from mid- September onwards.⁶⁰

Even then, in order not to let the strategic initiative slip out of their hands, the Somalis resumed their offensive, this time to take Harär. To that end, they employed two tactics. First, they tried to overrun the Qoré defences through intensive artillery barrage and frontal tank assault. To withstand Somali artillery shells, the Qoré troops strengthened their defences with strong bunkers. Meanwhile, the government threw every available force to Qoré. Accordingly, the Qoré troops were reinforced by the 219th Năbălbă Battalion, the 74th Militia Brigade, the 2nd Tank Battalion and an artillery battalion with 122mm guns. Secondly, the Somalis attempted to outflank Ethiopian defenders in the south and north. The manoeuvre in the south was just a feint attack intended to force Ethiopians to disperse the troop concentration at Qoré. Though the Somalis in the south were quickly beaten off, the engagement in the north was extremely fierce. Probably the bloodiest battle of the whole war was fought between October 8 and November 5, 1977 (Măskărăm 28 – Ţekemt 26, 1970 E.C) to control Dalăcha, a strategic hill north of Qoré. The battle seesawed as Dalăcha fell into Somali hands at one time and was regained by Ethiopians soon afterwards. For instance, on October 13, the Somalis took control of Dalăcha but lost it to Ethiopians the next day. Again on October 18, the Somalis, supported by tanks and artillery guns, attempted to take Dalăcha hill. But they lost more than a battalion of men and two MiG-17 jet fighters. During the battle for Dalăcha hill, the Somalis were firing on the average 80 artillery shells every ten minutes on Ethiopian positions, causing considerable human and material damage.⁶¹

As their attempts to overrun and outflank the Qoré defences were frustrated by stiff resistance from Ethiopians, the Somalis concentrated their forces on the Fădis, Băbillé and Jarso-Kombolcha fronts to launch a three pronged offensive to take Harär. On November 10, 1977 (Hedar 1, 1970 E.C), the Somalis tried to overwhelm Ethiopians with massive firepower to capture Jarso, a small town situated 35 kilometers north of Harär. Then, on November 12, the Somalis mounted a simultaneous attack on the Fădis and Băbillé fronts so as to advance to Harär from the south and southeast.⁶²

On the next day, an event of considerable strategic importance occurred. Infuriated by Moscow's commitment to help Ethiopia, the Mogadishu government expelled all Soviet and Cuban military advisers from Somalia. In addition, Somalia unilaterally abrogated the 1974 Somali-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, denied the Soviets use of Somali military bases and severed its diplomatic relations with Cuba.⁶³

The Somali president, Mohammad Siad Barre, hoped to replace the Soviets by Americans as Ethiopia had done the reverse. In fact, as early as July 1977, the Carter administration did promise to supply Somalia with defensive weapons. Having Somalia's unprovoked aggression against Ethiopia, the U.S government made it clear that no American weapons would be supplied to Somalia as long as its forces were violating Ethiopian's territorial integrity.⁶⁴

The expulsion of Soviet and Cuban advisers from Somalia was immediately followed by a "massive airlift" of Soviet weapons to Ethiopia. The shipment of arms was accompanied by the arrival of about 1,500 Soviet military advisers and more than 12,000 Cuban combatants. While General Vasily Ivanovich Petrov, Deputy Commander of the Soviet Ground Forces, headed the Soviet military mission, General Arnaldo Ochoa Sanchez led the Cuban troops to Ethiopia.⁶⁵ The Cuban troops are said to have arrived with their own military hardware that consisted of the latest T-62 tanks. Likewise, the Soviets brought with them indispensable information about Somalia. While the Soviets, Cubans and South Yemenis (codenamed by Ethiopians "Comrades 01, 02, and 03" respectively) stood on Ethiopia's side, the Somalis had to fight "almost alone against an international colossus."⁶⁶

Having received enormous quantities of Soviet weaponry, Ethiopia came to enjoy for the first time in the war superior firepower. In the meantime, the Eastern Command concentrated additional troops on the three fronts where the Somalis had been assaulting Ethiopian positions to capture Harär. On November 23, the Somalis almost managed to overwhelm the defenders on the Fädis front and reached the suburbs of Harär, only 3 kilometers from the city centre.⁶⁷ The Somalis claimed that one of their units had even reached the walls of the Harär Military Academy in a deep thrust into the southern part of the town.⁶⁸ The timely arrival of the 2nd Paracommando Brigade enabled the defenders to beat off the Somalis through a counter-offensive. In addition to the 2nd Paracommando Brigade, the 501 People's Revolutionary Guards

(PRGs) Brigade, the 61st and 62nd Paracommando Battalions, a rapid deployment (*Fäṭno Dārash*) company, a platoon of M-41 tanks, a reconnoitering company and two artillery batteries were deployed on the Fädīs front.⁶⁹

The situation on the Jarso-Kombolcha and Babbillé fronts was also critical. On the Jarso-Kombolcha front, the Somalis had been trying to overrun Ethiopian defences starting from November 10, 1977 (Hedar 1, 1970 E.C). On November 17, the Somalis intensified their artillery barrage. As a result of the Somali renewed offensive, troops of the 76th and 96th Militia Brigades were gripped with panic and retreated to Kombolcha and Harär. Only a handful of soldiers remained behind and destroyed the army's property so as to prevent it from falling into Somali hands. Following a brief rehabilitation, the troops set up defences at Hablo, a strategic hill on the western outskirts of Jarso town. The Somalis managed not only to intercept the contingent heading to Jarso at Fälana but also to overrun the defences at Hablo, forcing the remnants to flee to Kombolcha. The Somalis inflicted heavy damage on the defenders at Jarso and Fälana. Fallen into Somali hands were two 105mm artillery guns and several vehicles along with their loads of supplies. In hot pursuit of Ethiopians retreating to Alāmaya, Amarésa and Harär, the Somalis captured part of Kombolcha town on November 25. Shortly afterwards, however, the unit that had been defending Kombolcha with heavy odds was reinforced by the 1st Paracommando Brigade and regained Kombolcha, pushing the Somalis back to Fälana.⁷⁰

On the Babbillé front, too, the Somalis made repeated onslaught to overrun Ethiopian defences so as to capture Babbillé and cut off the Harär-Qoré route. Positioned on the Babbillé front was the Second Task Force, which included the 68th, the 91st and 94th militia brigades, an anti-tank unit with 106mm guns, a platoon of M-47 tanks, the 4th tank battalion, the 013 veterans battalion, a mechanized platoon, a platoon of 4.2 mortars, the 101 workers' brigade, a BM battery and a battery of 105mm artillery guns. Despite the concentration of several army units, the Task Force was pushed back by the Somalis on November 12, who had captured several strategic points. EPRP members were allegedly blamed for the retreat. They were even accused of killing junior commanders and were summarily executed. On November 13, the Task Force mounted a counter-offensive between 0700 and 1330 hours and captured Abu Shäriif, a place located between Babbillé and Fiq towns. The Somalis are said to have sustained heavy losses. But that did not deter them from attempting another offensive.⁷¹

On November 25, the Somalis counter-attacked Ethiopian positions from three directions. But they were quickly beaten back. Two days later, a greater Somali force temporarily succeeded in dislodging Ethiopians from Abu Shārif. But shortly afterwards, the Ethiopian army regained Abu Shārif with the support of the air force.⁷²

In order to decisively crush the Somalis within the shortest possible time and to make the war less costly, a number of preparations were made. To begin with, the air force was given several missions: to make itself ready for nocturnal operations, make relentless reconnaissance flights to identify Somali concentration points, carry out bombing raids on key strategic targets deep inside Somalia, such as depots, ports, airfields, bridges as well as convoys, and then drop leaflets throughout Somali-occupied Ethiopian territory to agitate inhabitants to take up arms against the invaders. The government declared amnesty to all people who had been supporting the invaders. Secondly, the army had to strengthen its defences with trenches and bunkers so as to halt Somali advances through determined resistance. Meanwhile, it was intended to force the Somalis to throw their last strategic reserve and wear down their capability to launch an offensive. Thirdly, the army was planned to acquaint itself with the new Soviet weaponry. In this regard, the first Cuban contingent of 3,000 troops, which had arrived in December 1977, did a commendable job in training Ethiopians in the use of Soviet T-54 and T-55 main battle tanks as well as heavy artillery. In addition, the main strike force made a joint military exercise in offensive tactics with Cuban tank and artillery units. Fourthly, the regular and militia units deployed on several fronts were organized into seven divisions. These were the 3rd, 4th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th infantry divisions. In the meantime, all sorts of vehicles were made available to move rations, arms and ammunition as well as fuel and lubricating oil to the war front. Finally, "fifth columnists" who had been blamed for the army's retreat on several occasions were executed.⁷³

On the eve of the Ethiopian counter-offensive, the government amassed 64,500 combatants organized into 33 infantry brigades, 2 motorized brigades armed with 300 tanks and 156 artillery guns. On the other hand, the Somalis had 126,000 troops organized into 22 infantry brigades, four motorized brigades and a mechanized brigade with 135 tanks, 205 artillery guns and 100 armoured vehicles.⁷⁴

The plan of operation for the counter-offensive had already been designed by the Supreme Military Strategic Committee (SMSC) headquartered in Harär. The SMSC was made up of

Ethiopian senior officers (drawn from the NROC and the Eastern Command) and Soviet and Cuban military advisers. The Ethiopian high command included Brigadier General Tayyé Telahun, Minister of Defence, Colonel (later Major General) Fanta Bälay, Commander of the Air Force, Colonel (later Major General) Mulatu Nägash, Commander of the Eastern Command, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Mäsfen Gäbrä Qal, Operations Officer of the Eastern Command, and Major (later Brigadier General) Taddäsä T. Haymanot, Intelligence Officer of the Eastern Command. The Soviet group included General Petrov, head of the military mission, and General Gregory Barisov, former chief adviser to the Somali armed forces.⁷⁵

According to the SMSC's plan, the counter-offensive was planned to be executed in five stages. In the first and second stages, Ethiopian forces would dislodge the Somalis from the Fädis and Diré Dawa fronts respectively. After liberating all the areas north of Harär in the third stage, the army units from Diré Dawa and Kombolcha would meet at Chenhaksän and resume their counter-offensive toward Jijiga. In the fourth stage, the army units advancing to Jijiga from the north and those from Qoré would converge on Mt. Karra Mara and liberate Jijiga. In the last stage, the army would eject the Somalis from the whole of the Ogadén, Balé and Sidamo.⁷⁶

By January 1978, the Ethiopian forces, now named the First Revolutionary Liberation Army (FRLA), were well positioned to launch a large scale counter-offensive. While the army was making its last minute preparation for a counter-offensive, the Somalis mounted a preemptive strike on Ethiopian positions on January 22, 1978 (Ṭer 14, 1970 E.C) and tried to advance to Harär from Babbillé (east), Awoday (west), Fädis (south) and Kombolcha (north). In the west, they attempted to cut off the Diré Dawa-Harär road by surging toward Awoday (a small town located between Harär and Alämaya) and Amarésa some 5 kilometers west of Harär.⁷⁷ On the same day, the Somalis pounded Babbillé with artillery shells and BM rockets. Then, their infantry and tank units made a coordinated assault on Ethiopian positions to take Babbillé. The Somalis did manage to dislodge Ethiopian infantry units from both sides of Abu Shärif. But a tank unit and a group of veterans held out their positions until reinforcements arrived. Between January 22 and 24, the Somalis lost hundreds of their troops, 8 tanks, a BM-13 rocket launcher and several artillery pieces. On the Awoday-Amarésa front, too, the Somalis suffered heavy losses. Once more, the 2nd Paracommando Brigade saved Harär by beating off the Somalis

around Amarésa and Awoday. On the same front, Ethiopian jet fighters destroyed Somali tanks, APCs and artillery guns in 86 sorties.⁷⁸

Once the threat on the Awoday-Amarésa line was averted, the Ethiopian army swiftly moved to the Fädís front and counter-attacked the Somalis on January 25. On the next day, following an intensive artillery barrage that lasted 20 minutes, Ethiopian infantrymen, closely supported by the air force, routed two Somali tank battalions on the Fädís front and captured enormous heavy weapons and ammunition.⁷⁹

Soon after the liberation of Fädís, the army moved on to the second stage of the counter-offensive on the Diré Dawa front. Reconnaissance flights over the area confirmed that the Somalis had concentrated the bulk of their forces at Haräwa and Jaldéssa, northeast of Diré Dawa. Entrenched along the Haräwa-Jaldéssa line were nine Somali infantry brigades, a tank brigade with 57 tanks, an artillery battalion with 60 guns and a mechanized battalion with 30 APCs. Poised against the Somalis on the Diré Dawa front were the 78th Brigade, the 7th Battalion, a tank company from the 9th Battalion, a battery of BM-21 rockets, a battery of 105mm artillery guns, a platoon of 106mm anti-tank platoon, the 4th Mechanized Company and the 61st Paracommando Battalion. On the Jaldéssa front, the 69th and the 75th Brigades, an anti-tank platoon, the 80th tank battalion, a tank company from the 9th battalion, an infantry battalion from the 93rd Brigade, the 201 Nábälbal Battalion, the 791st infantry battalion and the 16th infantry battalion were deployed.⁸⁰

On January 31, 1978 (ፕፕ 23, 1970 E.C), the 9th Division deployed a tank battalion along the Diré Dawa-Harär road and an artillery battalion to Hawalé (south of Diré Dawa) for deception purposes. The movement of troops and weapons in broad daylight to the south and east of Diré Dawa deceived the Somalis, who came to believe that the next Ethiopian counter-offensive would be directed in those directions. The Somalis around Haräwa were taken by complete surprise when the Ethiopian and Cuban units launched a counter-offensive on Somali positions on February 1, at 0700 hours. On the way to Haräwa, a BTR APC and two tanks belonging to Cuban units were destroyed by friendly land mines washed away by flood. Despite such setbacks, the joint Ethiopian-Cuban troops swiftly surged toward Haräwa. The panic-stricken Somalis had no time to even eat the food they had cooked. They left behind a number of tanks,

APCs, artillery pieces, machine guns and food supplies. While most of the Somali APCs that had been retreating were destroyed by Ethiopian jet fighters and bombers, the remaining few fell into cliffs and ditches. Leaving the 782nd battalion to look after captured property, the other units, spearheaded by Cuban troops, outflanked the Somalis at Jaldéssa.⁸¹ The attack on Jaldéssa began on February 4, 1978 (ፕፕ 27, 1970 E.C). When the Cuban troops were making a wide enveloping move to attack them from behind, the Somalis at first thought that a friendly force was on its way to reinforce them. Having discovered the danger of being cut off and annihilated, the Somalis retreated in disarray toward Anäno Miṭé, leaving their arms and supplies behind. The 9th Tank Battalion, the 201 Nābälbal Battalion, the 75th Militia Brigade, the 69th Militia Brigade (reputed for its bravery) and a militia company of the 79th Brigade followed on the heels of the retreating Somalis. As they converged on Lāwonaḡi, north of Adāw, they were joined by the 108th Militia Brigade as well as the Cuban artillery battalion, tank brigade and BM rocket battalion. Meanwhile, the Somalis were reinforced by a tank battalion, a motorized brigade and an artillery battalion that enabled them to briefly capture Arabi, north of Jijiga. But they were soon overwhelmed by Ethiopian and Cuban forces. During that engagement, five Ethiopian-Cuban tanks destroyed 14 Somali tanks. An Ethiopian tank that ran out of ammunition disabled a Somali tank by colliding with it. The Ethiopian-Cuban forces then moved eastward and positioned themselves north of Jijiga for the next counter-offensive.⁸²

While units of the 9th Division and their Cuban comrades in arms advanced toward Jijiga from the north in a wide enveloping maneuver, the 10th Division on the Kombolcha front repulsed the Somalis who had attempted to overrun Ethiopian defences so as to advance to Harär. Placed under the 10th Division were the 74th and the 102nd Militia Brigades, the 1st Para Commando Brigade, the 1st Cuban tank company, the 2nd Cuban artillery battalion, a BM battery and an anti-tank platoon. Having foiled the Somali attempt to cut off the Dängägo-Diré Dawa road, the 10th Division began its counter-offensive on February 8, 1978 (Yäkatit 1, 1970 E.C). On the same day at 1800 hours, two battalions of the 1st Paracommando Brigade and the 102nd Militia Brigade liberated Jarso. On February 9, the 74th Militia Brigade took control of the Kombolcha-Jarso road and captured enormous weapons.⁸³

Meanwhile, the 75th Militia Brigade, now put under the 10th Division, was ordered to advance from Anäno Miṭé to Woday Fälana. The Somalis, who had already positioned themselves on strategic heights, forced the militia brigade to retreat. At that point, the commander of the Eastern Command moved to the war front and made some adjustments. While the 75th Militia and the 1st Paracommando Brigades were ordered to resume the counter-offensive, the 74th Militia Brigade and two battalions of the 102nd Militia Brigade remained as reservists. The renewed counter-offensive forced the Somalis to retreat to Geri Qochär, where they set up defensive lines. But on February 28, the army drove the Somalis from Geri Qochär and captured a great deal of small arms and food supplies.⁸⁴

In the next four days, however, the army could not advance owing to heavy rains and foggy weather. It was only on March 3, 1978 (Yäkatit 24, 1970 E.C) that the army was supplied with food by helicopter. On the next day, at 0900 hours, the troops, setting out from Geri Qochär, liberated Chenhaksän and moved forward to join the army coming from Arabi. On their way, they lost two tanks to land mines. After clearing off 800 land mines, the troops moved forward parallel to the Harär-Jijiga road.⁸⁵

On its part, the 8th Division on the Babbillé front was ready to strike Somali positions. Placed under its command were the 68th, the 91st and 94th Militia Brigades, the 101st Airborne Brigade, the 4th Tank Battalion, an artillery battery, a battery of BM-21 rockets, the 3rd Paracommando Brigade, a Cuban BM battery, and a tank battalion as well as two artillery battalions (one Cuban and one Ethiopian). Units of the 8th Division were assigned to open up the Babbillé-Fiq road and then move on to other towns in the Ogadén. On March 4, at 1500 hours, they captured a strategic point along the Babbillé-Fiq road named Sheikh Ahmad-Sheikh Indris. But Somali artillery barrage made further advance difficult. The army even retreated from the places it had captured. After reinforcements, the army regained Sheikh Ahmad-Sheikh Indris. On March 8, at 1130 hours, Ethiopian units liberated the town of Fiq. Two days later, they entered another small town in the heart of the Ogadén named Sägäg.⁸⁶

Conditions on the Qoré front were also favourable to Ethiopian forces. Deployed on the Qoré front was the 3rd Division, consisting of the 10th Mechanized Brigade, the 9th Infantry Brigade, the 3rd, 5th and 18th infantry battalions, the 219th Näbälbal Battalion, the 74th and 90th Militia

Brigades, the 4th artillery battalion, a BM-21 battalion, an artillery battalion with 122mm guns, a battery of 105mm guns, the 2nd tank battalion and an anti-tank battery. Likewise, positioned along the Gursum line were the 92nd militia brigade, the 023 veterans battalion, a battery of 105mm guns, a tank platoon, and a squad of combat engineers.⁸⁷

The earlier operations carried out by the 9th, 10th and 11th divisions and their outflanking manoeuvres toward Jijiga from the north made the 3rd division's frontal advance less difficult. One of the main objectives of the counter-offensive was to liberate Jijiga with minimal sacrifice. According to the SMSC's operational study, mounting a frontal assault on the highly fortified Somali positions along the Qoré-Jijiga line for which the Somalis were well prepared would be suicidal. Instead, an outflanking assault from the north could be less costly and likely to ensure quick victory. Accordingly, the 1st Parracommando Brigade, the 69th and 75th militia brigades and two battalions of the 74th militia brigade, in collaboration with a Cuban armoured brigade consisting of 60 - 70 tanks, outflanked the Somalis entrenched on Mt. Karra Mara and attacked them from the north, something the Somalis had not expected. What was more surprising and frustrating for the Somalis was the airlifting of Cuban troops and tanks by huge helicopters behind enemy lines so as to cut off Somali supply lines and escape routes and then attack them from the rear.⁸⁸

Of the militia units that attacked the Somalis from the north, it was the 69th brigade that received Ethiopian as well as Cuban commendation. The Cubans, for instance, praised the militia brigade thus:

marching on foot it virtually filtered into the mountain range ... advancing over muddy terrain under torrential downpours, along difficult, narrow and dangerous mountain trails armed with tanks, artillery and armoured infantry (vehicles), it came with its forward units to the other side of the mountain range on February 28th ...⁸⁹

Despite heavy artillery barrage, intensive aerial bombardment as well as coordinated tank and artillery assaults from Ethiopian-Cuban forces, the Somalis continued their stubborn resistance for three days. On the third day, however, all Somali resistance collapsed. On March 5, 1978 (Yäkatit 26, 1970 E.C) at 0900 hours, Ethiopian and Cuban troops triumphantly entered Jijiga. As the Somalis poured onto the Jijiga-Togochalé and Jijiga-Dägähabur roads in full retreat, they were subjected to relentless aerial bombardment by Ethiopian jet fighters.⁹⁰

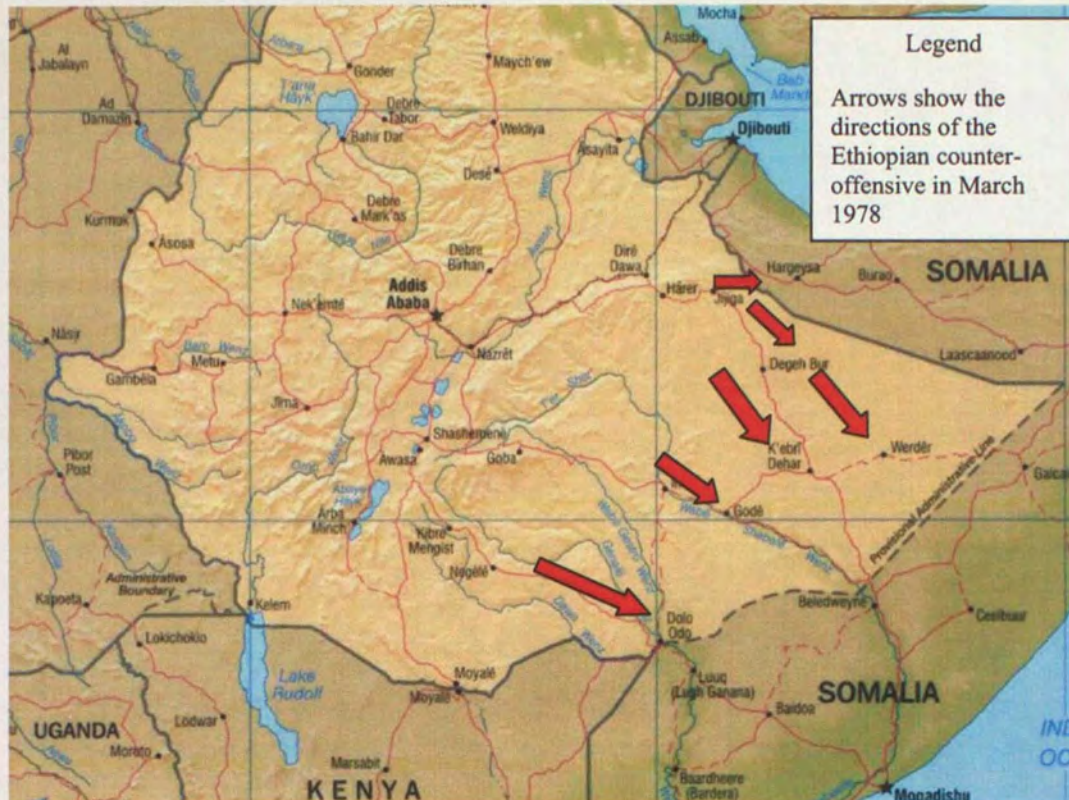


Fig. 5.4. The Ethiopian counter-offensive in March 1978

Adapted from web map: Adapted from web map: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/Africa/Ethiopia_rel99.jpg

When the 3rd Division marched from Qoré to Jijiga, it met no resistance from the Somalis. In order not to give the Somalis a breathing space to regroup, a motorized battalion from the 3rd division, the 3rd Cuban tank brigade and the surviving members of the 69th militia brigade (which lost 83 percent of its manpower before entering Jijiga) marched to Dägähabor on the same day Jijiga was liberated. The Ethiopian-Cuban troops liberated Dägähabor on March 8, 1978 (Yäkatit 29, 1970 E.C). Due to the shortage of vehicles, infantrymen had to walk long distances to other towns in the Ogadén without enough water and some died of dehydration. Even then, the 3rd battalion of the 3rd Division entered Awaré on March 12 at 1145 hours, while the 18th battalion of the same division liberated Wardér on the next day at 0850 hours. Similarly, on March 17, at 0850 hours, the 923rd battalion of the 3rd division entered Godé. A day earlier, a platoon from the 10th division had already been flown to Godé by helicopter. On March 14, the 3rd commando brigade had already liberated Qäbri Dähar. Two months later, the 68th brigade reached Qälafo.⁹¹

The 3rd, 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th divisions set up their headquarters at Dägähabur, Qäbri Dähar, Diré Dawa, Jijiga and Chenhaksän, respectively. However, due to the worsening military situation in the northern theatre, the whole of the 3rd division, most of the 10th division and a brigade from the 11th division were sent to Eritrea in early April 1978. As a result, the 11th Division was transferred to Dägähabur. Although the Somalis were on the run, the army did not yet liberate remote outposts like Mustahil, Gäladin, Shelabo and Féfér. That enabled the Somalis to resume their guerrilla operations in the next two years until a final blow was delivered by the Lash Operation of 1980.⁹²

While the Eastern Command controlled most of the Ogadén, the 4th and the 12th divisions in the southern front liberated Filtu, Dolo, Imi and El Karré between March 8 and 17, 1978.⁹³

Eventually, all guns fell silent, at least for some time, after raging for eight months. Obviously, the war brought about immeasurable human and material damage to both countries. On the Ethiopian side, a total of 17,085 troops were put out of action, of whom 5,059 were killed, 8,207 wounded, 2,423 missing in action and 1,236 men deserted the army. The causality figure included the 160 soldiers (some of whom officers) who were executed for retreat and various acts of sabotage.⁹⁴ In addition, 163 Cuban troops lost their lives.⁹⁵ Official records pertaining to South Yemeni casualties are not so far available. With regard to Ethiopian prisoners of war (POWs) who fell into Somali hands, no official figures were given until 1988. But on the eve of the exchange of POWs between Ethiopia and Somalia 10 years after the war, the MOND disclosed that a total of 2,523 Ethiopian POWs (including 206 civilians) were in Somalia. The government also revealed that there were 233 Somali POWs kept in Harär.⁹⁶ On its part, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that it had visited 226 Ethiopian POWs in Somalia and 200 Somali POWs in Ethiopia in late 1987.⁹⁷

The material damage is also quite staggering. The total value of tanks, APCs, military and civilian vehicles, food and medical supplies, engineering and communication equipment, ammunition and explosives as well as fuel destroyed during the war on the Ethiopian side was estimated at 284,509,222.98 Birr (USD 137,444,069 according to the exchange rate of the time). This included, among other weapons, 133 American and Soviet made tanks and 107 APCs.⁹⁸

Somalia also suffered heavy human losses and immense material damage. According to Ethiopian official records, 5,676 Somali troops were killed and 1,983 wounded. The table below shows the number of Somali weapons captured or destroyed.

Table 5.1: Somalia's losses in terms of weapons

No.	Type of Weapons	Captured	Destroyed	Total
1.	Tanks	72	82	154
2.	APCs	32	238	270
3.	Anti-aircraft guns	72	49	121
4.	Artillery pieces	188	107	295
5.	Military and civilian vehicles	63	561	624
6.	Combat aircraft	-	34	34
7.	Various types of rifles	27,998		27,998

Source: MOND Archives (Harär), *Ba Mesraq Enna ...*, P. 23.

The Somali full-scale invasion that began in July 1977 ended up in a disastrous defeat of the aggressor eight months later. Several factors contributed to that defeat. To begin with, Somalia's armed forces had been trained and equipped by the Soviets for over a decade. By deploying a much larger force and superior weapons, the Somalis could roll through Ethiopian defences, penetrating 700 kilometers deep into the interior. Following the expulsion of the Soviets and Cubans from Somalia, the Somali government began to face a serious shortage of vital spare parts for its Soviet made weaponry. Meanwhile, the United States refused to arm Somalia as long as it was waging a war of aggression against Ethiopia.⁹⁹ Although some Arab states like Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Pakistan supplied Somalia with some equipment, they could not arm her the way the Soviets did. In short, the Somali army was undersupplied.¹⁰⁰

In contrast, Ethiopia came to enjoy the benefits of international solidarity, which turned the scale to its favour. With the arrival of Soviet military advisers and Cuban and South Yemeni troops, Ethiopian stockpiles of Soviet weapons tremendously increased. In the meantime, the Ethiopian

fighting force continued to swell until it had reached seven divisions by January 1978. In order to carry out successful offensives, an army needs at least three or more times greater combat strength than its adversary.¹⁰¹ But Somalia lacked the demographic and economic resources to do that. Somalia's population was 10 times less than that of Ethiopia. As the fighting dragged on for months, the Somalis lost the determination and lacked the resources for a protracted war.¹⁰² At the beginning of the invasion, the Ethiopian army was immensely outnumbered and outgunned by the Somalis. Six months later, Ethiopian forces began to enjoy superiority in numbers and arms and pinned down the Somalis, forcing them to exhaust their human and material resources in static defence before the large-scale counter-offensive. Meanwhile, having penetrated 700 kilometers deep into Ethiopia, the Somalis faced a logistical nightmare. Their outstretched supply lines became highly vulnerable to Ethiopian air strikes.

The Ethiopian air force played a key role not only in reducing Somali tanks, APCs and artillery guns to rubbles but also in destroying MiG fighters through dog fights thereby winning the battle for the sky. The Ethiopian air force had also the capability to destroy military targets deep inside Somalia. For instance, it bombed air fields and arms depots in Hargesa and Berbera just before the beginning of the Ethiopian counter-offensive. Ethiopian pilots flying American made F-5E jet fighters outmanoeuvred the Somali MiG fighters. According to an Ethiopian pilot who took part in the war, "by successfully shooting down the Somali combat aircraft with our F-5E jets, we did a lot of promotional job."¹⁰³ The Ethiopian air force had a reputation for experience and effective combat. Obviously, therefore, "the Ethiopian domination of the air had perhaps more to do with technical skill and experience than the mere possession of a superior machine."¹⁰⁴

Finally, the Somalis "woefully underrated two critical factors: the depth of Ethiopian patriotism and the popularity of the revolution."¹⁰⁵ The violation of Ethiopian territorial integrity by Somalia produced a nation-wide indignation and determination to beat off the invaders. The Därg was prepared to mobilize the masses for the war effort. The militiamen were so committed that they hurled hand grenades into the turrets of Somali tanks before being cut into pieces by machine guns. In the end, the Ethiopian army prevailed, first by pinning down the Somalis, then by ejecting them from the territory they had occupied.

5.2. Counter-Insurgency Operations in Northern Ethiopia

5.2.1. The Battles for Naqfa 1976 - 1986

Naqfa, a small town located in the former Sahel *Awrajja* of northern Eritrea along the Afabét-Qarora road, resembles a "shallow dish"¹⁰⁶ embraced by bare mountains standing shoulder to shoulder. For more than a decade, these mountains were scenes of bloody engagements. During those engagements, tens of thousands of government troops and insurgents lost their lives while trying to capture and defend Naqfa.

In May 1976, the Därg assembled 25,000-30,000 peasants from the northern provinces and sent them to Eritrea in an attempt "to drown the rebels under a sea of peasant humanity."¹⁰⁷ The peasant march, named the "Raza Operation," was, however, a complete failure. Before even crossing into Eritrea, the peasants were ambushed by the guerrillas and forced to disperse.

Following the failure of the Raza Operation and the rejection of the Därg's Nine Point Peace Plan by the insurgents, the military situation began to deteriorate. The two guerrilla groups, the ELF and the EPLF attacked isolated garrisons throughout Eritrea. One such garrison that came under attack was the 15th Infantry Battalion based at Naqfa.¹⁰⁸ On September 17, 1976 (Mäskäräm 7, 1969 E.C) the EPLF launched a close-in offensive on Naqfa to overwhelm the infantrymen there. While giving close air support to the battalion, a jet fighter was shot down by the insurgents but the pilot managed to eject safely. Since he landed very close to rebel held areas, rescuing him was not an easy task. As a result, 12 infantrymen died during the rescue operation. Though the insurgents failed to take Naqfa, they managed to put the garrison under siege. Then, they continued to tighten the siege by bringing in reinforcements, raising the total number of their fighters to 3,000. Although they were outnumbered 10 - 15 times, the infantrymen repulsed repeated EPLF attempts to overrun the garrison during the six month siege. Since the September EPLF offensive, the infantrymen had been asking for either relief units to be sent overland or paratroopers to be parachuted.¹⁰⁹

In response to the anxious telegraphic messages of the infantrymen, the government sent two relief units composed of the Israeli-trained Nābālbāl (flame) commandos in late September 1976.

But both were repulsed by the insurgents.¹¹⁰ Disappointed by the government's failure to relieve the garrison, the battalion's commander, Major Mammo Täntemé, sent an emotional appeal to the various units of the armed forces in mid- October 1976. Part of the message reads:

We the 200 men have been fighting day and night for a month with a larger enemy force. We shall continue to fight to the last man. ... Among us, more than 60 wounded soldiers are decomposing in agony in their foxholes. We have received no assistance in response to our continuous appeal for relief. That has made us doubt the existence of a credible and responsible government. ... We are sending this last message so as to urgently get a relief force.¹¹¹

Touched very much by the plea of the infantrymen, the airborne troops based at Mändäfära, with the conviction that their training was meant for such an operation, made a solemn decision to reinforce the garrison. As a result, 99 handpicked airborne troops were soon moved to Asmara. But, they had to wait for a week until jumping shoes and parachutes were brought from Addis Ababa and Däbrä Zäyet respectively. In the meantime, the insurgents seemed to have got wind of the plan. In an attempt to forestall the planned reinforcement, they brought additional fighters and anti-aircraft weapons to the Naqfa area so as to shoot down the airplanes as well as the paratroopers in the air. It was believed that anti-aircraft weapons such as the ZU-23 could shoot down airplanes as high as 2,500 meters. In order to avoid such risks, the pilots decided to drop the paratroopers from an altitude of 3,000 meters. In enemy territory, paratroopers normally jump at an altitude of 300-600 meters and are not expected to stay in the air for more than two minutes. If dropped at an altitude of 3,000 meters, paratroopers would be forced to stay in the air for 10 minutes. It was feared that within those 10 minutes, all the paratroopers would be shot down by the insurgents before touching the ground. The pathfinder, who jumped from a helicopter escorted by F-5 jet fighters, narrowly escaped rebel fire. He landed with a bullet-riddled parachute. Although the pathfinder could not put signals for the airplanes on the jumping ground due to EPLF snipers, it was decided to parachute the 99 paratroopers as soon as possible. As they jumped from the first aircraft in a kind of suicide mission, the second plane was shot and had to return to Asmara. With the exception of one soldier who was shot in the air, all others safely landed despite a continuous fire from all directions.¹¹² With regard to the dangerous

mission, one of the airborne troops recorded in his diary: "It is quite a miracle to have come down alive, to have escaped the hail of bullets fired at us from the ground as we dropped."¹¹³

Soon after their landing, the paratroopers joined the infantrymen in pitched battles against insurgents. With close air support, they dislodged the insurgents from their trenches after a one-hour hand-to-hand combat. The combined forces soon took control of all the strategic hills around Naqfa including the airstrip. It was then possible to land two helicopters, which brought about 30 troops and evacuated the wounded. The infantrymen and the paratroopers were expecting the landing of more helicopters and the arrival of additional troops. But that opportunity was lost. Probably due to their preoccupation with the power struggle within the Därg in Addis Ababa, the commanders in Asmāra failed to send additional troops by helicopters to Naqfa. Nor did they encourage the troops at Naqfa to control more strategic points. Instead, they ordered the troops to withdraw from the newly controlled areas and retreat to the trenches already built by the 15th Infantry Battalion. That helped the insurgents to recapture the strategic hills and put the garrison under siege once again.¹¹⁴

In order to accommodate the new arrivals, trenches and bunkers had to be expanded and strengthened so as to make them as impregnable as possible. Instead of being given separate defence lines, the paratroopers were mixed with the infantrymen so as to create intimacy and cooperation among fighters. Major (Posthumously Lt. Colonel) Mammo Tämtémé and Lt. Colonel (later Br. General) Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam, the commanders of the 15th Infantry Battalion and the airborne troops respectively, began to work hand in glove with each other and their effective leadership created an indomitable spirit among their fighters. As a result, the continuous barrage of heavy guns from the surrounding hills, the repeated attempts to overwhelm the garrison, the psychological warfare waged by the EPLF, the critical shortage of supplies and the failure to get relief units did not sap the morale and will of the troops to resist.¹¹⁵

Through time, the defenders of Naqfa came to know when the insurgents would fire heavy guns and attempt to storm the garrison. They, therefore, began to take some precautionary measures. To ward off surprise attacks at night or dawn, dogs were used to sense possible rebel movements and alert the troops in the trenches.¹¹⁶

Since the beginning of the siege, supplies could reach the garrison only by air. The troops could not, however, design effective methods with regard to the acquisition of supplies dropped from airplanes. The anti-aircraft weapons strategically positioned around the garrison prevented the airplanes from flying at low altitude and dropping supplies. In order to avoid rebel fire, the airplanes were forced to parachute bundles of rations, ammunition and medical supplies from a height of 700 - 800 feet. It was highly risky to come out of trenches and give signals to pilots to drop the supplies on exact locations. If the parachuted supplies were far from their positions, the insurgents would either burn them by firing explosive bullets or attack the troops while trying to collect them. On several occasions, parachuted supplies were taken by wind to EPLF-controlled areas. Quite often, fierce battles were fought to take parachuted supplies. Initially, many troops lost their lives while attempting to pick them up. Later on, they preferred to allow the insurgents to collect the supplies; they would then attack them. That enabled the troops not only to collect their supplies but also to capture weapons from the EPLF. On their part, the insurgents gained a bitter lesson not to rush into dropped supplies. Thereafter, both parties refrained from taking the initiative in picking up supplies. As a result, supplies were left uncollected up to three days. In an attempt to deny the insurgents the chance of getting supplies, pilots were advised to first drop sandbags to know the wind direction and then parachute the supplies. That method worked very well and the besieged troops began to get most of the dropped supplies.¹¹⁷

As the task of snatching parachuted supplies became extremely difficult, the insurgents began to replenish their fighters with fresh supplies using vehicles and camels at night to avoid aerial bombardment. Once they brought in new supplies, weapons and fighters, they mounted a number of surprise attacks, usually at night, so as to overwhelm and control the garrison. They knew very well that the government troops had a critical shortage of ammunition. They, therefore, designed various methods to force the besieged troops fire all their ammunition. On many occasions, the insurgents made mock offensives at night so that their adversaries would be thrown into panic and fire all their bullets. In addition to mock offensives, they put helmets on sticks and moved them back and forth on the horizon so as to dupe the troops to open fire at the seemingly human target. Initially, the troops were deceived and fired many bullets on those inanimate targets before discovering that it was actually a trick. All such tricks and manoeuvres taught the besieged troops a vital lesson. It was only when they became sure of their targets that the defenders of Naqfa should pull a trigger.¹¹⁸

The insurgents were determined not only to deplete the garrison's stocks of munitions but also the besieged troops themselves at Naqfa. Apart from actual and mock offensives, the insurgents planted anti-personnel mines at night around strategic hills, which were usually controlled by troops before collecting dropped supplies. Since the troops had a serious shortage of anti-personnel mines, they waited for the insurgents to plant the mines and leave the area. No sooner had the insurgents left than the garrison sent its miners to painstakingly take out the anti-personnel mines and lay them along the route the EPLF quite often used to make surprise attacks. That worked very well and many insurgents were blown up.¹¹⁹

When all the attempts to batter the garrison into submission failed, the EPLF waged psychological warfare. The insurgents put megaphones on big trees and hilltops close to the garrison and tried to badger the besieged troops into surrendering to the EPLF. They asked the troops as to why they fought just to keep a few officers on power. The insurgents narrated their victory over the relief units and the government's inability and indifference to send reinforcements to Naqfa. They also promised that those troops who decided to give themselves up would be sent back to their villages or would be given a chance to go abroad. The agitation was usually concluded with the declaration of a one-day cease-fire to allow time for the troops to discuss the issue and arrive at a final decision. Upon the expiry of the cease-fire, the troops were asked about the decision they had made. Such agitations were made mostly twice a week. True, the psychological warfare waged by the EPLF did put the morale and unity of the troops to a severe test. Though immediately aborted, rumours that could lead to division between the infantrymen and the airborne troops were circulating around the garrison. In the end, however, that too, did not work.¹²⁰

As a last resort, the insurgents employed the local people and their fighters to dig new trenches at night very close to the garrison. These measures were intended to deny the besieged troops access to any supplies or airborne reinforcements by bringing all areas within close range and mount a final assault to overrun the garrison from a short distance. Since the distance between the garrison and the EPLF-held trenches was getting narrower, it was very difficult for pilots to drop supplies or bombard rebel positions. The insurgents calculated that the embattled troops would starve and eventually be forced to surrender.¹²¹

Starvation was in fact a daily reality at Naqfa garrison. On a number of occasions, the besieged troops were without food for 72 hours. The rations dropped by aircraft did not last long. Out of desperation, soldiers resorted to grind weevil-spoiled maize (stored by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission as emergency food for famished people) in their helmets and baked it on flat stones. There was no fuel to boil the corn. The rough and hastily baked bread brought about the outbreak of diarrhea among troops. Fear of rebel fire left troops with only one option: to defecate inside the trenches on empty cans. Due to the absence of medical supplies, soldiers with diarrhea were left to their own devices. Even heavily wounded soldiers could not get any medical attention. Just to mention some of the gruesome reports, it was not uncommon to witness wounded soldiers decomposing alive and bleeding to death. It was possible to move the wounded and bury the dead only under cover of darkness.

Those who were still alive had other problems. Since the soldiers were unable to change or wash their cloth, they were infested with lice. It was not unusual to see soldiers scratching their back with the wall of trenches.¹²²

The most pressing problem was the shortage of rations, medicine, radio batteries and ammunition. As early as September 19, 1976, the 15th Infantry Battalion commander reported that his fighters had been weakened by starvation. When the insurgents brought the Naqfa garrison under siege on September 17, 1976 (Mäskäräm 7, 1969 E.C), the government troops numbered only 297. Within a month, that number had declined to about 170. The infantrymen and the airborne troops continued to suffer casualties as a result of daily barrage of heavy gunfire and repeated attempts to storm the garrison. Even after the landing of the paratroops, the request for a relief force continued. Out of the 150 telegraphic messages sent during the six-month siege, 80 of them were requests for relief units.¹²³ In late November 1976, the government again sent a relief unit of 1,700 men called the Bāṭes (sever) Brigade. But the brigade was ambushed and repulsed by the insurgents after reaching the Mäsahlit pass (between Kärän and Afabét). There were attempts by the Second Division to send the brigade back to Mäsahlit and then to Naqfa. But the unruly troops of the Bāṭes Brigade rejected orders to regroup and march to Naqfa once again.¹²⁴ Following the November attempt to relieve the besieged troops, the garrison continued to send strongly worded and highly disturbing messages. On December 29, 1976 (Tahsas 20, 1969 E.C), for instance, the garrison sent a direct appeal to Mängestu Häylä Maryam:

We have been fighting day and night against a heavily armed enemy. ... Since the enemy is now swelling the ranks of its fighters with reinforcements, we could not even fetch water. The army appeals to the government to bomb the garrison and its property with explosives before the rebels could take control of Naqfa. The army is respectfully waiting for your final decision.¹²⁵

Mängestu did promise that a relief force would reach Naqfa within a few days. The garrison waited for months for the arrival of relief units. Out of desperation, the garrison again sent other emotional appeals. Another telegraphic message sent on January 13, 1977 (ፕጥ 5, 1969 E.C), runs:

... We did not realize that we had been thrown away to be finished off by starvation and enemy fire. Like all other human beings, we have our own families. But we have been thrown away like aging dogs. Our children and families who are longing to see us alive always receive news about our death. If we had committed mistakes, we have to be told explicitly and punished accordingly.¹²⁶

The besieged soldiers felt that they had been deserted by their own government. They complained that while the EPLF managed to reinforce its fighters it was quite strange for them as to why the government with all its resources and better organization failed to do the same. Finally, they asked the government to unequivocally respond within 12 hours whether it really wanted to see the soldiers at Naqfa to stay alive and defend their position.¹²⁷

At a time when a relief force was desperately needed, the Därg itself had been torn apart by power struggle which eventually led to the execution of Br. General Täfäri Banti and his associates on February 3, 1977. As a result, the issue of the Naqfa garrison seems to have been ignored. The government's failure to either relieve or reinforce the Naqfa garrison boosted the morale of the insurgents. As an ominous sign of a final assault on Naqfa, they brought in fresh fighters and new weapons. The long-awaited assault finally came on March 22, 1977 (Mägabit 13, 1969 E.C). In the first two attempts to overwhelm the garrison through hand-to-hand combat, the insurgents suffered heavy casualties. In a third attempt, however, they managed to get an opening in the trenches and control a strategic post. That helped the insurgents to launch a two-

pronged attack on the remaining defensive positions. Many died during the hand-to-hand fighting. The foggy weather prevented any air support to the garrison. Some of those who were deeply disappointed by the government's failure to relieve them surrendered to the insurgents. In the final hours of fighting, the remaining troops destroyed documents before falling into EPLF hands. Radio communication with Asmāra was cut off. In those perilous moments, some of the last defenders shouted "forward" and rushed to EPLF lines with the intention of breaking through the ever-tightening encirclement and finding a escape route. They did manage to force their way to Afabēt through an opening. On their way to Afabēt, they encountered five ambushes and lost some of their fellow fighters. Finally on March 25, 1977 (Māgabit 16, 1969 E.C), 53 infantrymen and 22 airborne troops succeeded in reaching Afabēt after a three-day arduous march. In the end, Naqfa fell into EPLF hands.¹²⁸

The fall of Naqfa highly demoralized other garrisons throughout Eritrea. In the next few months, the EPLF controlled Afabēt, Kārān, Ellabārād, and Dāqāmāhari and captured enormous weapons. Similarly, the ELF captured Omhajār, Tāsānāy, Aqordat, Mändāfāra and Adi Kuwala. Though they remained in government hands, Asmāra, Bārēntu, Adi Qāyeh and half of Meṣewa were either besieged by the insurgents or had come within range of artillery fire.¹²⁹

The army in the Ogadén was also suffering major military reverses until late 1977. By the end of 1977, however, the military situation in the southern and south-eastern fronts had turned against Somalia. The army began its counter-offensive in early 1978 and scored a major victory over Somalia in March.¹³⁰

Having beaten the Somali invaders, the army turned to northern Ethiopia to deal with the insurgency. In May 1978, the NROC was set up at Māqālē to lead the counter-insurgency operation in northern Ethiopia. The army to be involved in the operation was organized into seven task forces, namely: 501st, 502nd, 503rd, 504th, 505th, 506th, and 507th. A total of 86,722 combatants were placed under the seven task forces. Each task force was given a specific sector to liberate. Accordingly, Task Force 501 was to move from Gondār to Humāra, cross the Tākāzé River and capture Omhajār and Tāsānāy. Task Force 502 was assigned to set out from Sheré and march through Shāmbāqo to Bārēntu, Aqordat and Kārān. Task Force 503, on its part, would move in three directions: Adigrat to Asmāra through Mändāfāra, Enticho to Asmāra through

Şoräna and Adi Qäyeh to Asmära through Däqämähari. While Task Force 504 was ordered to hunt down insurgents in Tegray, Task Force 505 was to break the siege around Meşewa and move to Asmära and then to Qarora. Task Force 506 was given the task of breaking the siege around Asmära and move in four directions: Asmära-Mändäfära, Asmära-Däqämähari, Asmära-Meşewa, and Asmära-Kärän. The last task force, 507, was ordered to move from Bäräntu to Şhämbäqo. Between July and December 1978, the operation went very much according to plan and the task forces scored a temporary victory through a well-coordinated offensive in Gondär, Tegray and Eritrea.¹³¹

Admittedly, the operation was achieved through enormous sacrifice. One of the bitterest fighting took place at Ellabäräd, a valley known for its fruits and dairy products, and located along the Asmära-Kärän road. Task Force 506A met no resistance when it entered Ellabäräd on the evening of November 25, 1978 (Hedar 16, 1971 E.C), with all its tanks and armoured vehicles. Breaking out of the surrounding hills, where they had been lurking, the EPLF fighters mounted a surprise attack on the troops who had been preparing their dinner. Radio communication was soon cut off. Task Force 506B was immediately moved to Ellabäräd as reinforcement that same night. Though difficult to clearly identify EPLF positions, jet fighters made more than 70 sorties to strike at rebel positions. The valley was strewn with corpses and destroyed tanks. After nearly 36 hours of heavy fighting, the two units of Task Force 506 drove the insurgents out of Ellabäräd.¹³²

At the same time, Task Forces 501 and 502 scored a sweeping victory over the ELF and met at Aqordat. Once they achieved their goal, they were merged to form Task Force 508 and liberated Kärän on November 27, 1978 (Hedar 18, 1971 E.C). Following a four-day respite at Kärän, Task Forces 506 and 508 were ordered to capture Afabét and Naqfa. But the delay at Kärän helped the EPLF to strengthen its defences at Mäsahlit. The army failed not only to overrun EPLF defences at Mäsahlit but was also pushed back to Kärän. Following a brief period of rehabilitation, the two task forces finally managed to reach the gates of Naqfa after breaking the EPLF fortification at the Mäsahlit pass and liberating Afabét.¹³³

In order to storm the last stronghold of the EPLF, army commanders worked out a new plan of operation. According to the plan, Task Forces 506 and 508 would overrun rebel defences around

Naqfa with the help of artillery fire and air strikes. The military intelligence believed that Naqfa was defended by four EPLF brigades (51st, 58th, 70th and 77th) with a total manpower of 5,000 fighters. To wipe out those EPLF forces, Task Force 506A, the main strike force, would follow the course of the Tébra River from the south and advance towards Naqfa. While two brigades of Task Force 508A would surge through hill 1925, Task Force 508B would control the strategic heights east of Naqfa between Qäy ʾat and Shañña, annihilate the insurgents and finally capture Naqfa.¹³⁴

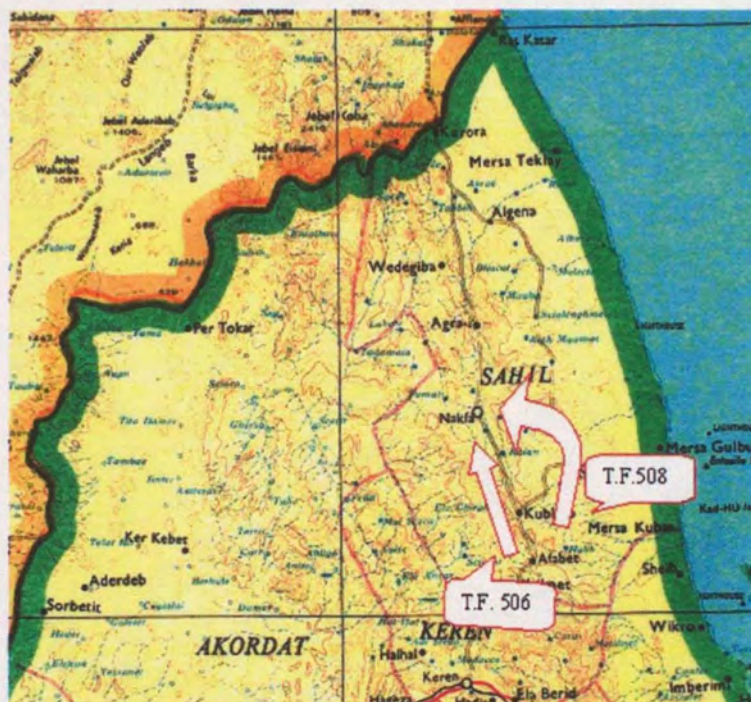
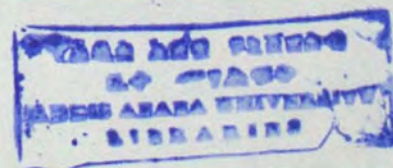


Fig. 5.5. The 1979 Government Offensive on Naqfa

Adapted from Map of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Mapping Authority, ND (Scale: 1: 2,000,000)

The various units of the two task forces were ordered to mount a human wave frontal assault on July 14, 1979 (Hämlé 7, 1971 E.C), at 0400 hours (4:00 A.M). They would advance under the cover of darkness so as to confuse the insurgents and take Naqfa. But as they came closer to EPLF positions, their movement was exposed by moonlight and the insurgents soon opened fire at 0340 hours. Although they rushed into EPLF defences, the barrage of machinegun fire from left and right decimated most of the troops of the first wave. The task forces threw the second wave of troops at 0500 hours. The EPLF defences again proved too strong to be broken. During



the third offensive, troops tenaciously fought for an hour at dawn but failed to storm EPLF defences. The last reserve units were thrown onto EPLF positions after an artillery bombardment, which lasted for 12 minutes. The hail of fire coming from camouflaged machineguns made any advance difficult. On July 15, 1979, the 9th Brigade of Task Force 508 moved to EPLF position at 0500 hours after a 10-minute artillery bombardment. But the insurgents had already planted anti-personnel mines and positioned their machineguns at vantage points. As a result, the offensives attempted at 0500 and then at 0745 hours were repulsed by the insurgents.¹³⁵

Those troops who had reached EPLF trenches reported about the nature of the defence lines. It was found out that the insurgents had built two lines of semi-circular trenches. The front line was a ditch with no overhead protection. A few meters behind the frontline defence, there was another trench strengthened by big logs, stones and sand bags. The army did manage to overrun the front line defences but failed to break the second line of trenches. The insurgents had also positioned various types of light and heavy guns camouflaged and completely hidden from air strikes. Since EPLF trenches were found on the escarpment and top of the Naqfa Mountains, the army's positions at the low-lying areas appeared in clear detail before the eyes of the insurgents. The narrow and zigzag road to the town of Naqfa was heavily mined and vigilantly guarded by camouflaged weapons. The insurgents had prepared their defences in such a way that they could avoid direct hits from tanks, artillery guns and combat aircraft. The semi-circular defence lines enabled the insurgents to outflank assailants through a pincer manoeuvre. When the assailants rushed to EPLF positions, they were machine-gunned from left and right. Then the commanders of various battalions agreed to storm EPLF defences from behind in a nocturnal operation. But before putting their plan into effect, they were ordered by their superiors to move to their defence perimeters.¹³⁶

Between January and July 1979, the two task forces carried out a series of costly operations. Despite their overwhelming superiority in numbers and arms, the task forces failed to overrun EPLF defences. Although the insurgents were outnumbered about ten times, they succeeded not only in bringing the fighting to a stalemate for several months but also in pushing the army back to Afabét in November 1979. Commanders later admitted that the task forces had failed to assign

a special commando unit to destroy EPLF machineguns and bombard rebel positions with mortars and artillery guns.¹³⁷

Between December 1979 and January 1982, the army launched no offensives in Eritrea save the march to Rora Şälim from the Red Sea coast, which was doomed from the start.¹³⁸ In a letter dated February 5, 1981 (Ṭer 28, 1973 E.C), for instance, army commanders in Eritrea were reminded to take all precautionary measures to avoid unnecessary offensives. In hindsight the former head of state, Mängestu H. Maryam, regrets that instead of wearing down and finishing off the insurgents at Naqfa in a relentless campaign, the government allowed them to recover from their losses by suspending military operations for a couple of years. For him, that was a huge tactical blunder, which contributed to the undoing of the later Red Star Operation.¹³⁹

Despite the failure of the repeated attempts to capture Naqfa in 1979, the government believed that it was still possible to wipe out the Eritrean insurgents altogether through a well-planned military operation and infantry units specially trained in mountain warfare. To that end, four mountain ranger units, namely the 18th, 19th, 21st and 22nd MIDs, were organized and trained in 1980-81. Recruited voluntarily and given an extended special training, the first two MIDs (i.e., the 18th and 19th) were reputed for their combat competence and high morale.¹⁴⁰

In addition to the creation of the mountain infantry divisions, the government took two other measures intended to contribute to the successful execution of the planned operation. On the diplomatic front, Mängestu made an accord with the Sudanese president, Ja'afar Muhammad al-Nimeiri, during his visit to Khartoum in May 1980. Nimeiri who also visited Ethiopia in November 1980, agreed to deny the Eritrean insurgents free movement in Sudanese territory and to allow the Ethiopian army cross the border so as to cut off EPLF supply lines. Since the Sudanese government had been allowing the Eritrean insurgents to open offices, set up training centres, supply depots, repair shops and medical posts in its own territory, the agreement was hoped to benefit the Ethiopian government. But the conciliatory mood of the Sudanese government proved to be a temporary gesture.¹⁴¹

While the agreement was being concluded with the Sudan, the Ethiopian government launched a campaign named "Operation Lash" in September 1980 in the Ogadén. The operation aimed at dealing a final blow to Somali insurgency in the Ogadén so that the army could turn against the

Eritrean insurgents in full force. Within a matter of three months, the army dealt a crushing defeat on the Somali insurgents.¹⁴²

Likewise, the EPLF wanted to avoid a two-front attack during the imminent government onslaught. The temporary suspension of military operation by the government enabled the EPLF to wage a war of liquidation on the ELF in 1980/81. Backed by the TPLF, the EPLF finally routed the ELF forcing its remnants to flee to the Sudan. By the end of 1981, the EPLF was the only rebel group ready to face the impending government offensive.¹⁴³

Before the launching of the Red Star Operation, the EPLF took other measures to strengthen its own defences around Naqfa and weaken the government's capability. For about seven months, the EPLF rebels had been digging new bunkers, trenches and foxholes around Naqfa. Aerial photographs taken before the operation revealed that the EPLF had already prepared three rings of trenches around Naqfa.¹⁴⁴ Having strengthened its defences, the EPLF mounted a preemptive strike on government positions. On January 23, 1982 (ፕጥ 15, 1974 E.C), an EPLF commando unit attacked the 35th Brigade headquarters in Asmāra. The guerrilla raid was intended to demoralize one of the elite units of the 18th Mountain Infantry Division.¹⁴⁵

The widely publicized Red Star operation was finally launched in February 1982. It was believed that the Eritrean insurgency could be stamped out with the capture of Naqfa, the last stronghold of the EPLF. The army to be engaged in the operation was organized into five commands: Nadāw, Weqaw, Mäbräq, Mäket and Ma'ekälawi. According to the plan of the operation, the Nadāw, Weqaw and Mäbräq commands would mount a three-pronged offensive on the Naqfa, Algéna and Kärkäbät fronts respectively. The tasks of the other two commands were less demanding. While the Mäket Command was assigned to remain vigilant in and around Asmāra, the Central Command had to escort convoys and safeguard major government installations in Gondär, Tegray and southern Eritrea.¹⁴⁶

In order to lead this huge campaign, the Military Operations and Planning Command (MOPC) was set up in Asmāra. The MOPC included Mängestu H. Maryam, the commander-in-chief, General Täsfayé G. Kidan, the defence minister, General Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, the chief-of-staff, commanders of the air force and the navy as well as Soviet military advisers. Pinning much hope on the especially trained units, the MOPC brought the four mountain infantry

divisions to Eritrea. While the most eminent, the 18th Mountain Infantry Division was put on reserve; the 19th, 21st and 22nd MIDs were placed under the Weqaw, Mäbräq and Nadäw Commands respectively.¹⁴⁷

Each command was given a specific target. Led by Brigadier General (later Major General) Abärra Abbäbä, the Weqaw Command was assigned to cut off EPLF routes to the Sudan, block the Algéna-Naqfa road and wipe out the insurgents around Algéna. The command consisted of the 19th MID, the 15th and 23rd Infantry Divisions, and deployed 21,581 troops armed with 49 tanks, 44 armoured vehicles, 84 field artillery, 162 mortars and 60 anti-aircraft guns.

Put under the leadership of Brigadier General Wubätu Şäggayé, the Nadäw Command was ordered to cut off the rebels around Naqfa from those of Algéna, annihilate them and capture their last stronghold, Naqfa. The command included such combat-hardened army units like the 3rd and 17th Infantry and the 22nd MID. The Command deployed 20,801 troops with 19 tanks, 16 armoured vehicles, 99 field artillery, 198 mortars and 58 anti-aircraft guns.

Assigned to open a third front in the EPLF's rear base, the Mäbräq Command, led by Brigadier General Qumllachäw Däjäné, was assigned to close all EPLF exits to the Sudan and capture its bases in the Barka lowlands. The command was composed of 24,367 troops armed with 31 tanks, 34 armoured vehicles, 88 field artillery, 204 mortars and 67 anti-aircraft guns.¹⁴⁸ The command's three divisions (the 2nd and 24th Infantry and the 21st Mountain Infantry) included eight infantry brigades (four of them mountain infantry), a paracommando brigade, three tank battalions, three artillery battalions, a mechanized (the well known Sänṭeq) brigade, and two anti-aircraft battalions.¹⁴⁹

Before this elaborate plan was put into action, the insurgents managed to discover the blueprints of the whole operation to the last detail.¹⁵⁰ To the government's great dismay, the plan of operation had even leaked out and commanders who were supposed to lead the operation appeared in *Africa Confidential*. Even then, the government went on with the operation without any change of plan.¹⁵¹ It, however, tried to find out the total number of EPLF fighters and their fire power. According to a government intelligence report, the EPLF had deployed 20,000-25,000 fighters including the nearly 3,000 fighters sent by the TPLF for assistance. If the report

is to be believed, the EPLF was armed with 15 tanks, 14 armoured vehicles, 16 field artillery, 63 mortars and 14 anti-aircraft guns on the three fronts.¹⁵²

Although they were immensely outnumbered both in manpower and equipment, the insurgents were determined to hold out their positions. They had even decided to take the initiative instead of waiting for the government onslaught. Accordingly, just three days before the beginning of the government offensive, they mounted a preemptive attack on the 40th and 41st Brigades of the Weqaw Command so as to disrupt the operation. As a result of the heavy fighting that followed 1,244 troops of the 19th MID were put out of action. The 40th and 41st Brigades were finally rescued by the 39th MI Brigade, which pushed the insurgents back with artillery fire and air strikes. The 40th and 41st Brigades were soon rehabilitated and put into their original positions.¹⁵³

Despite the disruption of the Weqaw Command, the long-awaited operation was launched according to plan on February 15, 1982 (Yäkatit 8, 1974 E.C), on all the three fronts. On the Algéna front, the three divisions of the Weqaw Command moved to their targets with some initial success. The 15th Infantry Division crossed the Ethio-Sudanese border at Qarora and managed to block EPLF movements to the Sudan by bringing Jäbäl Dämbäbit, a strategic hill, under control. The 23rd Division, too, made good advance and controlled Belqaṭ and Fah where the insurgents set up arms depots and health stations. It then moved further south towards Afchäwa to block the Algéna-Naqfa road so that the insurgents could not help each other. Due to rebel counter-offensive, however, the 23rd Division was pushed back to its original position. At the same time, the 19th MID mounted a frontal attack on rebel positions and captured Tameru and Katar, two strategic hills southwest of Algéna. But its further advance was halted by stiff resistance from the insurgents. Despite the intensive use of tanks, artillery fire and air strikes, the division failed to capture the strategic pass of Adobayah. EPLF trenches proved impregnable and the terrain was very suitable to the insurgents.¹⁵⁴

During the second phase of the offensive, three new brigades (93rd, 104th and 21st) were brought from the Ogadén to the Algéna front to replace losses. Reinforced by the 93rd Brigade, the 23rd Division was ordered to recapture the areas it had controlled during the first phase. In spite of repeated attempts to overrun EPLF defences, the division failed to move forward. The three divisions were again ordered to move to their respective targets. All were ejected from the areas

they controlled. During the third phase, while the 19th and 23rd divisions were put on defensive positions, the 15th Division was brought from Qarora and ordered to advance towards the Algéna-Naqfa road. Although it had occupied some strategic points, the 15th division was beaten off by the insurgents. The offensive attempted in the three phases on the Algéna front was finally called off in favour of defence.¹⁵⁵

The military situation on the Kärkäbät front was even worse for the Mäbräq Command. Initially, all the three units moved to their targets without much difficulty. While the 2nd Division marched to Halhal from Kärän, the 24th Division moved towards Sata from Kärkäbät. The other unit, the 21st MID, captured Kur, a strategic point in the Barka lowlands, with no fighting. The insurgents seemed to have discovered that the 21st MID had just arrived from a training camp with no combat experience. The insurgents who had entrenched themselves at a strategic pass near Kur halted the advances of the division. As the division began to retreat on February 20, 1982 (Yäkatit 13, 1974 E.C), they sent outflanking units and attacked the retreating troops from left and right with heavy guns. The only watering hole, which was under the division's control, fell into EPLF hands. Military vehicles could not move on the sandy plains of Kärkäbät. The troops were exposed to a barrage of fire and suffered from dehydration during the confused retreat. As a result, a considerable number of troops were killed and wounded. On February 23, a team led by Br. General (later Maj. General) Mulatu Nägash moved to Kärkäbät to investigate the reasons for the collapse of the 21st MID.¹⁵⁶ The team held the division commander, Colonel Wubshät Mammo, responsible for the disaster. The commander was executed by firing squad at Afabét.¹⁵⁷

The damage inflicted on the 21st MID highly demoralized other units of the Mäbräq Command. Fearing another disaster, the 2nd and 24th Divisions were pulled out and returned to base. One of the tactical blunders was committed here. Instead of rehabilitating the troops and engaging the insurgents, the operation on the Kärkäbät front was called off. That helped the EPLF to quickly transfer its fighters to the Naqfa front.¹⁵⁸

It was on the Naqfa front that the insurgents faced an overwhelming onslaught from the Nadäw Command. The command assigned the 3rd and 17th Infantry Divisions to storm Naqfa from the north and east respectively after cutting off the Naqfa-Algéna road. The other unit of the Nadäw Command, the 22nd MID was to carry out mock offensives in the EPLF's southern sector, escort convoys to the battle zone and secure the environs of Afabét. One of the army units that came

closer to victory was the 3rd Division. The division “deceptively moved towards Algéna parallel to the coast and then suddenly turned left and with extraordinary speed and tactical efficiency” to storm EPLF positions north of Naqfa.¹⁵⁹ While one unit of the 3rd Division advanced to the west to block the Naqfa-Algéna road, another one surged through EPLF defences in a bold thrust towards the town of Naqfa. At the same time, the 17th Division deployed its brigades from Tiksi to capture the strategic heights surrounding Naqfa from the north and east. Two days after zero hour, the 11th and 19th Infantry Brigades captured two strategic heights: hills 1590 and 1702 respectively. On February 19 and 20, while the 19th Brigade took two more hills, 1725 and 1755, the 11th Brigade controlled height 1527. The capture of such strategic points brought the assailants only 4 kilometers from the town of Naqfa. The insurgents were thrown into panic as the 3rd and 17th Divisions continued their deep thrust to take Naqfa.¹⁶⁰

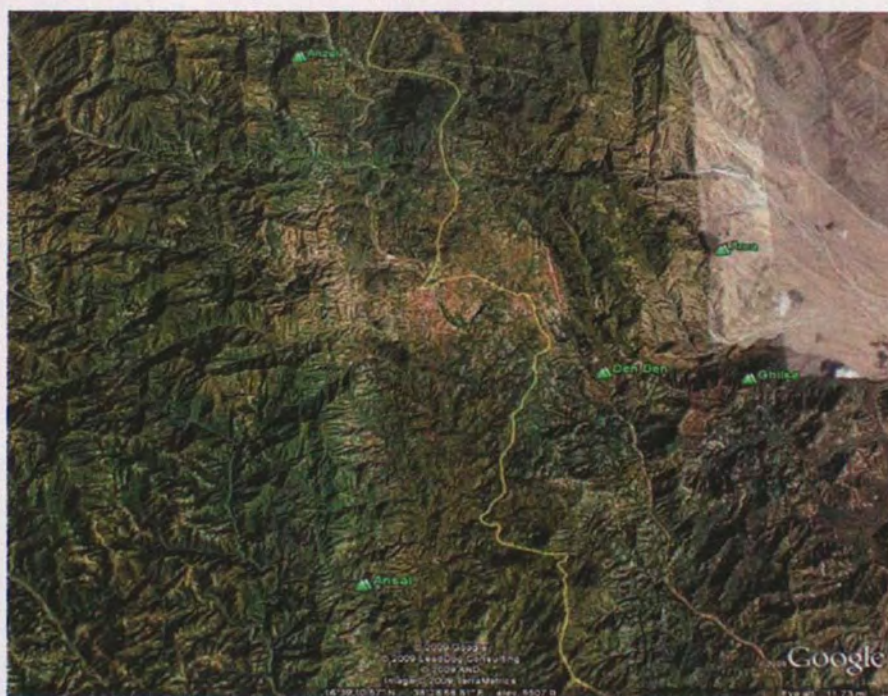


Fig. 5.6. Satellite image of the Naqfa area (courtesy Google Earth).

At this critical moment, the EPLF quickly moved in non-combatants like carpenters, mechanics, health workers and political cadres (who had received training in defensive and offensive tactics earlier) to the front to save Naqfa from falling into government hands.¹⁶¹ On February 23, 1982, using tanks, artillery, mortars and Zu-23 anti-aircraft weapons furiously, the insurgents pushed

the 3rd Division back to Tiksi and forced the 17th Division to abandon the strategic heights it had occupied. The division commander, Colonel Mäkonnen Woldé, died during this fierce fighting. The 18th MID, which had been left on reserve, was brought to Tiksi on February 24, 1982. One of its units, the 36th Brigade, was ordered to retake the heights (hills 1725 and 1755) lost to the EPLF. On February 26, 1982, while the 36th Brigade and the 3rd Division were advancing towards Naqfa, the insurgents swiftly moved additional fighters from Algéna and desperately attacked the various units (the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th Brigades) of the 3rd Division. The 3rd Division lost its commander, Colonel Täshagär Yemam, and was forced to retreat. Then the insurgents encircled the 36th Mountain Infantry Brigade and tied it down in static defence. The brigade was finally rescued by two battalions of the 38th Mountain Infantry Brigade.¹⁶²

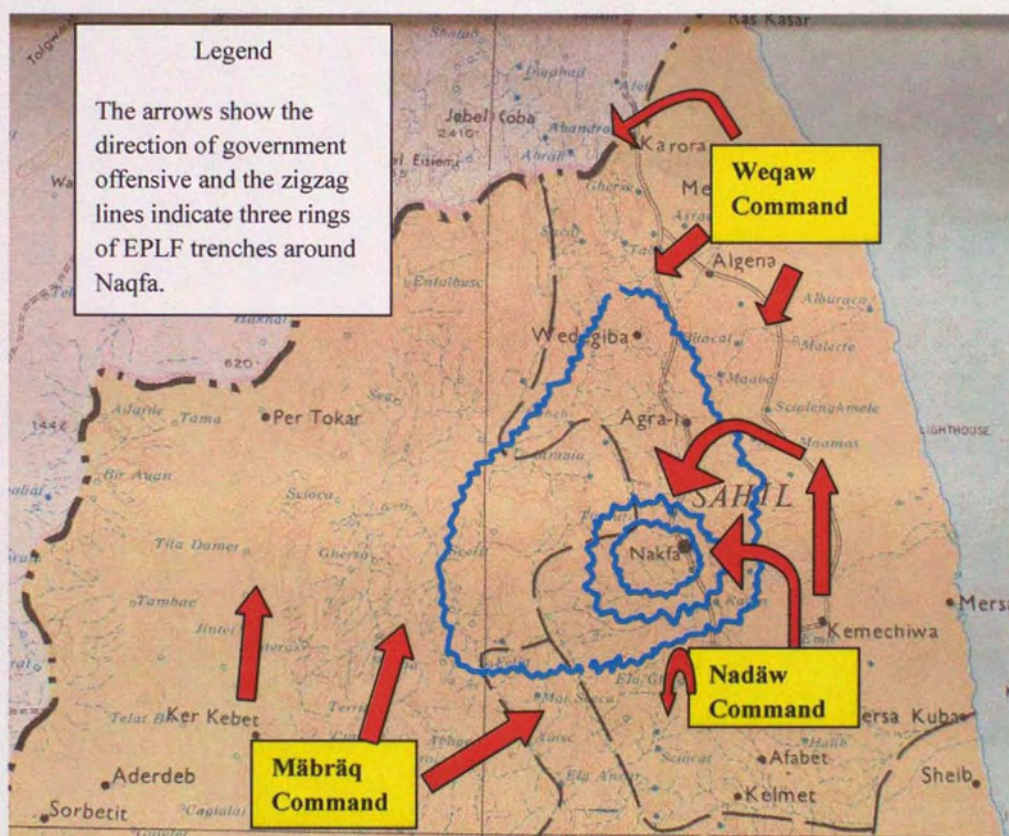


Fig. 5.7. Operation Red Star

Adapted from Map of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Mapping Authority, ND (Scale: 1: 2,000,000)

With the arrival of the 24th Division from the Kärkäbät front, the battle entered its second phase. While the 3rd Division was pulled back for rehabilitation, the 17th, 18th and 24th Divisions tried to retake the strategic heights still controlled by the EPLF. Although the 17th Division succeeded in recapturing hill 1702 on March 3, 1982 (Yäkatit 24, 1974 E.C), it was ejected the next day. While the 18th MID was trying to take low-lying points, it was mistakenly struck by its own helicopters and jet fighters. The attempt to retake height 1702 failed due to the barrage of fire from EPLF machine guns well positioned on the hill. After a brief period of rehabilitation, the 3rd Division was again moved to its former position. Between March 10 and 20, 1982, the 24th Division tried in vain to recapture hill 1702 by employing occasional use of hand-to-hand combat.¹⁶³

During the third phase of the operation, the 2nd Division (which had been deployed on the Kärkäbät front) was brought to reinforce the Nadäw Command. Whereas the 3rd Division was put on reserve, the 2nd, 17th, 18th and 24th Divisions were ordered to mount a frontal attack on EPLF positions in a north-south and east-west direction. The situation was no better. In an attempt to reverse the military situation, the command set up two battalions of volunteers who were ready for a suicide mission. Armed with automatic assault rifles, bayonets and hand grenades, the volunteers attempted to force their way to the strategic heights. Despite the immeasurable valour and sacrifice of the volunteers, hill 1702 could not be recaptured.

The commanders continued to throw in more troops, hoping that the insurgents would eventually be forced to give up. During the fourth phase, the 21st MID, which had lost many troops in the sands of Kärkäbät, was put under the Nadäw Command.¹⁶⁴ That brought the number of army units on the Naqfa front to seven divisions. During this phase, while the 3rd and the 17th Divisions (which sustained probably the heaviest casualties) were put on reserve, the 2nd, 18th, 21st, 22nd, and 24th Divisions tried to dislodge the insurgents from their trenches in their respective fronts. The insurgents first forced the 2nd Division to retreat and then halted the advance of the remaining four divisions.¹⁶⁵

So far, all the divisions had tried to storm EPLF positions to the north and east of Naqfa. During the last phase of the operation, fought in late May and early June 1982, the 21st and 22nd Mountain Infantry Divisions were deployed from Afabét to control Naqfa from the south. Although the divisions captured some heights like Amba, they failed to overrun EPLF defences.

The rigidity of the command structure and the distance between the Algéna, Naqfa and Kärkäbät fronts made cooperation and coordination among the three commands a difficult exercise. The inflexibility of the command system also left no room for independent action by junior commanders. By the time approval was obtained for an action, the reality on the ground had usually changed. In contrast, the EPLF had offered a *carte blanche* to its commanders at all levels to take any measure deemed advisable.

Apart from institutional problems, tactical and disciplinary drawbacks hampered the army's operation. Due to fear of being mistakenly struck, the army failed to move to EPLF positions under the cover of artillery fire and aerial bombardment. The army's inability to move swiftly to EPLF trenches soon after artillery fires and air strikes usually helped the insurgents to regroup quickly.¹⁷¹ On the other hand, the artillery fires and air strikes failed to demolish rebel trenches. Once it captured a strategic point, the army also failed to swiftly consolidate its position and withstand EPLF counter-offensives. As has been the case, particularly with the 21st Mountain Infantry Division, troops panicked at the sound of a counter-offensive by EPLF's flanking units and that quite often led to the breakdown in the chain of command. Many soldiers ran for their lives, leaving weapons behind, instead of making an orderly retreat.¹⁷²

The army had also a serious deficiency in gathering vital intelligence about the insurgents. Conversely, the insurgents established an efficient intelligence network that could access top military secrets. They were able to intercept radio messages and decipher military codes. They were also reported to have infiltrated the military hierarchy and to be in a position to get plans of operation.¹⁷³ Underestimating all such capabilities of the insurgents, the government attempted to prevail by sheer weight of numbers and superior fire power. In the final analysis, the Red Star Operation turned out to be a costly campaign with no marked success.

Following the failure of the Red Star Operation, the army remained in its defensive position until losses were replaced by new recruits. The Mäbräq Command, which had fizzled out at the beginning of the operation, was replaced by the Mänter Command. While the government was still trying to rehabilitate and reorganize the army, the military intelligence unit learned that the EPLF was preparing to launch a major offensive in February 1983. In order to disrupt the intended offensive, the government decided to mount a preemptive strike on EPLF positions.¹⁷⁴

This time, the government seems to have drawn a painful lesson from the Red Star Operation. In order to surprise the EPLF, the plan of the 1983 operation was kept in absolute secrecy, hence the name the "the Stealth Offensive."¹⁷⁵ Just before the launching of the offensive, the 15th and 19th Divisions and the 29th Mechanized Brigade of the Weqaw Command were moved to Afabét to reinforce the Nadäw and Mänter Commands, leaving only the 23rd Division at Algéna. Then in February 1983, the various units of the Nadäw and Mänter Commands attacked EPLF positions on the Kubkub, Halhal and Barka fronts. Through a U-shaped coordinated offensive, the army captured some strategic points like Etaba, Gir, Mäläbso, Asmaṭ, Kur and Tärit on the Barka and Halhal fronts and blocked EPLF routes to the Sudan. On the Kubkub front, the Nadäw units also controlled a few strategic heights like hill 2595. In June 1983, however, the insurgents recaptured all those areas, with the exception of Mäläbso, through a surprise attack. During the February offensive and the EPLF counter-offensive, 17,648 government troops were put out of action.¹⁷⁶

After the June counter-offensive, the EPLF snatched the initiative. The insurgents began to carefully study and strike the soft spots of the government. In December 1983, they captured the town of Täsänäy in western Eritrea in a surprise attack. Then in January 1984, they encircled the 23rd Division, the only army unit of the Weqaw Command still stationed at Algéna. The insurgents were beaten back leaving behind a considerable number of military vehicles, anti-aircraft weapons, machineguns and small arms. A month later, a larger EPLF force overwhelmed the Weqaw Command at Algéna. After 48 hours of fierce fighting, the insurgents destroyed the Weqaw Command. The remaining government troops retreated with their tanks and artillery guns and joined the Nadäw Command at Afabét. The Weqaw Command lost 3,639 troops. The material loss was estimated at 43,565,659 Birr. The February offensive enabled the EPLF to control the whole of the Red Sea coast from Qarora to Mesewa.¹⁷⁷

Worse still, on May 20, 1984 (Genbot, 12, 1976 E.C), at 2330 hours (11:30 P.M), EPLF commandos penetrated the strongly fenced and mined perimeter of Asmära airport and destroyed 10 airplanes (6 MIG-23s, 2 Ilyushin and 2 helicopters), and damaged 8 others (2 MiG-23s, 5 MIG-21s and 1 Dash-5) in a nocturnal raid.¹⁷⁸

A year later, on July 5, 1985 (Säné 28, 1977 E.C), the insurgents mounted a surprise attack on the town of Bäréntu at 1800 hours (6:00 P.M). For the first time, Bäréntu fell into EPLF hands after 24 hours of heavy fighting. While trying to defend Bäréntu, 5,617 government troops were put out of action (1,389 killed, 2,476 wounded and 1,752 missing in action). With the intention of regaining western Eritrea, the government planned another campaign named "Operation Red Sea." In order to reinforce the 68,811 troops stationed in Eritrea, 21,369 soldiers were gathered from the eastern and southern commands as well as the Holäta and Hurso military academies. The Red Sea Operation involved four infantry divisions, a mechanized division, and two additional mechanized brigades. The army began its operation in late August 1985, and regained Bäréntu, Täsänäy, Ali Gidär and Haykota within a matter of two weeks. It also captured the main EPLF training camp, Sawa Forto.¹⁷⁹ Unlike the Sahel Mountains, the zones of operation in the western lowlands were suitable for tank battle, artillery fire and air strikes. The government troops effectively used those weapons in the open plains and swept across vast areas inflicting heavy damage on the EPLF.

The success of Operation Red Sea encouraged the government to plan another huge campaign known as the "Bahrä Nägash Operation." It was the last attempt to capture Naqfa. The Bahrä Nägash Operation was single-handedly planned by Mängestu Haylä Maryam. According to him, the capture of Naqfa, which had evaded the army for the preceding six years, could be achieved through a coordinated offensive by well-trained armoured and motorized units in collaboration with marine commandos and paratroopers. Mängestu envisaged that the air force would carry out saturation bombing of EPLF defences around Naqfa to open the way for a lightning strike by infantry units and paratroopers. Then, mechanized units would destroy EPLF training camps and arms depots in its rear sector and cut off its supply lines. In the meantime, marine commandos would sail from Meşewa to Mälka Fatuma and then sweep through the sandy plains to Algéna. In order to make surprise an essential element of the operation, the paratroopers would be dropped behind EPLF lines and would storm command posts and nerve centres. Finally, the infantry units would overwhelm the insurgents at Naqfa and capture their last stronghold.¹⁸⁰

The planned operation called for a huge preparation. Training camps were to be expanded. At Awash Arba, another training camp was established for armoured, tank and artillery units. The Hurso camp was devoted to the training of officers. The government believed that, due to their

rigorous training, the airborne units would play a key role in bringing the planned operation to a successful conclusion. Accordingly, the airborne brigades were raised to division level, making Ethiopia the only country in the continent with an airborne division. Such a powerful force had to be armed with state of the art weaponry. To that end, Mängestu led a delegation composed of high-ranking officials and senior commanders of the armed forces to the Soviet Union some time before the Bahrä Nägash Operation. This time, Mängestu earnestly asked for a sizable number of fighter and transport helicopters. The Kremlin officials reluctantly gave Mängestu a squadron of helicopter gunships and another squadron of transport helicopters (three-fourth of the request). In contrast, tanks and artillery pieces were acquired without much difficulty.¹⁸¹

Having acquired the required weaponry, the government reorganized and deployed four divisions in Eritrea. The newly organized Bärged Command included the 21st Mountain, the 23rd Infantry and the 102nd Airborne Divisions, the 16th and 29th Mechanized Brigades. Its auxiliary units were the 10th BM Rocket Battalion and the 42nd and 157th Artillery Battalions. With its total manpower of 17,081 troops, the Bärged Command was to be deployed on the Algéna front.

The Nadäw Command on the Naqfa front was composed of the 19th and 22nd MIDs, the 27th Mechanized Brigade, the 26th, 41st and 43rd Artillery Battalions, the 9th BM Rocket Battalion and the 401st Tank Battalion with a total of 12,781 combatants.

On the Mäläbso front, the Mänter Command consisted of 10,842 troops organized under the 18th Mountain and the 3rd Infantry Divisions, the 8th BM Rocket, the 76th Tank, the 147th and 285th artillery Battalions.

Deployed on the Kärkäbät-Sata front were separate units like the 2nd Mechanized Division, the 8th and 89th Infantry Brigades with a total number of 5,139 troops. On the whole, 45,843 troops were arrayed against the insurgents in all the four fronts. In addition, the Mäket Command was assigned to gather militia units from the highlands of Eritrea and the Red Sea coast, secure Asmära and the port of Meşewa and escort army convoys to the various fronts.¹⁸²

Just before the launching of the operation, Mängestu held a meeting with senior commanders in Asmära. The commanders assured him that the operation would achieve ninety-nine percent of its objective. Mängestu made a last minute correction in the plan. The airborne division had been

put on reserve. But Mängestu ordered his commanders to use it as a vanguard strike force. Then Mängestu returned to Addis Abäba leaving his commanders in charge of the whole operation to avoid any complaints of interference. (Mängestu had been informed by his security men that the senior commanders had been attributing failures of earlier operations to meddling from the commander-in-chief).¹⁸³ Each command was given a specific plan of operation. The Bärgeḍ Command was expected to move one airborne brigade from Afabét to Katar and Tameru hills by helicopter, transport another brigade of airborne troops from Asmära and parachute them at Algéna and move a third airborne brigade from Meṣewa to Mälka Fatuma and then to Algéna. After capturing strategic hills like Katar, the airborne troops were supposed to surprise the insurgents on the Algéna front. In the meantime, the infantry and mechanized units would move from Afabét to Algéna by military vehicles and in collaboration with the paratroopers would control EPLF supply centres in Adobah and Tabah valleys.¹⁸⁴

The Nadäw Command was assigned to overrun EPLF defences, capture Naqfa and open up the Naqfa-Algéna road so as to get in touch with the Bärgeḍ Command. The Mänter Command on the Mäläbso front was ordered to capture Asmaṭ and then Kur and Tärit. The 2nd Mechanized Division, with all its auxiliary units on the Kärkäbät-Sata front, would cut off EPLF supply lines and block the insurgents' retreats to the Sudan.¹⁸⁵

Although the morale and preparedness of the combatants was high, the operation was full of doom and gloom from the outset. On D-Day (i.e., October 10, 1985) (Mäskäräm 30, 1978 E.C), Lt. Colonel (later Br. General) Bähaylu Kendé, Deputy Commander of the 102nd Airborne Division, led 12 helicopters to the Algéna front. When his troops began to take positions around the Katar hills, he was suddenly told that there was a change of plan.¹⁸⁶ The remaining paratroopers, who were to be transported from Afabét to Katar and Tameru hills by helicopter, were to join the infantry at Afabét and move to Algéna by vehicles. The other airborne units that were supposed to land at Mälka Fatuma at 600 hours (6:00 A.M) did not reach the port until 1700 hours (5:00 P.M) due to the technical problem of the landing craft deliberately created by saboteurs. Similarly, there was considerable delay in moving paratroopers from Asmära and parachuting them at Algéna due to the shortage of airplanes. The troops who moved from Afabét to Algéna camped at the foot of Katar and Tameru hills instead of capturing the strategic heights. Likewise, the paratroopers who jumped at Algéna were not immediately moved to their targets.

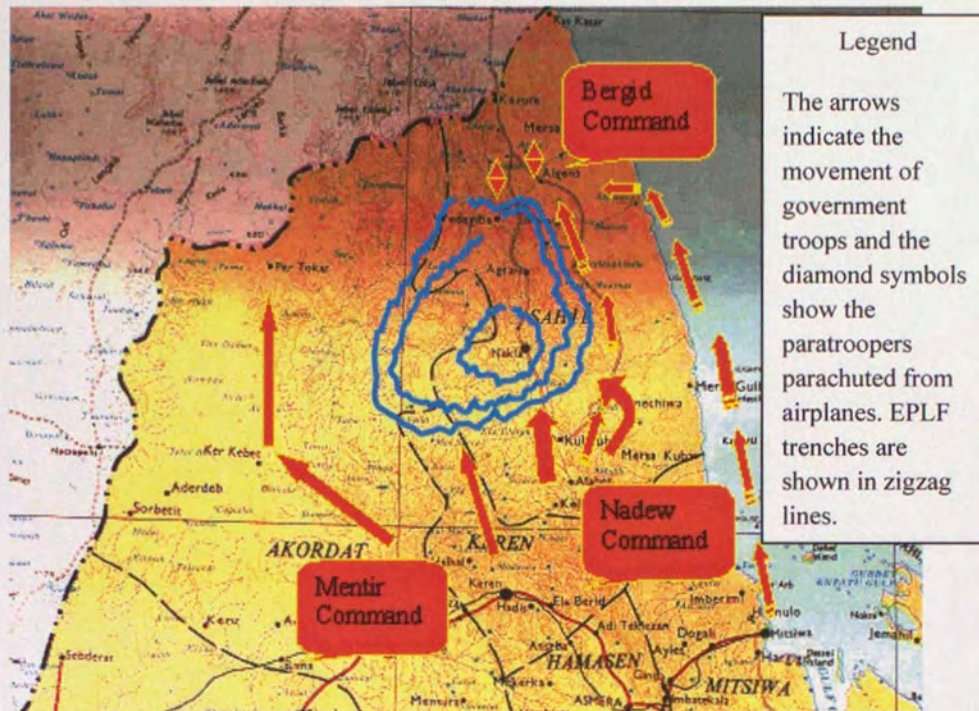


Fig. 5.8. The Bahrä Nāgash Operation

Scale: 1: 2,000,000

Adapted from Map of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Mapping Authority, ND.

The considerable delay helped the insurgents to move fighters from Naqfa to Algéna and control the Katar and Tameru hills at 0100 hour (1:00 A.M). They strengthened the old trenches and positioned their machine guns at strategic locations. For the government troops, it was already too late to mount any meaningful offensive. When the infantrymen and airborne troops moved to their targets, they were caught by EPLF fire from well-positioned machineguns. As a result, they were forced to fall back to Algéna.

The military situation on the other fronts was even worse. The army failed either to capture strategic heights around Naqfa or attack the EPLF's rear sector. Apart from the capture of Algéna and Qarora, the first phase of the operation ended in failure in less than two weeks.¹⁸⁷

There was a change of plan for the second phase of the operation. Accordingly, the Nadäw Command was ordered to mount a frontal assault after being reinforced by the 102nd airborne Division. The other commands remained in their defensive positions. Just before the launching of the second phase offensive, troops of the 102nd Airborne Division were brought to the Naqfa front and were given a special training that would enable them to storm Naqfa. Since the

insurgents had positioned their machineguns at strategic locations and planted mines along their defence lines, the commanders came to conclude that Naqfa could only be captured through a nocturnal operation. On November 12, 1985 (Hedar 3, 1978 E.C), at 2000 hours (8:00 P.M), the Nadāw Command launched the second phase of the Bahrā Nāgash Operation. The advance to EPLF positions was preceded by a 40-minute artillery bombardment and the clearing of land mines by the army engineers.

With the exception of a few lucky ones, most of the troops of the first wave were machine-gunned or blown up by anti-personnel mines. The 6th Airborne Brigade and the 18th Mountain Infantry Division fought with extraordinary courage and tried to overwhelm the rebels. As usual, the insurgents counter-attacked the assailants by flanking units from left and right and forced them to retreat. A couple of weeks later, the offensive on the Naqfa front was called off before it could cause a staggering depletion of manpower. In the first and second phases of the operation, 14,442 government troops were put out of action (3,545 killed, 10,374 wounded and 523 missing in action).¹⁸⁸

The operation department justifiably singled out four factors for the failure of the Bahrā Nāgash Operation: the army's inability to withstand the EPLF counter-offensive, the inadequate use of heavy weapons to demolish EPLF trenches, the incompetence of commanders to deal with changing circumstances and delays in setting up command posts soon after the army's offensive.¹⁸⁹ On his part, Māngestu put the blame on senior commanders who proved to be incompetent under changing circumstances.¹⁹⁰

On the other hand, the military intelligence unit pointed out a number of EPLF strengths. Among other things, the insurgents could build strong trenches and bunkers within a short time. They were able to crawl to government positions with absolute silence and launch surprise attacks. In order to avoid air strikes, they usually carried out attacks during bad weather. When the army mounted a frontal offensive, they often sent outflanking units to cut off the assailants. After capturing a given point, they swiftly moved machine guns to give cover to their fighters and repulse counter-attacks. Machineguns and other weapons were positioned to achieve maximum result. When the army captured strategic points, the insurgents usually launched an immediate counter-offensive and ejected it from the areas captured. Whenever necessary, they deliberately retreated to lure the government troops to their traps where they could not escape. The insurgents

could also rotate fighters even during heavy fighting. They could also move fast and easily with their arms and small supplies. Most importantly, as has been the case during earlier operations, the Naqfa Mountains favoured EPLF defences and made the government offensive a nightmare.¹⁹¹

Soon after the end of the Bahrä Nägash Operation, the insurgents snatched the initiative once again and began a large-scale counter-offensive on the Halhal front. The 22nd Mountain Infantry Division was moved from the Naqfa to the Halhal front and tried in vain to check the EPLF counter-offensive. The army could only stop the advance of the insurgents after the arrival of the 102nd Airborne Division. When the insurgents threatened the security of Asmära and its environs, the Airborne Division was sent back to Asmära.¹⁹²

On January 14, 1986 (ፕ 6, 1978 E.C), the EPLF mounted another commando raid on Asmära airfield and destroyed several airplanes and set the ammunition and fuel depots on fire.¹⁹³ The attack proved the vulnerability of even the maximum security zones in Asmära.

Between 1976 and 1986, the Sahel Mountains surrounding the town of Naqfa witnessed probably the bloodiest fighting in the history of Ethiopia. The MOND archives reveal that the government lost 196,944 troops in Eritrea alone between 1977 and 1986.¹⁹⁴ A considerable number of those troops died during the battles for Naqfa.

For the government, "capturing the town [Naqfa] was equated with the final solution to the Eritrean problem. The truth of the matter was that Naqfa didn't matter that much; won or lost. ... It might be a temporary setback, but not the 'final blow' "¹⁹⁵ In all the major offensives, the government attempted to take advantage of its numerical supremacy, for "conventional military wisdom suggested that the only way to defeat a guerrilla army was to overwhelm it with numbers."¹⁹⁶

The operations to capture Naqfa failed not because the government troops were inferior in fighting abilities than the insurgents. Some units like the 18th Mountain, the 3rd, and 17th Infantry and the 102nd Airborne Divisions fought with exceptional spirit, high morale and firm resolve. If one accepts Napoleon Bonaparte's maxim that: "three-quarters of war is a matter of morale," why then did these famed divisions, known for high morale, fail to take Naqfa? The same

military genius points out some of the factors that may lead to the undoing of military operations: "In mountain war, he who attacks is at a disadvantage." Napoleon also warns commanders to "avoid the field of battle that he [the enemy] has reconnoitered and studied. Be even more careful to avoid one that he has fortified and where he has entrenched himself."¹⁹⁷ Not only were the mountains of Naqfa thoroughly studied by the insurgents but also strongly fortified so as to make advancing uphill by the army towards the well-entrenched insurgents a daunting task.

Apart from these, the army's operations were marred by several drawbacks from planning to execution. In the first place, operations were either planned by Māngestu or the senior commanders and the Soviet advisers. The designers of those operations did not take the unsuitability of the Sahel Mountains and the strength of the insurgents into consideration. Nor did they involve the best available minds, including junior commanders who had a long acquaintance with the Sahel Mountains, in the planning process. In addition, no contingency plans were prepared to be carried out in case of failure. That the command system did not allow horizontal relationship and freedom of action was another serious obstacle to the government offensive. On the other hand, the army failed to use the local population as a source of information about the insurgents. In contrast, the insurgents assigned the local people to gather intelligence about the army and they managed to infiltrate the military hierarchy at all levels. Since they had all sorts of intelligence, the army could not conceal its movements. As a result, it was not always possible to take the insurgents by surprise or carry out deceptive measures. If the insurgents were to be significantly weakened, the government had to seal off all EPLF exits to the Sudan, effectively patrol the Red Sea coast to cut off EPLF supplies and alienate it from the local people as well as from its external supporters. Instead of trying to overwhelm the insurgents by sheer numbers and superior weaponry, the government should have deployed well-disciplined and highly committed troops especially trained in counter-insurgency operations. The military intelligence personnel should have vigilantly watched the army from any possible hostile infiltration, meticulously gathered vital and timely information about the insurgents and jealously kept the army's secrets.¹⁹⁸

In the final analysis, the government's failure to capture Naqfa inexorably led to the Afabét debacle of 1988.

5.2.2. The Afabét and the Sheré Debacles

Between 1982 and 1985, the army in Eritrea launched four major operations to wipe out the Eritrean insurgents. Following the failure of the last offensive to capture Naqfa in November 1985, the SRA was reorganized into four commands namely Bärgeḍ, Nadäw, Mäket and Mänter and all the commands were ordered to exercise active defence in their front lines. Nadäw was the most formidable and the strongest of all the commands that formed the SRA. Put under its command were two mountain and one infantry divisions, the famed 29th Zara'y Däräs Mechanized Brigade, an artillery brigade and a tank battalion.¹⁹⁹

Nadäw's nerve centre as well as its ammunition and fuel depots were based at Afabét, a small town located 175 kilometers north of Asmära. For Mängestu, Afabét had immense strategic importance. It served as a bridge between the strategic town of Kärän and the main EPLF stronghold, Naqfa, and had a commanding position overlooking the rebel held areas in the north. In addition, it was the only spot in northern Eritrea with adequate water supply for a large army. Given Afabét's strategic importance, Mängestu did not regret putting all the eggs in one basket.²⁰⁰ Some of Mängestu's critics, however, disagree with the strategic importance of Afabét. In the eyes of Major Dawit Woldä Giorgis, a onetime administrator of Eritrea, "there was no military logic to having such a huge force with so much military hardware in one small spot."²⁰¹

Since the failure of Operation Bahrä Nägash, the Nadäw Command was ordered to exercise constant vigilance along its defence parameters stretching as far as Tiksi in the north so as to keep the insurgents at bay. Apart from small scale aerial and overland reconnaissance missions, the Nadäw command carried out no major counter-insurgency operations between late 1985 and 1987. In January, 1987, Nadäw was given a new commander, Brigadier General Tariku Ayné. Tariku had been at odds with Major General Räggaša Jimma, who was now commander of the SRA, and Major General Märe'd Negussé, the Chief-of-Staff. Once transferred to Nadäw, Tariku began to reject orders from his superiors, mainly General Räggaša and the two deputy commanders of the SRA, Major General Hussein Ahmäḍ and Brigadier General Wubätu Şäggayé, both of whom happened to be his juniors. Unfortunately,

the conflict among the senior commanders engulfed the division, brigade and battalion commanders. The conflict within the 22nd Mountain Infantry Division between the commander, Colonel Germa Täfäri, and the political officer, Captain Sirak Worqnäh, was particularly very serious and greatly affected the rank and file.²⁰²

The Nadäw troops had their own grievances. They had been on the frontlines without any leave from five to nine years. It has become an open secret to every soldier that there would be no prospect of ending the war in Eritrea, which was still costing lives everyday.²⁰³ Within a span of five years alone (i.e., 1982-1987), 117,195 troops of the SRA had been put out of action.²⁰⁴ Nadäw troops, therefore, demanded, among other things, either to be relieved or transferred to other fronts outside Eritrea. The unrest within the 48th, 49th, 50th and 51st brigades of the 22nd MID was particularly rife. Those soldiers who sided with the political officers declined to take orders from commanders of the division down to the squad level. Discontent and dissatisfaction had driven troops of the 22nd MID to the extent of ambushing and robbing convoys and confiscating even the rations of their commanders. Although the situation was getting out of hand, Tariku is reported to have "sympathized with the troops' grievances and supported some of their demands."²⁰⁵

In an attempt to curb the problem, the SRA took some disciplinary measures, ranging from demotion to execution. Among the rebellious soldiers and officers imprisoned at Tiksi, some managed to escape and defect to the EPLF. Among the defectors were people from the operations, military security and radio communication departments. Although defection meant the fall of invaluable secrets into the hands of the insurgents, no attempts were made to change communication codes and operation plans.²⁰⁶

The insurgents were quick to capitalize on Nadäw's turmoil. They decided to mount an offensive when morale was very low. On December 6, 1987 (Hedar 26, 1980 E.C), the EPLF made a feint attack on the Mäket command forcing it to retreat from the Haléba defence lines. The attack was intended to divert the attention of commanders away from the Nadäw front lines. Two days later, the insurgents launched another offensive against the rebellious 22nd MID. By striking deep into the division's inner defences, they disabled the command centre and pushed the troops back 20 - 30 kilometers to the south from the gates of Naqfa. Such strategic heights like Dändän and Glob came under EPLF control. All the four brigades

of the 22nd MID were routed and displaced from their defence lines. A total of 1,388 troops were put out of action. When the division was beaten, Tariku was not around Tiksi or Afabét. Held responsible for this setback and other wrongdoings, Tariku was executed on February 15, 1988 (Yäkatit 7 1980 E.C), following Mängestu's visit to Eritrea and his face-to-face discussion with the Nadäw troops (see Appendix-VII). Brigadier General Käbbädä Gashä, commander of the Mäket Command, was demoted to a private and dismissed from the army without pension.²⁰⁷ General Räggsa, the SRA commander, and Colonel Shäwaräga Bihonäñ, political officer of the SRA, were transferred to other posts. While Colonel Gétanäh Haylé was made the new commander of Nadäw, General Wubätu was promoted to be commander of the SRA.²⁰⁸

Although some corrective measures were taken, disciplinary problem especially insubordination was far from over. The 14th Infantry Division which replaced the 22nd MID was equally rebellious and regarded the neighbouring unit, the 19th MID, as an enemy force. Both divisions were reluctant to close the gap between them. Cognizant of all these internal problems, the EPLF leaders were painstakingly preparing a plan of operation to mount the largest offensive ever on the Nadäw Command in March 1988.²⁰⁹ The EPLF, known for concealing its intentions while accessing the top secrets of its adversary, excluded even brigade commanders from taking part in the planning of the Afabét offensive to avoid any possible leakage of information. While the plan of operation was being worked out, EPLF fighters were involved in soccer tournaments in order to make the Ethiopian commanders believe that there was no threat from the insurgents.²¹⁰ The EPLF commanders took all these precautions as if they were acting in accordance with the advice of the German field marshal, Erwin Rommel: "Concealment of intentions is of the utmost importance in order to provide surprise for one's own operations."²¹¹

Although EPLF sources claim that there was a concentration of 20,000 government troops around Afabét by early 1988, Nadäw's three divisions (14th, 19th and 21st) had a total manpower of little more than that of an infantry division, 15,223, to be exact. In addition to the considerable manpower depletion, the relations between the 14th and the 19th divisions, as shown above, were far from smooth. To make matters worse, Colonel Täshomä Woldä Sänbät and Colonel Admasu Mäkonnen, commanders of the 14th and the 19th divisions

respectively refused to take orders from the new commander of Nadäw, Colonel Gétanäh Haylé, who had the same rank as them. Days before the EPLF onslaught on the Tiksi front in December 1987, the 19th division was ordered to immediately close the unmanned defence lines of 4-5 kilometres located between itself and the adjacent 14th division. The rejection of this order brought about fatal consequences.²¹² Though discipline had reached nearly a breaking point, the SRA did not stop sending orders to the Nadäw command to avert the danger on the horizon. Some 24 hours before the attack on Afabét, General Wubätu forewarned the Nadäw and Mänter commands that the EPLF had been bringing in weapons, probably to strike the Afabét garrison from behind and cut off its supply route. Both commands were, therefore, ordered to reconnoitre their respective defence perimeters and report to the SRA within a couple of days. With such information at hand, it was not difficult to predict the intention of the insurgents. Before any report came out of Afabét, the EPLF mounted a three-pronged attack on the Nadäw Command on March 17, 1988 (Mägabit 8, 1980 E.C).²¹³ According to EPLF's time table, Afabét would be captured within 24 hours at the earliest or 48 hours at the latest.²¹⁴

The EPLF's right flank slipped through the gap between the 14th and 19th divisions, advanced behind Nadäw's lines and sealed off the strategic pass of Mäsahlit by displacing the Sädäd Commando Battalion, thereby blocking the Afabét-Kärän road so as to prevent any retreat and repulse possible relief units. The left flank swept through the Red Sea coastal plains to outflank the 29th Mechanized Brigade at Kämchäwa and then attack Nadäw's command centre from the east. The central column mounted a frontal assault on Nadäw positions along the Amba, Ras Armas and Rorat Mountains. The Nadäw Command received reports of an EPLF offensive on all fronts at 0515 hours.²¹⁵ Although EPLF fighters on the right and central fronts proceeded according to plan, they faced stiff resistance on the left flank from the 29th Mechanized Brigade. In the words of Michela Wrong, "for 16 hours, the surprised Ethiopians resisted with extraordinary tenacity."²¹⁶ As the EPLF gained the upper hand, the SRA decided to pull back the Mechanized Brigade from Kämchäwa and send reinforcements to Afabét. As troops began to fall back to Afabét, the insurgents tried in vain to block them at Moga'e River. Then they hurried on the heels of the mechanized troops to trap them at Ad Shärum, a narrow pass located north of Afabét. The mechanized convoy heading to Afabét consisted of 70 tanks, APCs and trucks. As the convoy struggled to pass through the narrow

pass, one of the leading trucks was hit by a shell fired from an EPLF tank. All other trucks, tanks and APCs were blocked. The Nadāw troops had to act swiftly to prevent the whole convoy from falling into EPLF hands. They began to destroy their own weapons with hand grenades. Then jet fighters appeared in the skies to complete the destruction.²¹⁷

Since the Naqfa-Afabét road was now blocked at Ad Shārum with destroyed tanks and trucks, the EPLF mechanized units had to move back to Kāmchāwa. From there they rushed to the east, then moved southwards parallel to the Red Sea coast before turning west to Afabét.²¹⁸ As the insurgents were racing with time to storm the Nadāw Command centre at Afabét, the SRA rushed the 16th Sānteq Mechanized Brigade, the 38th and 39th Mountain Infantry Brigades to the Māsahlit pass from Aqordat, Mälābso and Wa'ezāger respectively in an attempt to reopen the Kārān-Afabét road. But the two EPLF brigades refused to be driven out of the strategic pass. Then on March 18, the SRA sent the 78th and the 82nd Brigades of the 15th Infantry (Nābro) Division to Kārān from Asmāra. Although the insurgents tried to delay their advance by ambushing them at Adi Täklāzan, the two brigades reached Kārān with minor damage. From there, 650 troops from the two brigades were flown by helicopters to Afabét.²¹⁹

As the Nadāw troops in the outer defence lines retreated to Afabét, the EPLF's central column positioned itself against the 21st MID to storm the command centre. Fearing that the Nadāw command may not be able to coordinate the ill-disciplined and demoralized troops, General Wubātu took command of the fighting. Troops in the inner lines of trenches fought heroically for two days without let up. Although the situation was getting worse at an alarming speed, furious fighting continued in the third day. While the troops east of the town were still holding out their positions, the insurgents managed to force their way into the outskirts of the town. At this critical moment, many troops retreated in the direction of Kārān. Commanders tried to regroup troops but it was all to no avail. Following a furious hand-to-hand fighting, the insurgents controlled the command centre. Despite the storming of the command and control centre, the rear guard continued the fighting until the evening of March 19. All resistance was finally broken at 0730 hours. Although the command blew up its own headquarters before falling into EPLF hands, it failed to do the same to the ammunition depot.²²⁰ The insurgents, therefore, captured, in the words of Māngestu, "a

mountain of ammunition.”²²¹ In addition, 50 tanks, a number of long range artillery pieces, multiple rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, and military vehicles fell into EPLF hands.²²² According to the Operations Department of the MOND, 12,116 troops were put out of action, of whom 2,995 were killed, 6,038 wounded and 3,083 missing in action. The rest are reported to have reached places of safety.²²³

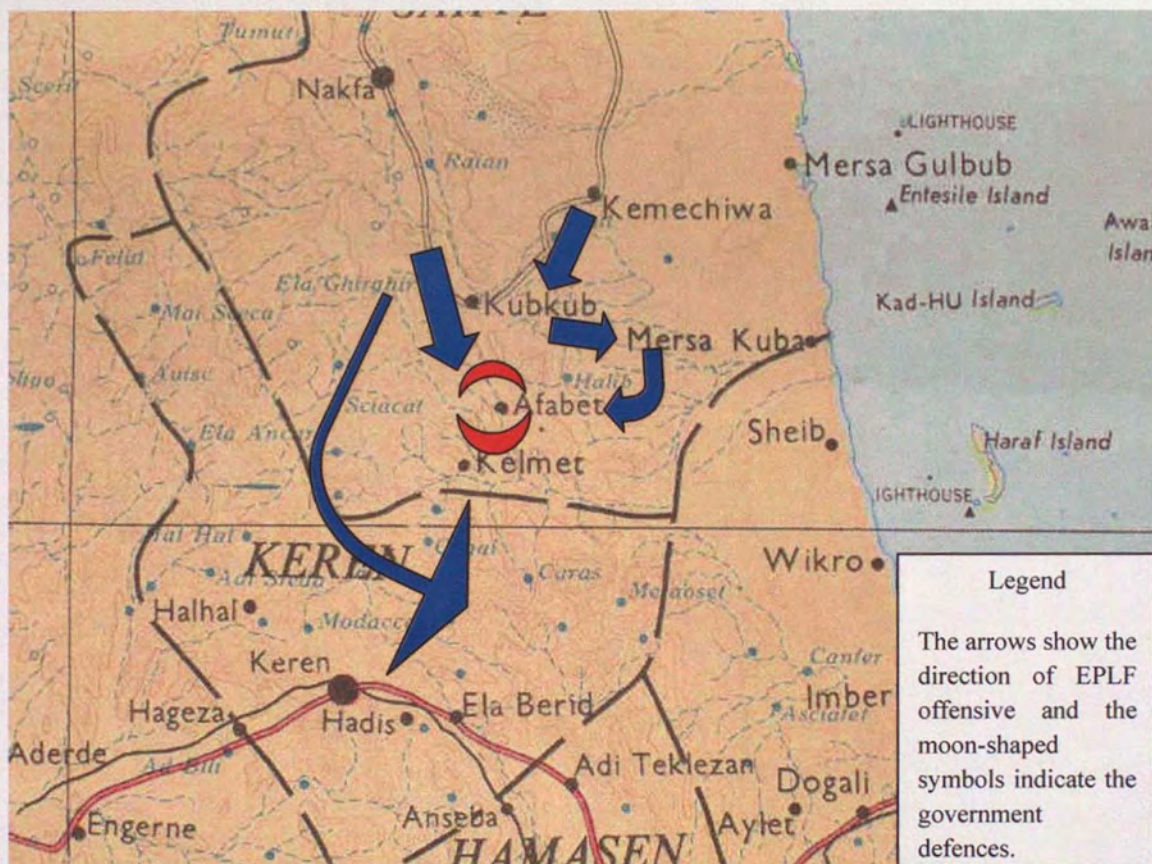


Fig. 5. 9. The Battle of Afabät, adapted from Map of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Mapping Authority, ND.

The fall of Afabät into EPLF hands was a turning point in the war in Eritrea and it was a huge victory for the insurgents. However, given the grave internal crisis which had been rocking the Nadäw Command, its destruction with in a three day fighting may not be that surprising. The committee formed to investigate the main reasons for the destruction of the Nadäw Command listed several factors including conflict and rivalry among commanders, insubordination, corruption, incompetence and “lack of a reliable reserve force...”²²⁴ But, the then commander of the SRA, General Wubätu, dismisses the last point as one of the reasons

for defeat. According to him, by the time the EPLF launched its offensive to take Afabét, the 102nd Airborne Division was idly stationed in Asmära. But, he could not deploy the division to Afabét without getting the go ahead from his superiors.²²⁵ In the eyes of an ex-EPLF fighter, the Afabét victory was the result of EPLF's sophistication and ingenuity.²²⁶ Although EPLF's skilful use of intelligence and good military leadership for its all-out offensive contributed a great deal to the fall of Afabét to its hands, the fundamental reasons for the destruction of the Nadäw Command should be sought in the command's internal crisis.

Shocked by the destruction of the Nadäw command, the government pulled its troops out of Bäréntu, Aqordat, Täsänäy, Ali Gidär and Haykota within the next two weeks, leaving western and northern Eritrea to the EPLF.²²⁷ Consequently, the 2nd Mechanized Division, the 23rd Infantry Division and the reputed Sänçeḻ Mechanized Brigade were concentrated around Kärän in an attempt to reopen the Kärän-Afabét road. What was disheartening was the fate of the Kunama living in and around Bäréntu. Since 1977, the Kunama had always been on the side of the army and they never supported the insurgents. When Bäréntu was evacuated, they had to move with the army all the way to Kärän for fear of reprisals by the EPLF.²²⁸

Weeks after the destruction of the Nadäw Command, the government came to believe that it was still possible to regain Afabét. Accordingly, in consultation with the Soviet military advisers, a plan of operation to retake Afabét was prepared in absolute secrecy. Even the senior commanders of the SRA were not informed, probably to prevent information leakage. Since the Kärän-Afabét road was highly fortified, the 102nd Airborne Division was to march to the north along the sandy plains parallel to the Red Sea coast in the direction of She'eb. Likewise, the 9th Division was moved from the Ogadén to Meṣewa via Assäb. About 90 tanks and armoured vehicles were deployed to capture Afabét from the east. By the time they reached Ma'mido, the troops were completely exhausted and many had already died due to dehydration and sunstroke. Water became absolutely scarce. The shortage was so critical that a soldier killed a lieutenant for a few litres of water. Government troops thus became easy prey to the insurgents. The EPLF's four divisions were arrayed against the airborne division and the supporting units. Brigadier General Tämäsgän Gämächu, commander of the airborne division, was ambushed by the insurgents; some said he committed suicide. The remaining

troops were finally ordered to fall back to Asmāra after losing many of their comrades in the sands of Ma'mido.²²⁹

Soon after the fall of Afabét, the government moved the widely esteemed unit, the 3rd (Lion) Division from Tegray to Kärän to reinforce the army there. Using this opportunity to the best advantage, the TPLF mounted a series of offensives and controlled Adwa, Aksum, Säläkläka, and Enda Sellasé between March 28 and 31, 1988. When Enda Sellasé fell into TPLF hands, 2,776 troops of the 17th Division and their commander, Brigadier General Ar'aya Zär'ay were able to make their way to Gondär.²³⁰

Frustrated by the worsening situation unfolding in the region, Brigadier General Addis Agellachäw, commander of the Tegray Command, sent a message full of despair to the defence minister. Part of the message reads:

There are several indications that the situation [in Tegray] is on the verge of getting out of control. The swift movement of the enemy is making intelligence gathering and decision making a difficult exercise. The enemy's intricate intelligence network, the defection of the people's militia to the rebels, the increasing number of enemy collaborators in towns and rural areas and the rebels' psychological warfare have eroded the fighting spirit of the army ... The separate army units we had stationed at various places could not even defend themselves and a considerable number of troops and weapons are being destroyed and falling into enemy hands. ... Even those army units which had been great fighters are being easily neutralized, missing and captured by the enemy.²³¹

The 17th Division, called Tärb (wasp), was, for instance, known for its fighting capability and bravery. But in March 1988, the Tärb and the 16th divisions lost to the TPLF 9 T-55 tanks, 66 artillery pieces, 9 Zu-23 anti-aircraft guns, 16 military vehicles and a considerable number of small arms.²³²

After a two-month rehabilitation and preparation, the insurgents were ready to strike the army's southern sectors. Accordingly, in collaboration with the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), the TPLF moved from Säqota and captured the town of Koräm on May 25, 1988 (Genbot 17, 1980 E.C), following a five hour fighting. On the same day, other TPLF units

captured the strategic mountain of Amba Alagé. The army at Maychäw was completely cut off. Its supply routes were blocked at Amba Alagé and Gera Kasso, another strategic mountain between Koräm and Allamaṭa. Then on May 27, 1988, a joint TPLF-EPDM force attacked the 1st Division headquarters and the 117th brigade based at Maychäw. The army's defences were overrun and the division commander, Colonel Haylu G. Yohannes, was captured after courageously fighting like a soldier. The army lost 3 T-55 tanks, 11 artillery guns, 12 armoured vehicles, 4 Zu-23 anti-aircraft guns and 63 various vehicles. The insurgents controlled the area for two weeks until they could move all captured property to a place of safety. Nonetheless, within a matter of five days (between June 10 and 15, 1988), the army recaptured Koräm, Maychäw and Amba Alagé.²³³

In an attempt to reverse the worsening military situation in Eritrea and Tegray, the government had already been taking a series of measures. On April 9, 1988 (Miyaziya 1, 1980 E.C), the Tegray Command (renamed the 604th Corps), the North-eastern Command (now the 605th Corps) and the North-western Command (603rd Corps) were brought together to form the Third Revolutionary Army (TRA). The newly formed TRA had under its command 75,493 troops, of whom regulars formed 35 percent, the rest (65 percent) being national servicemen and people's militia. Following the formation of the TRA, its component units – the 603rd, 604th and 605th corps - were assigned to carry out counter-insurgency operations in Gondär, Tegray and Wollo respectively.²³⁴

The establishment of the TRA was followed by the declaration of a state of emergency on May 14, 1988 (Miyaziya 6, 1980 E.C), in Eritrea and Tegray. Accordingly, Lieutenant General Täsfayé G. Kidan and Captain Läggäsä Asfaw, both politbureau members of the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), were made overall administrators of Eritrea and Tegray respectively and they were given sweeping power.²³⁵

Despite the formation of the TRA, the declaration of the state of emergency and the assignment of two loyal party officials as overall administrators, the government seemed less secure. The government calculated that by signing a peace accord with Somalia, it would be possible to redeploy troops from the Ogadén to the northern front. To that end, the Ethiopian government initiated peace talks with Mogadishu in early 1988 and the effort bore fruit soon afterwards.

Accordingly, Ethiopia and Somalia agreed to pull back their forces 15 kilometres from the common border as a first step toward a cessation of hostilities. The agreement was signed on May 16, 1988, in Hargesa by Major General Mäsfen G.Qal, the Ethiopian deputy defence minister, and Brigadier General Muhammad Sayid Morgan, the Somali commander of the 26th command. As expected, the agreement enabled the Ethiopian government to transfer some army units from the Ogadén to the northern front.²³⁶

Some two months after its formation, the TRA was ordered to launch a huge campaign named "Operation Adwa." The objective of Operation Adwa was to wipe out insurgents in Gondär and Tegray and it was to be carried out in four phases between June 20 and August 3, 1988 (Säné 13 and Hämlé 27, 1980 E.C). The theatre of operation was extended from the Dässé-Mäqälé road in the east to the Gondär-Humära road in the west. Units of the 603rd Corps (i.e., the 7th division, the 15th, 17th, 19th, 33rd, 114th, 115th and 136th brigades) were assigned to destroy the main TPLF base areas in northern Gondär. Similarly, the 604th Corps, coordinating the 4th, 9th, 16th infantry and the 103rd commando divisions, was expected to annihilate the insurgents in Tegray. The 605th Corps, consisting of the 1st infantry division, the 1st, 2nd, 16th, 117th, 100th, 140th and 142nd brigades, was given a less demanding task – to safeguard Woldya, Alälé Sulula, Qobbo, Koräm, Maychäw and Amba Alagé by stationing a brigade at each town.²³⁷

In the first phase of Operation Adwa, only the 604th Corps met stiff resistance from the TPLF. The 4th and 9th divisions were assigned to open up the Mäqälé-Adigrat and Mäqälé-Dässé roads before taking control of Hagärä Sälam and Abiy Addi. The two divisions controlled Hagärä Sälam and Abiy Addi according to plan between June 21 and 24, 1988. During the first phase of the operation, 1,071 government troops were put out of action while the TPLF casualty was reported to be 1,714.²³⁸

The second phase of Operation Adwa was launched following the completion of the first one. At this stage, the 7th Division and its supporting brigades under the 603rd Corps had to converge on Dansha from four directions: Humära, Mätämma, Tekel Dengay and Däbarq. On their way, these army units routed the insurgents in Bä'akar, Gerar Weha, Gechäw, Sanja, Addi Arqay and Dansha. While the 17th brigade from Däbarq captured Addi Arqay on June 21, 1988, other units of the 603rd Corps from Mätämma, Humära and Tekel Dengay advanced to Dansha. The march on Dansha was not, however, without problems. Although other units converged on Dansha

according to schedule, the movement of those troops from Tekel Dengay and Mätämma was hampered by the Angäräb River. When they finally entered Dansha on June 28, the troops were completely exhausted. Even then, they were ordered to keep on marching to Kaza and Däjäna along with other units. On his part, Brigadier General Haylu Bäräwaq, commander of the 603rd Corps, was instructed by his superiors to personally lead the third phase of the operation instead of delegating his power to his deputy, Brigadier General Assäfa Mosisa. The third phase of Operation Adwa aimed at storming the main TPLF base areas in Kaza and Däjäna.²³⁹

The TPLF had already established training camps near the banks of the Kaza and Angäräb rivers. Its command centre, arms depot, hospital and radio station were located at Däjäna in Tach (lower) Armacheho district of Wogära *awrajja*. The TPLF had also farms in the fertile plains of Däjäna, where it grew grain and cash crops for its own consumption and for export to the Sudan. Since the people of Tach Armacheho were reported to be fond of rifles and the government exercised little control over the district, the locality was, therefore, an ideal base area for insurgents. It is no wonder that the TPLF chose the district as its main base area.²⁴⁰

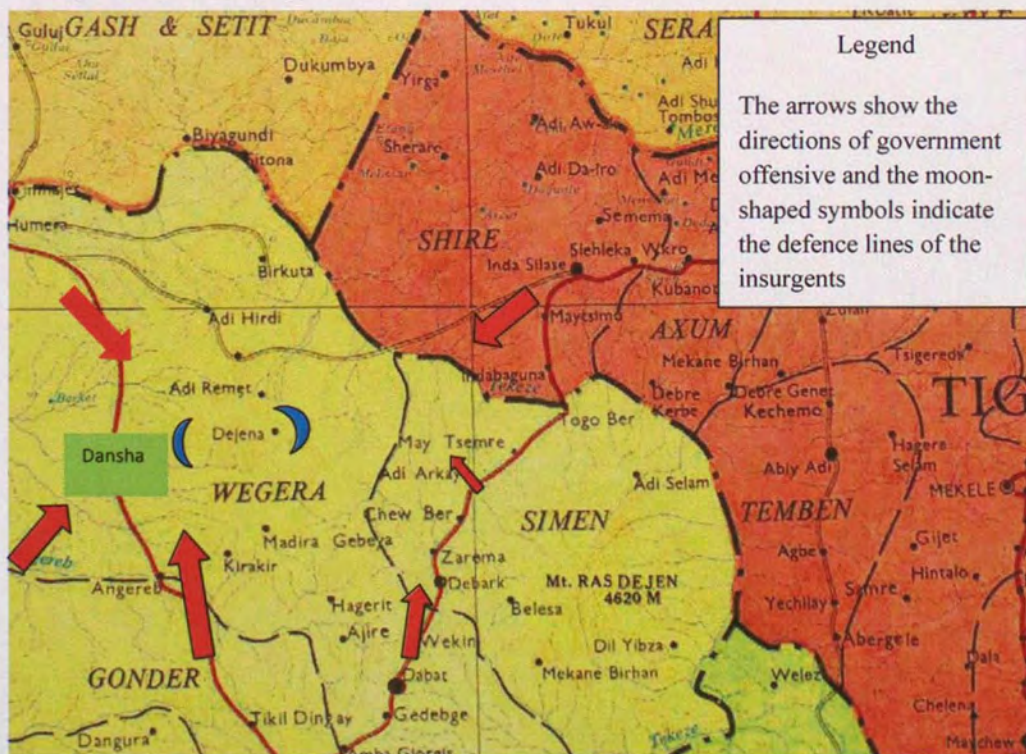


Fig. 5.10. The government attempt to encircle the TPLF base areas in Dansha, Kaza and Däjäna during Operation Adwa III, July 1988. Adapted from Map of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Mapping Authority, ND.

The convergence of government troops on Dansha, a town along the Gondär-Humära road not far from Däjäna, was thus a real threat to the TPLF insurgents. By the time the government troops resumed their advance to the main base areas in early July, the senior political and military leaders of the TPLF were at Däjäna. Hayyälom Ar'aya, one of the TPLF commanders recalled: "As we heard the advance of the 603rd Corps from Dansha to Däjäna, we realized that a decisive engagement which would put a severe test to our survival was going to take place. Losing Däjäna meant going back to square one."²⁴¹ By way of subverting the impending disaster, the TPLF had not only to deploy non-combatants known as "kefltat" (sections) but also to swiftly move most of its fighters from Tegray to Däjäna. In doing so, it intended to defend its base areas around Kaza and Däjäna in northern Gondär.²⁴²

On the other hand, the transfer of TPLF fighters from Tegray to northern Gondär helped the 604th Corps to capture several towns fairly quickly. According to plans of Operation Adwa, the army was expected to take control of only May Qenäṭal (located south of Adwa) and Sänqata (situated south of Adigrat) in the second phase. But the withdrawal of the insurgents enabled the 4th and 9th divisions to control May Qenäṭal, Adwa, Aksum and Enda Sellasé, while the 16th division captured Sänqata, Adigrat and Enticho between June 27 and 30, 1988 (Säné 20 -23, 1980 E.C). However, while opening up the Adigrat-Enda Sellasé road, the 604th Corps failed to garrison the towns of Adwa and Aksum. Instead, it concentrated its forces at Enda Sellasé and that brought about disastrous consequences.²⁴³

Once it controlled all the main towns in Tegray, the 604th Corps was expected to send the 4th and 9th divisions from Enda Sellasé to Däjäna so as to encircle and finally annihilate the insurgents in collaboration with the 603rd Corps. If units of 604th Corps arrived in time, the insurgents would have been in real danger. On their part, troops of the 603rd Corps captured the TPLF training centre at Kaza and entered Däjäna in early July 1988, despite the shortage of tanks and artillery guns. Then, they blocked the main route connecting the TPLF command centre in Däjäna with western Tegray.²⁴⁴

As units of the 603rd Corps surged through TPLF base areas toward the main command centre, the insurgents were thrown into panic. Government forces were very close to a decisive victory. At this critical moment, when the very survival of the TPLF was at stake, the 4th and 9th divisions

of the 604th Corps, which were expected to open the way for a final pincer operation, had not yet crossed the Tākāzé River. That was mainly due to the incompetence and lack of prudence on the part of the commanders. Since they planned the operation during the rainy season, tanks and artillery guns were immobilized by the muddy roads and rivers. The government troops themselves could not cover the enormous distance in time. This considerable delay contributed a lot to the undoing of the major campaign. To make matters worse, jet fighters taking off from Baher Dar could not bomb TPLF positions and helicopters could not evacuate wounded troops because of bad weather. Capitalizing on such weaknesses, the TPLF concentrated its fighters and managed to dislodge government forces first from Dājāna and then Dansha in a fierce counter-offensive. On July 11, 1988 (Hämlé 4, 1988 E.C), government forces on the Dansha front were in disarray. While General Haylu and most of his troops retreated to Humära, some others ended up in Gondär.²⁴⁵

The 604th Corps soon ordered the 4th and 9th divisions to return immediately to Enda Sellasé before the insurgents turned against them after routing the 603rd Corps. Although the 603rd Corps had nearly achieved its goal, the third phase of Operation Adwa finally fizzled out into a disaster. Had there been good coordination between the 603rd and 604th Corps and effective military leadership, the army could have scored a major victory.²⁴⁶ On the Dansha-Dājāna front alone, a total of 4,226 government troops were put out of action, of whom 1,652 were killed, 1,406 wounded and 1,168 missing in action.²⁴⁷ Obviously, planning such a huge operation to be launched during the rainy season is not only a complete lack of imagination and ignorance in military strategy but also a clear disregard for the lives of government troops. Some regard it as one of the several acts of sabotage committed by senior commanders who were preparing to stage a coup. Others view it as the result of short-sightedness on the part of Captain Lāggāsā Asfaw and the TRA commander, Major General Mulatu Nāgash.²⁴⁸

The setback in the Dansha-Dājāna front did not deter the TRA from going ahead with the last phase of operation Adwa. In this phase, the 604th Corps deployed the 4th, 9th and 16th divisions (a total of 12 brigades) to Addi Da'ero, Addi Guzām, Addi Hagāray and Sheraro to destroy the insurgents based in those areas. Leaving behind three brigades to safeguard army headquarters and supply routes, the 4th, 9th and 16th divisions set out from Enda Sellasé on July 29, 1988, to Addi Da'ero.²⁴⁹ Although initial advances were reportedly good, poor logistics exposed troops to

starvation. The situation was also exasperated by heavy floods and malaria. As two brigades (the 22nd and 120th) of the 16th division moved to Addi Hagäray on August 4, 1988 (Hämlé 28, 1988 E.C), they were attacked and scattered by a larger TPLF force. Once it secured its base areas in northern Gondär with heavy losses, the TPLF had concentrated its forces around Addi Hagäray to disrupt the last phase of Operation Adwa. Attempts to reinforce and regroup failed due to bad weather and harassment by insurgents. The insurgents then closed the line of retreat and encircled the 22nd and the 120th brigades of the 16th and the 103rd brigade of the 9th divisions. The three brigades suffered heavy casualties. The remaining troops were ordered to fall back to Enda Sellasé.²⁵⁰

Following the end of Operation Adwa, there began a period of inactivity until the TPLF captured Rama, a town located between Adwa and the Märäb River on September 29, 1988 (Mäskäräm 19, 1981 E.C). The supply route of the 604th Corps from Asmära was thus cut off.²⁵¹ The fall of Rama into TPLF hands prompted the government to work out a new plan of operation named "Operation Aksum." The overall objective of the operation was to reopen the Enda Sellasé-Asmära road so as to keep supplies coming in from Asmära. In order to closely coordinate the operation, the TRA moved its advance headquarters from Mäqälé to Enda Sellasé.²⁵²

Although experiences were very much disappointing with regard to military coordination, the SRA was assigned to deploy an infantry division along the Rama-Adwa route to support the TRA. Unfortunately, however, the overall administrator of Eritrea, General Täsfayé Gäbrä Kidan was at odds with both Captain Laggäsä Asfaw and General Mulatu Nägash. General Täsfayé did not seem to be interested to see the success of Operation Aksum.²⁵³

After nearly a five month rehabilitation, phase one of Operation Aksum began with the deployment of the 10th division from the SRA to Rama and the 9th and 16th divisions from the TRA to Chella, a place located north of Säläkläka. Setting out from Säläkläka and Enda Sellasé respectively, the 9th and 16th divisions were expected to meet at Chella and mount a joint operation against the insurgents. However, there was a 10-15 kilometre gap between the two divisions and that helped the insurgents to attack both divisions separately. After beating and scattering the 16th division, the insurgents concentrated their forces against the 9th division. Both divisions suffered heavy losses before returning to Enda Sellasé and Säläkläka. Soon afterwards, the TRA transferred the 103rd commando division from Mäqälé to reinforce the 4th division at

Enda Sellasé.²⁵⁴ Likewise, the 17th division from Gondär and the 6th and the 30th mechanized brigades from Wollo were moved to Mäqälé. The withdrawal of the 17th division made the Gondär-Däbarq line vulnerable to TPLF onslaught. As a result, the insurgents captured the towns of Däbarq and Dabat on February 3, 1989 (ፕጥ 26, 1981 E.C).²⁵⁵

Despite the failure of Operation Aksum I, the TRA believed that there was still a chance to control Aksum and Adwa and reopen the Adwa-Asmära route. The TRA thus went ahead with the second phase of Operation Aksum. According to the plan of Operation Aksum II, the 16th division would control Säläkläka, Aqab Sä'at, Endaba Beruk and May Brazio areas. Then, the 103rd commando division would sweep through the Säläkläka-Aksum road to pave the way for the 9th division, which could advance to Adwa. The 4th division would be kept at Enda Sellasé to safeguard supply depots and army headquarters. Based on wrong combat intelligence, the 604th Corps came to believe that the TPLF had sent some of its units to Däbarq and Dabat. As a result, it deployed only three divisions along the Säläkläka-Aksum front. But the fact of the matter was that five TPLF divisions were arrayed against the three divisions of the 604th Corps.²⁵⁶

On February 8, 1989, the 103rd commando division set out from Säläkläka and advanced to Aksum. As the division was on its way to Aksum, the insurgents launched an attack on February 10, 1989, at Aqab Sa'at against the 22nd brigade of the 16th and 75th brigade of the 9th divisions. Attempts to rescue the two brigades failed.²⁵⁷ As the insurgents threatened to cut the Säläkläka-Aksum road, the four brigades of the 103rd commando division were ordered to return without delay to Enda Sellasé. One brigade of the 9th division was assigned to safeguard the road for the safe return of the commando division. While advancing to Aksum, the 1035th commando brigade was the vanguard unit. Colonel Gétahun W. Giorgis, Commander of the 103rd commando division, was leading the vanguard brigade. When ordered to fall back, the 1035th brigade became the last to return. The brigade which had been assigned to patrol the road also withdrew along with the first three commando brigades. The 1035th brigade was left with no rearguard. It was soon isolated and attacked by the insurgents. The brigade sustained heavy losses. Out of its some 1200 men, only about 450 troops were able to return to Enda Sellasé. The division commander narrowly escaped a hand grenade attack. In the final analysis, Operation Aksum II ended in failure.²⁵⁸

Following the failure of the Aksum operations, the 604th Corps concentrated its four divisions around Enda Sellasé and Säläkläka. The 4th division was entrusted to defend Enda Sellasé town and the surrounding hills, including the strategic Qoyaşa Mountain. The 16th division positioned itself at Säläkläka. While the 9th division was stationed at Afgahgah, the 103rd commando division was put as a reserve force for the 4th division. Through its intelligence sources, the TPLF had already learned that the TRA would soon withdraw troops from Säläkläka in order to concentrate its forces around Enda Sellasé. Just before the evacuation of Säläkläka, the insurgents decided to block the strategic pass of Afgahgah between the two towns. Then on February 15, 1989 (Yäkatit 8, 1981 E.C), they mounted a dawn attack on government positions at Säläkläka. In the mean time, they slipped through a gap and advanced to Afgahgah. By displacing the small force stationed there, the insurgents captured the Afgahgah pass. That was followed by the fall of Mt. Qoyaşa into TPLF hands. The insurgents then positioned artillery guns at Qoyaşa, a mountain with commanding position over the surrounding areas. Government positions at Säläkläka and Enda Sellasé came under a barrage of artillery fire from Mt. Qoyaşa. The Enda Sellasé airport became one of the main targets of the insurgents' artillery. Heavy fighting took place at Afgahgah as government troops tried to force their way to Enda Sellasé. Many troops managed to break through the pass after suffering heavy casualty just before the fall of Säläkläka into TPLF hands. The 9th and 16th divisions suffered heavy losses. The 103rd commando division tried in vain to dislodge the insurgents from Mt. Qoyaşa and Afgahgah.²⁵⁹

The next objective of the insurgents was to destroy the 604th Corps altogether and capture Enda Sellasé. Some time earlier, the TPLF leaders had been advised by the EPLF leadership not to risk an attack on the 604th Corps for fear of a devastating counter-offensive. For the EPLF men, to move against the coming "flood" (i.e., the 604th Corps) would be suicidal. In contrast, the TPLF viewed the army in general and the 604th Corps in particular as a "hollow colossus" that may collapse if pushed vigorously. As a result, the TPLF was not ready to take heed of EPLF's advice. Instead, emboldened by the strategic initiative it had already seized, it went ahead with its plan of annihilating the government forces at Enda Sellasé.²⁶⁰ To that end, the TPLF amassed five divisions: Ag'azi, Alula, Awrora, Qäy Kokäb and Yäkatit.²⁶¹ According to Gebru, the number of divisions was much higher: "the TPLF had assembled more than 40,000 consisting of

seven regular divisions, about 10,000 *Zobawi* or zonal fighters, more than 5,000 people's militia..."²⁶² The TPLF forces were further reinforced by an EPLF mechanized brigade which arrived for critical support with 12 tanks, 8 artillery pieces and about a dozen of ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns.²⁶³

On the government side, however, there was alarming manpower depletion. On the day of the final battle, the TRA commander expressed his frustration by notifying that the total manpower of the 9th, the 16th and the 103rd divisions had dwindled to 7,300, much lower than that of an infantry division. The 604th Corps, therefore, had only around 12,000 troops, 4-5 times less than that of the TPLF fighters. Only the 4th division, which had avoided the brunt of earlier engagements, was hoped to put up stiff resistance against the insurgents.²⁶⁴

Just before the final battle, the TPLF is said to have smuggled fighters and arms into Enda Sellasé in various guises. Such infiltration helped the insurgents to confuse government troops and create havoc by fighting from within.²⁶⁵

On February 18, 1989 (Yäkatit 11, 1981 E.C), at 0200 hours, the insurgents launched a close-in offensive against the 604th Corps from the south, north and northeast. The main attack came from the direction of Addi Kokäb, Enda Giorgis (north) and Mt. Qoyäşa (northeast of Enda Sellasé). As anticipated, the 4th division fought staunchly and defended its position. Similarly, the tank, artillery and anti-aircraft units of the 604th Corps tenaciously fought and repulsed the EPLF mechanized brigade. That same mechanized brigade was not to be seen in the battle scene again until the fall of Enda Sellasé into TPLF hands and never played a decisive role.²⁶⁶



Fig. 5.10. The strategic hills of Enda Giorgis, just outside Enda Sellasé.

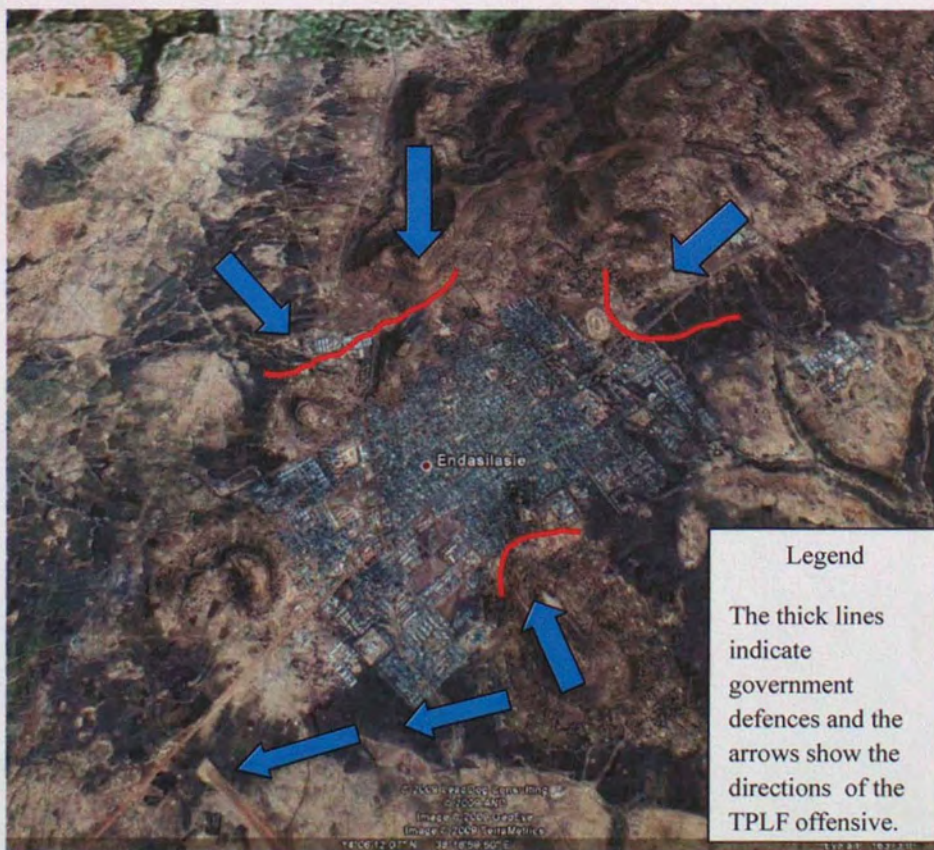


Fig. 5.12. The Battle of Sheré, adapted from Google Earth satellite image, 2009.

At this critical moment, General Mulatu delegated his command to Brigadier General Haylu Käbbädä, the head of TRA's operations, and left for Mäqälé at 1230 hours promising to send reinforcements. Contrary to his promise, the commander failed to dispatch reinforcements. Nor was he able to maintain even radio communication with the 604th Corps command. As the 4th division withstood the TPLF offensive, the insurgents turned against its reserve force, the 103rd commando division. The commando division was forced to retreat to the airport exposing the 4th division's rear defences. Soon, the demoralized troops of the 9th and 16th divisions, who had sustained heavy losses in earlier engagements, backed away, leaving the resisting 4th division exposed. Even then, the division continued fighting, unshaken by the retreat of friendly units and by the concentration of fire from the insurgents. Those based at Enda Giorgis especially fought courageously to the last hour.²⁶⁷

The battle was finally lost when the insurgents controlled the strategic hill of Enda Kántiba (nick-named 'Gobo Aṭarit', i.e., Hill of Prostitutes) on the southern outskirts of the town. Then, all government troops retreated to the airport.



Fig. 5.13. Enda Kántiba (Gobo Aṭarit) hill, Enda Sellasé.



Fig. 5.14. Enda Sellasé town viewed from Enda Giorgis. Enda Kántiba is seen in the background



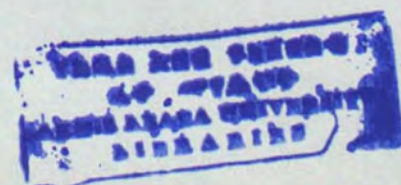
Fig. 5.15. Enda Sellasé town viewed from Enda Kántiba. Enda Giorgis is seen in the background.

All attempts to turn the panic-stricken troops into a cohesive and effective combat force failed. The insurgents had already rushed to Endabaguna to block the escape route to Gondär, learning

from a grave mistake committed a year earlier. They captured Enda Sellasé on February 19 at 1900 hours. The fall of Enda Sellasé turned out to be a decisive victory for the TPLF and the second largest blow to the government after the Afabét disaster. While Brigadier Generals Addis Agellachäw, commander of the 604th Corps, and Haylu Käbbädä died during the retreat, Brigadier General Bärätta Gämoraw, deputy commander of TRA, was captured. Including the nearly 3,000 government troops who managed to reach Gondär until April 16, 1989 (Miyaziya 8, 1989), a total of about 6,000 soldiers are believed to have made their way to safety. At the same time, 2,505 troops fell into TPLF hands. Shocked by the destruction of the 604th Corps, the government withdrew its forces from Mäqälé on February 27, 1989 (Yäkatit 20, 1981 E.C).²⁶⁸

Following the dramatic loss of Enda Sellasé, an ad hoc committee composed of three officers was formed to investigate the causes for the destruction of the 604th Corps. The committee came up with a 73 page report focusing on the weaknesses of the Corps and the strengths of the insurgents. Among other things, it came to the conclusion that 65 percent of TRA's troops were poorly trained and lacked commitment. The committee also questioned the competence of commanders. It found the profile of most of the commanders to be below standard. The incompetence of the combat intelligence department of the TRA and its defectiveness in gathering intelligence was another important finding of the ad hoc committee. The erosion of the fighting spirit of government troops by TPLF propaganda and the army's failure to win the support of the local people were also indicated in the committee's report.²⁶⁹

A closer look at the key findings of the committee's report reveals an honest assessment of factors that led to the dramatic collapse of the 604th Corps. It also shades light on the terrible failures of the preceding operations. Interestingly, when interviewed in 2003, two of the committee members corroborated what they had found out 14 years earlier.²⁷⁰ The committee, however, failed to implicate the two overall administrators and the commander of the TRA probably due to fear of antagonising them. Mängestu may be partly right in attributing the Shire military disaster to the sabotage and incompetence of the SRA and TRA commanders. According to him, General Täsfayé G. Kidan was at loggerheads with both Captain Läggäsä Asfaw and General Mulatu Nägash. During Operation Aksum I, Täsfayé withdrew the 10th Division from the Rama front without informing either Läggäsä or Mulatu "to embarrass both of them through defeat, ignoring the fact that such a disaster would cost so many Ethiopian lives."²⁷¹ Within the



TRA, relations among commanders and officials were far from smooth. For instance, General Mulatu was not in good terms with Captain Laggäsä. In fact, Mulatu was to blame for abandoning the 604th Corps at a critical moment. But Mängestu so far never admitted that it was he who assigned all such officials and commanders to key positions. He did not even admit that the evacuation of Mäqälé was one of his major strategic blunders. He claimed that the idea of evacuating Mäqälé was presented to him by those senior commanders who had been involved in the planning of the 1989 coup attempt. When he refused to be persuaded, they sent Soviet military advisers to put pressure on him.²⁷² In any case, Mängestu himself is to blame for that fateful decision.

5.2.3. From Sheré to Karra Mesheg: Worsening Military Reverses

Two and half months after the evacuation of Mäqälé, a group of senior commanders of the armed forces attempted a coup just after Mängestu's departure for an official visit to East Germany. Since it was poorly planned and badly coordinated, it was soon aborted. It led to the execution of several generals in Asmära and Addis Abäba.²⁷³

In the wake of the abortive coup, Mängestu reshuffled commanders of the armed forces. The appointment of new commanders did not, however, reverse the worsening military situation in the northern theatre. On the contrary. Following the withdrawal of government forces from Mäqälé, the various army units were to be repositioned. Accordingly, the TRA transferred its main headquarters to Ṭiṭa, 10 kilometres north of Dässé. Likewise, the 605th Corps had Ṭiṭa as its headquarters. The advance headquarters of the TRA and the 605th Corps were also moved to Qobbo and Allamaṭa respectively. Once it set up its headquarters, the TRA garrisoned all the main towns between Woldya and Amba Alagé. Accordingly, while the 1st, the 17th and the 27th infantry divisions were respectively stationed at Maychäw, Koräm, and Allamaṭa, the 6th mechanized brigade was based at Qobbo.²⁷⁴

On their part, the insurgents were again ready to mount a series of offensives against government forces. The TPLF began to coordinate its military operations with the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) and created the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in May 1989. After nearly six months of rehabilitation and consolidation, the EPRDF began its offensive on August 29, 1989 (Nähasé 23, 1981 E.C), by attacking government positions stretching from Maychäw in the north to Doro Geber (a small town located between Qobbo and Woldya) in the south. According to the EPRDF's plan of operation named 'Sälam bä Tegel' (peace through struggle), the whole theatre was divided into two sectors. The northern sector stretching from Gera Kasso (a highly strategic mountain just outside Allamaṭa town) to Maychäw was to be attacked by a force under the command of Hayyälom Ar'aya. The second force, led by Samora Yänuṣ, was to set out from Wajerat, near Mäqälé, make a wide detour, march through the Afar lowlands before reaching Doro Geber to cut off the army from behind. The whole operation was to be coordinated by one of TPLF's chief strategists, Şadqan G. Tänsay.²⁷⁵

Worried by the looming disaster, Lieutenant General Addis Tädla, the new chief-of-staff, radioed the deputy commander of the TRA, Brigadier General Märdasa Lélisa, on August 31, and September 1, 1989, warning that the 1st and 17th divisions should fight to the last man and hold out their positions at Maychäw and Koräm at any cost. The new TRA commander, Major General Asrat Berru, was also ordered to immediately move to the war front and coordinate operations instead of sending messages from Addis Abäba. Contrary to the strict orders given by the chief of staff, the 1st and the 17th divisions were displaced from Maychäw and Koräm respectively and were forced to retreat to Allamaṭa.²⁷⁶

The area between Woldya and Allamaṭa now became the new theatre of operation. While fighting was going on around Mt. Gera Kasso and Allamaṭa, the insurgents bypassed government positions and blocked the Qobbo-Woldya road at Doro Geber. At the same time, another small EPRDF force cut off the Allamaṭa-Qobbo road at a strategic pass called Chubé Bär. At this point, the army was given orders to destroy its supply depot at Allamaṭa and quickly retreat to Qobbo. The TRA made no attempt to evacuate the wounded by trucks or helicopters. Even those soldiers

who were seriously wounded were left to their own devices. Disheartened by the frantic reactions of the unattended wounded troops, a junior officer who witnessed the incident laments: "One thing which never vanishes from my memory is the desperate attempt of the wounded soldiers to escape by hobbling or crawling."²⁷⁷

The army's retreat to Qobbo was halted by the ambushing insurgents at Chubé Bär. The army shelled the insurgents' hideouts but failed to dislodge the ambushers. Many troops died while trying to break through the pass. Brigadier General Telahun Argaw, commander of the 605th Corps, forced his way with a tank. By the time he arrived at Qobbo, the town was inundated with demoralized troops.²⁷⁸

The TRA and the 605th Corps advance headquarters tried to regroup the available troops at Qobbo. Soon, the insurgents began their assault on government positions at Qobbo. According to the coordinator of the whole operation, the EPRDF deployed no heavy weapons in that operation. All heavy artillery guns and tanks captured in earlier operations were being used for training a mechanized unit in Tegray.²⁷⁹ While heavy fighting was going on, helicopters and jet fighters bombarded insurgent positions and gave splendid air support to the army. Between August 31 and September 8, 1989, several helicopters and jet fighters made 248 sorties from Baher Dar, Däbrä Zäyet, Diré Dawa and Kombolcha airfields to bomb EPRDF positions around Qobbo. During the operation, four helicopters, 1 MIG-21 and 1 MIG-23 fighter jets were hit by insurgent fire but managed to land safely.²⁸⁰

In spite of sustained aerial support, the army could not hold out its defensive positions. Some of the units even went to the extent of disobeying orders and began to retreat. A report sent to the chief-of-staff on September 7, 1989 (Pagumé, 2, 1981 E.C), by the TRA's deputy commander, gave a more specific instance: it disclosed that the 140th brigade had refused to receive his orders.⁵⁹ As troops began to retreat without order, commanders tried in vain to stop them by firing live ammunition of ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns.²⁸¹

In order to halt the advance of insurgents, the 102nd Airborne Division was brought from Asmāra to Woldya and rushed to Qobbo. On September 3, 1989 (Nähasé 28, 1981 E.C), however, it was intercepted by the insurgents at Doro Geber. According to a message intercepted from their radio, the insurgents had come to discover that the airborne division had faced a

critical shortage of rations and ammunition and they were trying to destroy it before the arrival of supplies. It was during this engagement that Colonel Gétahun Keflé, commander of the airborne division, died making the division's loss of commanders two in just a year's time.²⁸²

As the situation around Qobbo worsened, staff officers of the TRA and the 605th Corps left the army behind and moved to Woldya. The flight of commanders from battlefields usually spelt disaster. The circumstances at Qobbo were no different. It led to a complete breakdown of the chain of command.²⁸³ As the army around Qobbo disintegrated, the insurgents attacked it in hot pursuit. Even during this perilous moment, troops of the 27th division and the 30th mechanized brigade were still fighting, for they received no order to withdraw from Qobbo. The command was in such disarray that fighting broke out just outside Woldya between the government troops retreating from Qobbo and the 26th (Wolafän) Division which had just arrived from Baher Dar as reinforcement. The fighting between friendly units was so fatal that it resulted in the death of some troops and the destruction of three tanks. Chaotic as the situation was, the TRA eventually somehow managed to regroup and rehabilitate troops of the 1st, 17th and 27th divisions as well as the 6th and 30 mechanized and the 5th and 8th airborne brigades at Woldya. After some agitation, troops were positioned at strategic defence lines around Woldya. Repeated attacks by insurgents on these defences between September 11 and October 7, 1989 (Mäskäräm 1 – 27, 1982 E.C), were successfully repulsed.²⁸⁴

When the insurgents failed to overrun the army's defences, they bypassed Woldya and moved to western Wollo leaving only a small force behind. One EPRDF force advanced to southern Gondär along the Woldya-Wärräta road; another group (consisting of two TPLF divisions – Aqaqi and Qäy Kokäb - and one EPDM division – Lab Adar) advanced to Northern Shäwa and southern Wollo through Wogäl Téna.²⁸⁵ On September 25, 1989 (Mäskäräm 15, 1982 E.C), a TPLF division named Awrora captured Däbrä Zäbiṭ, a strategic place near the Gondär–Wollo border. On the same day, the NROC warned the 603rd Corps that the insurgents had already started to concentrate troops to capture Näfas Mäwcha town and block the Woldya-Wärräta road.²⁸⁶ Brigadier General Abbäbä Häylä Sellasé, commander of the 603rd Corps, had been asking for an infantry division to reinforce his units as early as September 11, 1989. What prompted him to send an emotional radio message to Major General Kenfä Gabré'l Denqu, head of operations, on October 5, 1989, was the fall of Däbrä Zäbiṭ into the hands of the insurgents.

Couched in rather passionate terms, the message reads: "I am very much worried by the growing number of enemy forces on all the fronts of our sector. I need an organized division, not separate units. It should be brought either from the SRA or elsewhere. If it is to be done, it should be done right now."²⁸⁷ The response from the operations department was quite disappointing. The commander was told in explicit terms that there was no extra division to be sent off and he was advised to count on the 7,000 troops under his command instead of putting forward unacceptable demands.

General Abbäbä was asking for reinforcements not to strengthen the defences around Näfas Mäwcha and Chächäho. He and Gāzahāñ Worqé, the party secretary of North Gondär misinformed the Operations Department that the insurgents had concentrated the bulk of their forces in North Gondär. For them, the insurgents' advance toward South Gondär was just a deception tactic to divert the army's attention in that direction. Brigadier General Haylé Mälläsä, the party secretary of South Gondär, on the other hand, believed that the insurgents had the intention of capturing Näfas Mäwcha, Kemer Dengay, Däbrä Tabor and Wärräta and then cutting off the Gondär-Addis Abäba road. That was exactly what they did a couple of months later. He thus advised General Abbäbä to station a larger force at Chächäho, a highly strategic place on the Gondär-Wollo border. But, General Abäba sent only a brigade and a battalion to Chächäho to push the insurgents back. The insurgents had already positioned their machineguns at strategic points and refused to be dislodged from the area.²⁸⁸

It was not difficult to anticipate that the next target of the insurgents would be the town of Näfas Mäwcha. Nonetheless, underestimating the danger on the horizon, General Abbäbä deployed only three infantry battalions and a BM battery to Näfas Mäwcha. On October 8, 1989, at 0600 hours, the insurgents mounted another offensive and captured Näfas Mäwcha scattering the small force stationed there. They also displaced the 603rd Corps advance headquarters and captured some heavy weapons.²⁸⁹ Once in control of Näfas Mäwcha, the insurgents pursued the retreating troops as far as Kemer Dengay, a small town located between Näfas Mäwcha and Däbrä Tabor. They did not stop there. On October 9, 1989 at 0505 hours, the insurgents attacked the 18th brigade stationed at Kemer Dengay. The 603rd Corps soon sent the 133rd brigade from Däbrä Tabor for reinforcement.²⁹⁰

Meanwhile, the other EPRDF force that had already moved from Wogäl Tēna to Kuta Bär attacked government positions around Dässé between October 11 and 15, 1989, and captured some strategic heights. It now became pointless as well as dangerous to keep an army unit stationed at Woldya. The 605th Corps therefore ordered the army at Woldya to withdraw from the area and quickly move to Dässé before its supply routes fell into the hands of the insurgents. The army left Woldya on October 14, 1989 (Tekemṭ 4, 1982 E.C). Since the army had no trucks for immediate evacuation, most of the soldiers had to shamble for several weeks all the way to Dässé. Some sold their rifles and exchanged their uniforms for plain clothes. Some committed suicide while others defected to the insurgents. The rest reached Dässé after an arduous trip lasting 2 - 4 weeks.²⁹¹

While commanders were trying to regroup and rehabilitate troops, the insurgents mounted repeated onslaught on the Kuta Bär front. Though momentarily, all attacks were successfully repulsed by the 2nd special commando and the 8th airborne brigades. Then, on October 18, 1989, the insurgents mounted a simultaneous attack on Wurgéssa, Wuchalé and Hayq. Army units stationed at these towns were forced to retreat to Dässé. Not to give respite to government troops elsewhere, the insurgents on the Kemer Dengay front renewed their offensive and tried to overrun the defences of the 18th, 25th and 33rd brigades.²⁹²



Fig. 5.16. EPRDF offensive between August and December 1989. Adapted from Map of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Mapping Authority, ND (Scale: 1: 2,000,000).

In order to further weaken the TRA, the insurgents stretched their zone of operations from southern Wollo to northern Shäwa. The TRA had already lost the strategic offensive and it was now tied down in static defence. The commanders of the TRA, the 603rd and 605th Corps were worried by the worsening military situation. General Telahun Argaw, for instance, was frustrated by the depletion of each division's manpower to 1500. What was equally disturbing was not only the feeling of war-weariness and loss of morale among his troops but also the critical shortage of commanders and staff officers from squad to brigade level. He dismissed the special commando brigades (the green beret units that had received special training including martial arts by North Koreans) as ill-suited for conventional combat.²⁹³

The new TRA commander, Major General Räggsa Jimma, was insisting that various army units under his command should build strong defences. In contrast, General Abbäbä seems to have realized the dangers of defensive warfare. Now the growing pressure from the insurgents forced him to ask for a reinforcement of a strong infantry division. The operations department rejected the request on the ground that the situation did not allow the transfer of a division to Kemer Dengay from any of the other fronts.²⁹⁴

As government forces remained in their defensive positions, the insurgents continued to engage various units of the 603rd and 605th Corps in southern Gondär, southern Wollo and northern Shäwa. On November 4, 1989 (Ṭekemt 25, 1982 E.C), the first skirmish in northern Shäwa took place at Karra Mesheg (a formidable fortification reportedly built during the Italian occupation at a strategic point located 16 kilometres north of Märañña town) as two government platoons moved to the area for reconnaissance. A larger EPRDF unit forced the platoons to fall back to Märañña. A week earlier, the insurgents made a feint attack on Kuta Bär. The attack was easily repulsed by the 5th airborne brigade. But the army stationed at Märañña could not withstand the counter-offensive from the insurgents. On November 13, 1989, Märañña fell into hands of the insurgents and 1,251 government troops were put out of action.²⁹⁵

Some 20 days after the loss of Märañña, the TRA mapped out a campaign known as “Zämächa Mäket” (Operation Defend) in order to snatch the strategic initiative from the insurgents. To that effect, the famed strike force, the 3rd Division was brought to Dässé from Eritrea. In addition, the 102nd Airborne Division, four Sparta brigades (1/81/1, 1/81/3, 2/81/1/ and 2/81/3), the 15th and 95th infantry brigades and the 1033rd commando brigade were gathered. The 3rd Division, the airborne division, the three Sparta brigades (1/81/3, 2/81/1, and 2/81/3) were put under a new task force named Task Force 3B. The rest (the 1/81/1 Sparta brigade, the 15th and 95th infantry and the 1033rd commando brigades) were placed under the 605th Corps.²⁹⁶

The main objective of the operation was to deliver a major blow to the insurgents in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa so as to pave the way for a larger and more comprehensive campaign which would include southern Gondär. According to the plan, units of the Task Force would launch a two-pronged offensive toward the Gugufu-Kabé-Wärä Ilu line from Dässé and Harbu. At the same time, the 605th Corps would prevent the concentration of the insurgents against the Task Force by blocking routes at strategic places and mounting auxiliary attacks.²⁹⁷

In the early stage, the government’s plan of operation seemed to be working fine. On December 19, 1989 (Tahsas 10, 1982 E.C), at 1000 hours, the 3rd Division, the three Sparta brigades (1/81/3, 2/81/1, and 2/81/3), and the newly added 2nd Paracommando Brigade advanced to Gugufu Mountains, strategic high grounds along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu road. The Airborne Division was left at a striking distance to be quickly summoned at any time to beat back possible counter-attack by the insurgents. At 1500 hours, the vanguard units, (i.e., the 3rd Division and the 2nd Paracommando Brigade) attacked EPRDF positions around Ṭäbasit just before reaching Gugufu. The Paracommando Brigade captured a strategic hill with an altitude of 3,707 meters. The insurgents tried in vain to eject the Paracommando Brigade from the high ground by bringing reinforcements. On the next day, at 0945 hours, the 3rd Division and the Paracommando Brigade continued their nibbling advance and captured at 1100 hours the Gugufu Mountains on both sides of the Dässé-Wärä Ilu road. Then, on December 20, 1989, the Airborne Division moved forward and struck EPRDF positions at 1600 hours. The division took control of the more strategic Yäwol Mountains and Kabé town on the next day following heavy fighting, which continued until 1830 hours.²⁹⁸



Fig. 5.17. Mt. Guguftu, a strategic height along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu road. The EPRDF trenches are still visible.

In order to prevent the EPRDF from transferring fighters from southern Gondär to southern Wollo, units of the 603rd Corps were expected to pin down the insurgents on the Kemer Dengay-Este front. Accordingly, on December 20, 1989, the 7th division launched a two-pronged attack on EPRDF positions on the Guna Mountains and Zenjäro Gädäl from Däbrä Tabor and Mäkanä Iyäsus (Este) towns respectively. At 1230 hours, the 11th, 18th and 33rd brigades controlled Kemer Dengay and its environs while the 28th and 133rd brigades from Este captured some areas 16 kilometres southeast of Mäkanä Iyäsus town. On the Kemer Dengay front, the insurgents, however, mounted a counter-offensive and pushed the 7th division back to Däbrä Tabor following four days of ferocious fighting.²⁹⁹

While the insurgents continued their counter-offensive on the Kemer Dengay front, those in southern Wollo attacked the 115th brigade on December 21, 1989, at 0745 hours and captured a strategic area 8 kilometres east of Kuta Bär. The renewed offensive on the Kuta Bär front was intended to halt the army's advance to Wärä Ilu. Two battalions of the 15th brigade and one battalion of the 6th mechanized brigade sent for reinforcement could not push the insurgents

back. Then the 86th and the 504th brigades were rushed to Kuta Bär. The insurgents were finally beaten back at 1700 hours.³⁰⁰

As the fighting continued, the government forces were struggling to maintain their gains. The last week of December saw that trend. Once again, however, they began to lose ground to the insurgents. On December 22, 1989, the insurgents stretched the war front to Mänz Enna Geshä *awrajja* of Northern Shäwa by attacking the army stationed at Mähal Méda. Mähal Méda, the *awrajja* capital, remained under EPRDF control for two weeks. By launching attacks on various units here and there, the insurgents were bent on wearing down government forces. The TRA had now too much to defend. The situation on the Kemer Dengay front was also getting bad for the government troops. On December 23, 1989, the insurgents captured Gasay, a small town between Kemer Dengay and Däbrä Tabor. Two days later, they captured Däbrä Tabor and forced the army to retreat as far as Wärräta, a strategic town connecting Baher Dar, Gondär and Däbrä Tabor. By bringing the whole of the Wärräta-Woldya road under their control, the insurgents scored a major strategic victory.³⁰¹

As the insurgents threatened to cut off the Baher Dar-Gondär road, the government moved another strike force, the 15th Infantry Division (Näbro, which means the Tiger) from Eritrea to Baher Dar. Heavy fighting took place for a week at Aläm Sagga, a strategic mountain between Wärräta and Däbrä Tabor. This time, the insurgents could not withstand the army's coordinated counter-offensive. On January 6, 1990 (Tahsas 28, 1982 E.C), the 7th, the 15th and 25th divisions took control of Däbrä Tabor. After a three day rehabilitation, the three divisions pushed the insurgent back to Kemer Dengay.³⁰²

While the army was trying to regain Kemer Dengay, the 603rd Corps intercepted a radio message exchanged between EPDM leaders – a message which could have been indispensable if exploited wisely. According to the message, the insurgents had the intention of recapturing Däbrä Tabor through a counter-offensive. To that end, they had to transfer most of their fighters to the Guna Mountains leaving only a small force for defensive purposes around Hayq and Kuta Bär. However, the insurgents could not put that plan into effect immediately for they faced insurmountable problems. To begin with, they sustained heavy losses as government forces rolled into Däbrä Tabor. Secondly, mutiny and desertion began to rock the TPLF army on the Guna front. Most of the TPLF fighters based around Guna were reported to have shown

reluctance to fight and die for somebody else's territory, complaining that they had already completed their mission of liberating Tegray. The TPLF leadership had thus to hold rigorous political education sessions that lasted for weeks throughout Tegray and on all the fronts to stamp out such dangerous perceptions among the rank and file.³⁰³

But the TRA failed to exploit the turmoil within the TPLF camp to its own advantage. Instead of resuming their counter-offensive as far as Näfas Mäwcha and beyond, units of the 603rd corps were stationed around Kemer Dengay. They were instead told to enjoy the lavish feast prepared to mark the army's successful counter-offensive from Wärräta to Kemer Dengay. Commanders of that front seem to have lost heart about launching a major counter-offensive. In hindsight, the then commander and deputy commander of the 603rd Corps as well as the Corps' intelligence officer deeply regret the serious tactical blunder they had committed. Instead of pushing the insurgents back as far as Däbrä Zabiṭ, the commanders lament, they gave them a breathing space to regroup and mount a large scale counter-offensive.³⁰⁴

The only unit that was making some advance at least for a significant period, was the 3rd Division that was stationed in southern Wollo. Although the insurgents tried to halt its advance by attacking Kuta Bär, the 3rd Division captured Wära Ilu on January 12, 1990. In an attempt to distract the army's attention, the insurgents once again attacked on January 14, 1990 (Ṭer 6, 1982 E.C), at 0130 hours the 17th, 86th, 91st, and 115th brigades stationed around Kuta Bär. After overrunning the defences of the 91st Brigade, the insurgents controlled the Ṭosa mountain ranges, threatening to capture Dässé. The 5th airborne and the 1/81/3 special commando brigades were quickly dispatched. They dislodged the insurgents from the strategic heights of Ṭosa. But the insurgents resumed their offensive around Kuta Bär. At the same time, they attacked government positions at Ṭis Abba Lima and Hayq along the Dässé-Woldya road. The 1st Division was displaced and Hayq town was lost to the insurgents. Within 72 hours, the town of Hayq changed hands more than a couple of times. The 6th Mechanized Brigade, the 2nd Paracommando Brigade, the 1st, 16th and 95th infantry brigades as well as the 1033rd Commando Brigade waged a night long counter-offensive before regaining Hayq on January 15, 1990, at 0815 hours. The insurgents recaptured Hayq through a counter-offensive at 1700 hours. But they could not hold on their position for an extended time. The 2nd Paracommando Brigade and the 3rd Division were

deployed and drove the insurgents out of Hayq town on January 16, 1990 at 1200 hours. On the same day, the insurgents captured the command post of the 91st Brigade on the Kuta Bär front and tried to take the town. But, on January 19, 1990, they were quickly beaten back once again.
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As the insurgents on the Hayq front retreated, they were pursued by the 3rd and the 8th infantry divisions. Government troops were able to regain Wuchalé and Wurgéssa. In not more than a week's time, the insurgents prepared strong defences at Ninni Bär, a highly strategic pass between the towns of Wurgéssa and Märsa, to halt further government advances. Between January 27 and February 10, 1990 (Ter 19 - Yäkatit 3, 1982 E.C), the 3rd and 8th divisions tried to overrun those defences. But the trenches at Ninni Bär proved too strong. The insurgents managed not only to hold out their positions but also pushed government troops back to Hayq town.³⁰⁶



Fig. 5.18. Ninni Bär, a strategic pass located between Märsa and Wurgéssa towns. The narrow pass is seen at the center of the background.

Though repeatedly repulsed, the insurgents kept on engaging the army in southern Wollo between January and February, 1990. During that period, the EPRDF commanders were designing a major plan of operation to be launched on the Guna front.³⁰⁷ Probably because of defective intelligence gathering, the government seemed to be unaware of the impending disaster. Until that disaster could be delivered, the insurgents continued their nibbling attacks on

the Kuta Bär and Hayq fronts. Accordingly, on February 12, 1990, the insurgents made another attack on government positions around Hayq and Kuta Bär. But they were beaten back.³⁰⁸

At about the same time, the EPLF was ready to launch a major offensive named "Operation Fänqel" (which means to root out or lever up) in Eritrea to capture the port of Meşewa. To that end, it concentrated four divisions (the 52nd, 70th, 85th and 96th) against the three brigades of the 6th Năbălbă (flame) Division stationed at She'eb, situated 86 kilometres northeast of Meşewa. On February 8, 1990, EPLF fighters advancing from Afabét mounted a lightning attack on government forces at She'eb. Within a few hours, the advance headquarters of the 6th Division fell into EPLF hands.³⁰⁹

Then, the insurgents rushed toward the Asmăra-Meşewa road to cut off supplies and reinforcements destined to the army at Meşewa. The deployment of the 29th Mechanized Brigade from Gahtălay (50 kilometres from Meşewa) and aerial bombardment could not halt the advance of the insurgents to the Asmăra-Meşewa road. Once the insurgents severed the main supply route overland on February 9, their next target was to shell Meşewa airport so that the army at the port town would be undersupplied and starved.³¹⁰

In an attempt to reopen the Asmăra-Meşewa road, the SRA deployed two famed units, the 18th MID and the 16th Sănteq Mechanized Brigade, to Ginda. The two units, however, failed to dislodge the insurgents from their fortified positions. On February 10, Dogali fell into EPLF hands. Brigadier General Tăshomă Tăsămma, commander of the 6th Năbălbă Division, repeatedly asked for reinforcements before the insurgents put Meşewa airport out of action.³¹¹

The command structure was so bureaucratic that measures were taken after the situation became too late. The 15th Division and two Sparta brigades were withdrawn from the Guna front and moved to Baher Dar to be airlifted to Meşewa. But the considerable delay helped the insurgents to put Meşewa airport within artillery range. Now the government was left with three options: to airlift the troops to Asmăra and send them overland to Meşewa; to transport them from Baher

Dar to Assäb airport and then sail them by ships to Meşewa; or airlift them to Dahlak airport and move them by ship to the port of Meşewa. Since the EPLF had already deployed its speed boats in the Red Sea and the port itself had come within artillery range, the last two options were abandoned in favour of the first one. By the time reinforcements arrived in Asmära by air, however, it was too late.³¹²

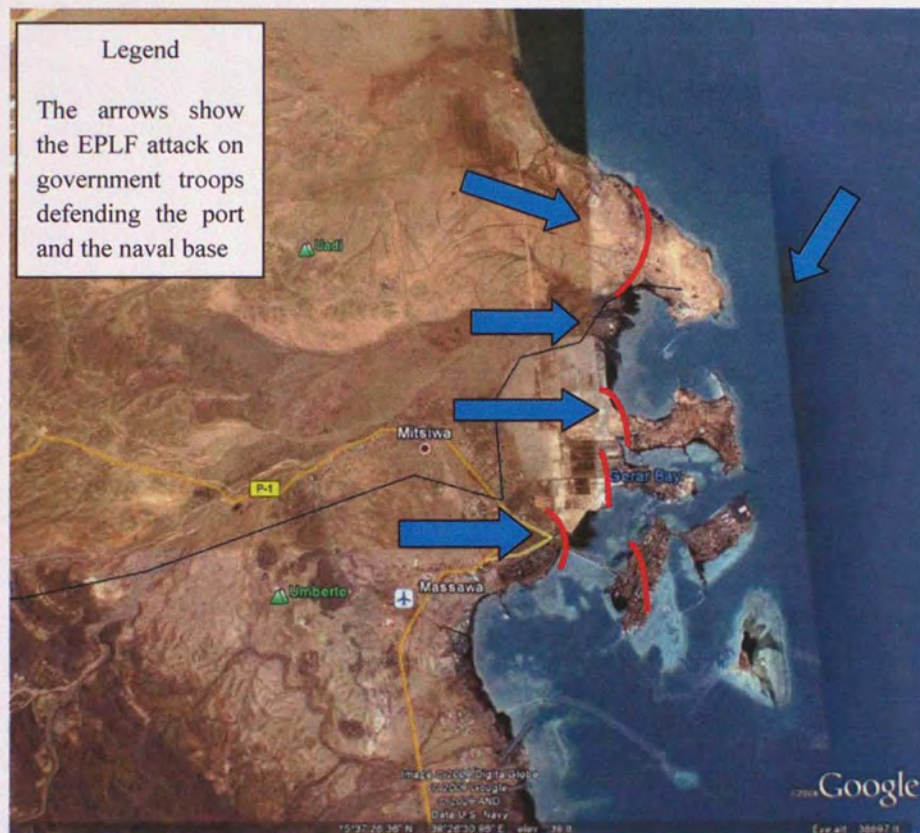


Fig. 5.19. The Battle of Meşewa, adapted from Google Earth, 2009.

The insurgents tightened the noose around Meşewa. Government troops that had been stationed at She'eb, Gahtälay, Dogali and Meşewa were repositioned around the port town. These included the various infantry, mechanized and artillery units of the 6th Näbälbal and the 3rd Mechanized Divisions. In addition to its overland onslaught, the EPLF mounted a naval offensive on the port. But several of its speed boats were soon sunk by the Ethiopian navy. On February 11, the insurgents began to shell government positions in Meşewa, including the port and the naval base. A number of astray shells hit the hospital, bringing about appalling results on patients.³¹³ On the

same day, the insurgents captured the command post at Forto, just outside the town and the airport. General Täshomä was forced to transfer his command post to the Meşewa palace. The government forces were concentrated at the port and the naval base. Now they had nowhere to fall back. As the insurgents came closer to the naval base, the fighting became fiercer. Government troops piled up wheat and salt sacks to serve as their defence. A ship trying to evacuate families of soldiers and civilian officials was sunk by artillery fire.³¹⁴

While government troops dwindled at an alarming rate, the insurgents were bringing in fresh reinforcements. The ammunition depots had already fallen into EPLF hands. That enabled the insurgents to intensify their artillery bombardment on government defences. In order to capture the naval base and the port, the insurgents had to cross an open field, which meant death. They, therefore, preferred to continue their artillery barrage to soften the resistance from government troops. In the meantime, they reduced the port town to rubble. On February 12, for the first time in the nearly 30 year war in Eritrea, two senior officers surrendered to the EPLF. These were Brigadier Generals Telahun Keflé and Ali Haji, commanders of the 606th Corps and the 3rd Mechanized Division respectively. The EPLF used the two generals to send an indecent proposal to General Täshomä to surrender to the insurgents, which he rejected out rightly with an insult.³¹⁵

Despite untold suffering, the troops at the port continued to resist the insurgents with unprecedented ferocity under their able commander, General Täshomä. As the insurgents came closer to take the port, General Täshomä committed suicide on February 17, 1990 (Yäkatit 10, 1982 E.C). Similarly, Colonel Bälay Aschänaqi, deputy commander of the 3rd Mechanized Division, took his own life. About 150 junior commanders and staff officers followed suit. Meşewa was irreversibly lost to the insurgents on the same day. The battle of Meşewa, one of the bloodiest engagements in Eritrea, decimated the last Năbălb force.³¹⁶

The senior officials and the SRA commanders are to blame for the fall of Meşewa to the EPLF hands. By the time the insurgents mounted their offensive, there were 144,628 troops in Eritrea and most of them were concentrated around Kărän.³¹⁷ General Täshomä repeatedly asked his superiors, particularly Major General Hussein Ahmăd, the deputy commander of the SRA, to send him reinforcements before the EPLF put Meşewa airport within artillery range. General

Hussein is said to have been dissatisfied with the appointment of Major General Wubshät Dässé as commander of the SRA, a position he wanted for himself. He thus seems to have been less committed to make a genuine effort to reinforce the army at Meşewa.³¹⁸ The senior commanders/officials were so short-sighted that instead of moving troops from Kärän to Meşewa, they attempted to transport the 15th Division and two Sparta brigades from Däbrä Tabor to Baher Dar and airlift them to Asmära. By the time the troops reached Asmära, the EPLF had already blocked the Asmära-Meşewa road and started to shell Meşewa airport with artillery fire.

On the other hand, the withdrawal of the 15th Division and the two Sparta brigades from the Guna front made the remaining three divisions vulnerable to EPRDF's onslaught. The EPRDF commanders lost no time in concentrating six TPLF divisions on the Guna front, leaving a small force in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa.³¹⁹

As the EPRDF transferred most of its fighters to the Guna front, the 605th Corps and the Task Force in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa could have scored a stunning victory had they launched a major offensive on their respective fronts. The TRA's other option could have been the transfer of troops from South Wollo and north Shäwa to the Guna front so as to attack the EPRDF fighters arrayed against the 603rd Corps from behind. The TRA took neither of these measures.

The 603rd Corps could deploy only three divisions (the 7th, the 25th infantry and the 102nd airborne divisions) on the Guna front; these were incomparable to the huge EPRDF force there. The 7th Division, one of the three divisions, had been fighting on the same front for six months and its manpower had already dwindled alarmingly. The manpower of the infantry brigades had, for instance, declined to between 575 and 800. That is much lower than 2,099, the total number of soldiers an infantry brigade is supposed to be made up of under normal conditions. In an attempt to close the gaps created after the departure of the 15th division, 4,000 new recruits who had received a six week training were in fact deployed. Just three days before the EPRDF's onslaught, 5,500 ex-POWs who had been captured, brainwashed and freed by the insurgents were brought to Däbrä Tabor for reinforcement.³²⁰ Two years earlier, Mängestu had instructed his senior commanders not to redeploy ex-POWs under any circumstances for they might have

received a hidden mission from the insurgents.³²¹ But the pressing problem seems to have forced commanders to redeploy them after a brief political education. As if to confirm Mängestu's fear, the ex-POWs were the first to flee when fighting raged.

The insurgents knew this very well. They were now ready to strike. "Just before mounting our offensive", the TPLF strategist at the time recollects, "we had carefully studied the positioning of government forces on the Guna front. We had already identified that the 102nd Airborne Division was the centre of gravity. To put that division out of action, we concentrated superior forces."³²² When one looks into the history of modern warfare, such a strategy, i.e., the concentration of superior force at a decisive point, is strongly advocated by commanders and military strategists like Napoleon Bonaparte, Carl Von Clausewitz, Mao Tse Tung and General Nguyen Giap.³²³ Clausewitz, for instance, emphasises: "The best strategy is to be very strong, first everywhere and then at the decisive point."³²⁴ That was exactly what the EPRDF commanders were trying to achieve on the Guna front.

On February 25, 1990 (Yäkatit 18, 1982 E.C), at 2300 hours, the insurgents launched an all out offensive on the Guna front from Lewayyé in the south to Atkäna in the north. Their offensive involved a manoeuvre on the rear. The May Day Division moved from Este, advanced through Mahdärä Maryam and blocked the Wärräta-Däbrä Tabor road at the strategic pass of Aläm Saga after displacing the 503rd motorized brigade. The 603rd Corps supply line was then cut off. The Awrora Division from Mt. Guna slipped through the gap between the 155th brigade at Lewayyé and the 33rd brigade at Shämämo. One of the battalions of the 155th brigade assigned to close the gap was quickly beaten and retreated without reporting its displacement to the brigade commander. The Awrora Division then attacked both the 33rd brigade at Shämämo and the 5th airborne brigade at Azawer Mikaél from behind. The 155th brigade was ordered to attack the Awrora Division from behind but failed to do so. On the northern sector, the Alula Division from Däbbäläma moved to the west bypassing the 11th brigade at Atkäna and then turned south to attack the 25th Division from behind. At the same time, both the Mäqdäla and Ma'ebäl divisions waged frontal assaults against government units stationed on both sides of the Kemer Dengay-Näfas Mäwcha road. While the Mäqdäla Division attacked the 28th and the 133rd brigades based around Märhabété and Kemer Dengay respectively, the Ma'ebäl Division from Dénsa and Dedem Şeyon engaged the 2nd infantry and the 25th motorized brigades positioned at Mägänta.

Having slipped through another gap left open, the Ag'azi Division from Moksh and Walga Méda mounted a frontal attack on the 5th airborne and the 33rd infantry brigades.³²⁵



Fig. 5.20. Walga Méda, Mt. Guna, a place where bloody fighting took place. The EPRDF erected this monument for the many fighters it lost during the battle of Guna.

The 25th Division was able to repulse the first EPRDF offensive on the Märhabété, Mägänta, and Walga Méda fronts. But units of the 7th Division in the southern sector failed to hold out their defensive positions and retreated to Gasay. While the 2nd, 11th, 28th and 154th brigades of the 25th Division were defending their positions with tenacity, they were ordered to fall back to Gasay by General Abbäbä to avoid encirclement by the insurgents. Just before the fallback, Colonel Mulugéta Mammo, commander of the 25th Division, was ambushed and killed by the insurgents while studying the heights to be occupied after the retreat. His death led to the collapse of the division. Almost all ex-POWs surrendered to the insurgents. By February 26, 1990, the 5th airborne, the 25th motorized and the 33rd infantry brigades were in disarray. Still, the 7th airborne brigade tried to check the advance of the insurgents to Däbrä Tabor. The insurgents then began to strike the 603rd Corps command post at Mt. Iyäsus, an imposing plateau on the southern outskirts of Däbrä Tabor, with artillery fire. They also shelled the airport.³²⁶

As the insurgents closed in on Däbrä Tabor, the arms depot was blown up. The then commander of the 603rd Corps claims that the situation was so chaotic that he does not still know for sure the

person responsible for the destruction of the arms depot. While attempts were being made by the 603rd Corps to move some tanks from the airport to the western outskirts of the town, the troops began to flee toward Wärräta, leaving the commander and his staff behind. On February 27, 1990 (Yäkatit 20, 1982 E.C), General Abbäbä and his staff left Däbrä Tabor just before the fall of the town into EPRDF hands. The road leading to Wärräta was full of fleeing soldiers. The machine guns positioned by the insurgents at the gate of Aläm Saga, a bottleneck on the way to Wärräta, could not stop the human wave. The demoralized government troops passed through the main trap suffering heavy casualties. While commanders were attempting to regroup troops, the insurgents shelled Wärräta with artillery fire, forcing the panic-stricken soldiers to flock to Baher Dar. As a last resort to halt the retreating troops, the bridge over the Abbay River was blown up on the orders of senior officials without prior consultation with commanders of the 603rd Corps. Although the insurgents had returned to Aläm Saga and Däbrä Tabor, government troops continued their retreat as far as Dangella.³²⁷

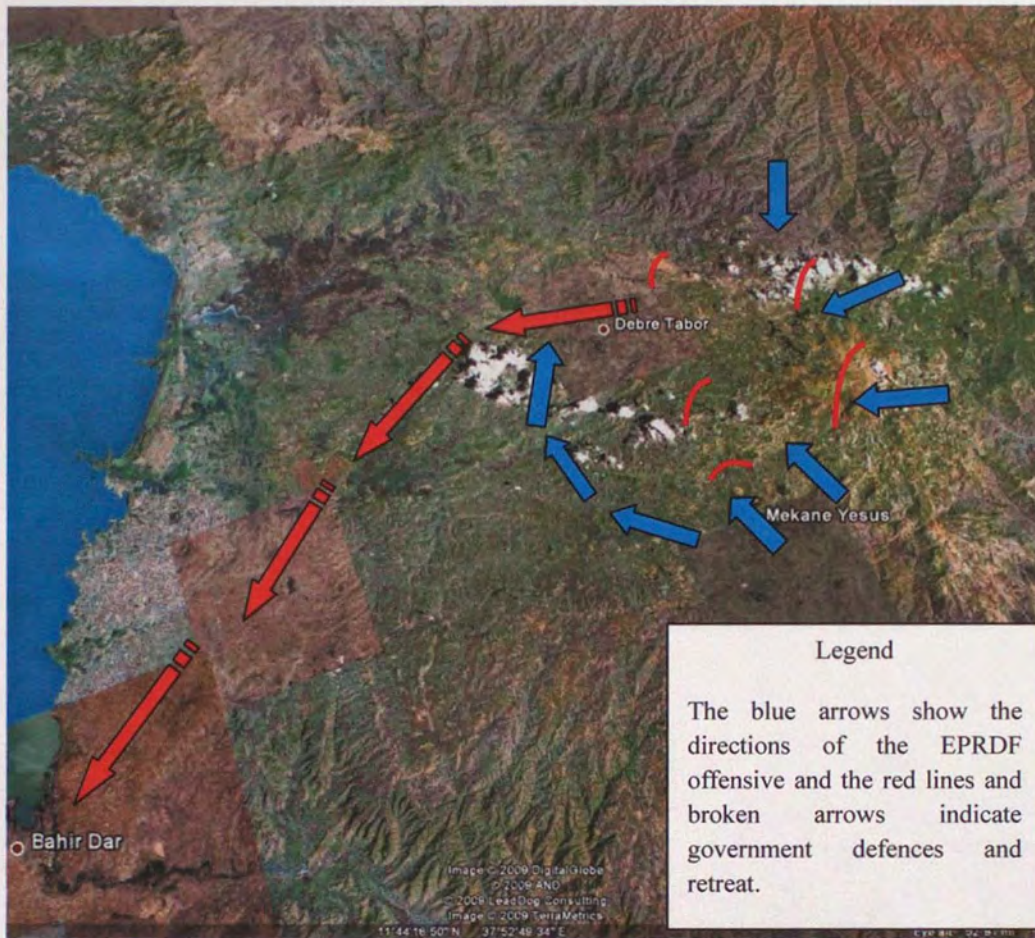


Fig. 5.21. The Battle of Däbrä Tabor, adapted from Google Earth, 2009.

Within a span of six days, therefore, the insurgents had overrun government defences from Mt. Guna to Baher Dar. This strategic defeat in the hands of the insurgents greatly affected the morale of government troops in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa. When the insurgents launched another large-scale offensive on March 25, 1990 (Mägabit 16, 1982 E.C), by attacking government positions around the Ṭäbasit, Guguftu and Yäwol Mountains, they faced no determined resistance. Once in control of those strategic heights along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu line, they advanced to northern Shäwa, displacing the 1st and the 16th divisions as well as the 6th mechanized, the 9th infantry and the 1033rd commando brigades.³²⁸ Government troops could not even use the Karra Mesheg fortification to put up stiff resistance when attacked by the insurgents on March 28 at 0835 hours. Within 24 hours, Karra Mesheg and Märañña came under EPRDF control. Right on the heels of government troops, the insurgents captured Aläm Kätäma on

March 30, 1990 (Mägabit 21, 1982 E.C), at 1030 hours. Within a matter of another six days, the insurgents had thus managed to control all the areas between Ṭābasit (near Dässé) and Alām Kätäma. Then, between April 6 and 8, 1990 (Mägabit 28 - 30, 1982 E.C), they also captured Rabél and Mähal Méda scattering the troops deployed to the area.³²⁹

As the insurgents threatened the capital, one brigade of the presidential guard, three infantry brigades (19th, 89th and 164th), four special commando brigades (3/82/3, 4/82/1, 4/82/2, and 4/82/3) and one BM-24 battalion with a total manpower of 12,209 men were deployed to northern Shäwa.³³⁰

On April 12, 1990, at 0645 hours, the insurgents attacked the 1033rd commando and the 2/81/1 special commando brigades stationed at Karra Qoré and Aṭayyé and blocked the Addis Abäba-Dässé road. The 1st and 95th brigades of the 1st division based at Ṭarma Bär and Shäwa Robit were quickly dispatched to reopen the road. Following fierce fighting that lasted two days, the 1st division controlled Aṭayyé and the 95th brigade captured Karra Qoré. The road was reopened. Then, on April 16, 1990, the 89th and 19th brigades began a counter-offensive from Molalé to Mähal Méda. But the 89th Brigade suffered heavy casualties and the 6th Mechanized Brigade was sent to reinforce it. The 4th Division was assigned to coordinate the counter-offensive on the Mähal Méda front. On April 19, 1990, at 0855 hours, the 3/82/3 special commando brigade captured Mähal Méda.³³¹

The reopening of the Addis Abäba-Dässé road and the recapture of Mähal Méda encouraged the high command to risk a major offensive along the Wärä Ilu-Karra Mesheg-Alām Kätäma line. Accordingly, senior officers at the MOND planned a huge operation in early May 1990 and sent it to the TRA. The campaign was named "Zämächa Näbälbal" (Operation Flame). The main objective of the operation was to annihilate the whole EPRDF force based in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa. To effect the operation, the TRA gathered six infantry divisions (1st, 3rd, 4th, 8th, 26th and 27th), one airborne division (102nd), four Sparta brigades (3/82/3, 4/82/1, 4/82/2, and 4/82/3) and one mechanized brigade (6th) in southern Wollo and northern Shäwa.³³²

The TRA expected that while most of the troops moved to the Gugufu-Kabé-Wärä Ilu front, the insurgents may attack the army in the Kuta Bär-Hayq area to disrupt the operation. As a

precaution, therefore, three special commando brigades (3/82/3, 4/82/1, and 4/82/3) were brought to Dässé and positioned at key points. The 27th Division was also deployed along the Hayq-Chefra route. To avoid possible attack on isolated units along the Dässé-Assäb road, the 505th brigade was pulled back from Bati to Kombolcha and the 152nd brigade from Millé to Bati. The 6th Mechanized Brigade was stationed at Tarma Bär to be swiftly moved to either Dässé or Lämi, a small town overlooking the Jäma River valley in northern Shäwa.³³³

According to the plan of Operation Flame, the 1st Division was assigned to secure Rabél, Mähal Méda, Zärät, Molalé and Tarma Bär. The 4th Division was supposed to sweep through Lalo Meder, Wogäré and Dängäz before moving to Aläm Kätäma. Then it would continue its offensive around Märañña and Karra Mesheg. Similarly, the 102nd Airborne Division would make a mock offensive towards Fitra and Aläm Kätäma and reconnoitre the Jäma valley during the first phase of the operation. In the subsequent phases, it was expected to capture Aläm Kätäma, Rima and Därra. The main task of destroying the insurgents along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu-Märañña line was given to the 3rd Division. In order to prevent the insurgents from sending reinforcements or escaping, the 26th Division was assigned to control the strategic Gimba Mountains west of Dässé.³³⁴

The first phase of Operation Flame went very much as planned. On May 21, 1990, the 3rd Division controlled the Guguftu and Yäwol Mountains as well as Kabé, Wärä Ilu and Dägolo towns without any fighting. The insurgents had already withdrawn from southern Wollo so as to concentrate fighters between Aläm Kätäma and Karra Mesheg. They might have also planned to lure the government troops deeper so as to stretch the supply lines of the 3rd Division for an eventual war of annihilation. Similarly, the 26th Division controlled Gimba with minor skirmishes. In accordance with the plan of operation, the 3rd Division handed over the security of the areas between Guguftu and Wärä Ilu to the 8th Division before advancing to Karra Mesheg.³³⁵

The EPRDF commanders seem to have been well aware of the danger of being encircled. Although successive military setbacks had already demoralized most of the government units, the capabilities of the 102nd Airborne Division and the 3rd Infantry Division were not to be underestimated. They, therefore, planned to rout the two divisions separately one after the other.

The first to be targeted was the airborne division based at Lämi. Although the division had suffered heavy casualty on the Guna front, it had been reconstituted with fresh recruits.³³⁶

While the 3rd Division was preparing to move to Karra Mesheg, the insurgents mounted a dawn attack on May 22, 1990 (Genbot 14, 1982 E.C), around Lämi to destroy the main strategic force, the 102nd Airborne Division. The 5th and 6th airborne brigades, which had been deployed to the Jäma River, were attacked before being ordered to fall back to Lämi. Simultaneously, an EPRDF force struck deep into the division's rear and blocked its supply route at Woqälo by forcing the 82nd battalion to retreat. Another unit disguised as a government force, entered Lämi and attacked the 8th airborne brigade and the division headquarters. The insurgents are reported to have worn uniforms of the airborne troops for deception purposes.³³⁷

Instead of advancing to Karra Mesheg to obstruct the EPRDF's offensive on the Lämi front, the 3rd Division was ordered to stay at Dägolo. That was one of the TRA's tactical blunders. The main concern now was to save the airborne division from destruction. To that end, the 6th mechanized and the 18th and the 19th infantry brigades were rushed to Lämi from Dänäba, Gäbrä Guracha and Mähal Méda respectively. While the 4/82/2 special commando brigade moved from Feché to Lämi, the 5/82/2 special commando brigade, which had arrived in Addis Abäba from Tolley to be sent to Asmära, was deployed to Mukäturi, not far from Lämi. 11 tanks of the presidential guard were also sent to Lämi. The first units to arrive near Lämi were the 6th mechanized and the 4/82/2 special commando brigades. On May 23, 1990, both brigades fought from 0600-1330 hours and came closer to Lämi. Soon afterwards, however, the special commando brigade was pushed back to Woqälo. Then, the 18th and the 19th brigades arrived and spent the night near the 6th mechanized brigade. On the next day, at 0400 hours, the 18th and the 19th brigades began a counter-offensive. At 0700 hours, they regained Lämi, forcing the insurgents to retreat to Fitra and Aläm Kätäma. The 5th and 6th airborne brigades broke the encirclement and fought their way to the west of Lämi. Out of the 6,421 Paratroopers, 3,128 men of the airborne division were put out of action (95 killed, 381 wounded and 2,652 missing in action). Within just three days, the division lost almost half of its manpower. In addition, 729 troops of the mechanized, special commando and infantry brigades were also neutralized (184 killed, 472 wounded and 73 missing). With regard to the loss of weapons, two tanks, two 122mm

artillery guns and four BM-24 launchers fell into the hands of the insurgents. On the other hand, the insurgents are reported to have lost 1,082 fighters.³³⁸

An ad hoc committee assigned to investigate the main reasons for this major damage on the airborne division listed down a number of factors. Primarily, the division was blamed for its failure to take precautionary measures after receiving vital information about the intention of the insurgents. Besides, commanders from the squad to battalion level were reported to be inexperienced and less committed. The new recruits brought to the division to replace losses were also found to be poorly trained and some did not even know how to throw hand grenades. Almost all the airborne troops had been complaining that, though trained as paratroopers, they were always deployed as infantrymen. They had already lost their confidence in their leaders and they were becoming ill-disciplined and disillusioned. Though the committee rightly pointed out the major reasons for the near destruction of the airborne division, it did not indicate that the unusually high number of troops (2,652 men) missing in action could possibly be linked with disillusionment and loss of morale.³³⁹

Soon after the retreat of the insurgents from Lämi, the 3rd Division was ordered to resume its advance to Karra Mesheg and Märañña. By then, the insurgents had already ample time to strengthen their defences at Karra Mesheg and gather additional fighters from other fronts. Anyhow, on May 26, 1990 (Genbot 18, 1982 E.C), the 3rd Division advanced to Karra Mesheg. Halting the army at a safe distance, Colonel Säräqä Berhan, commander of the 3rd division and his staff officers as well as brigade commanders worked out a plan to storm EPRDF positions at Karra Mesheg after reconnoitring the area. Accordingly, the 92nd infantry brigade was assigned to capture the fortress. Then, from the vanguard battalion of the 92nd brigade, 17 soldiers who volunteered to storm EPRDF defences with hand grenades were handpicked. Each soldier was given eight hand grenades and an AK- 47 assault rifle with 120 bullets. On May 26 at 0200 hours, the 17 volunteers followed by an infantry company sneaked to Karra Mesheg. As they lurked near their targets, the infantry company slipped through the Dägolo-Märañña road under the cover of darkness and attacked the insurgents from behind. At the same time, the 17 soldiers stormed EPRDF defences with hand grenades. The other units of the 3rd Division also swiftly arrived and drove the insurgents out of Karra Mesheg. The division controlled Karra Mesheg on May 27, 1990 (Genbot 19, 1982 E.C), at 0820 hours. Within the next 24 hours the insurgents

made 17 counter-attacks but all were repulsed. The division advanced to Märañña and captured the town on May 29 at 1130 hours following heavy fighting. During the two day fighting, 50 government troops were killed and 211 wounded. In contrast, 287 insurgents were killed and 40 captured. The insurgents also lost a considerable number of small arms and heavy weapons. Delighted by this brilliant victory, Colonel Säräqä gave promotions to about 200 soldiers ranging from lance corporal to master sergeant.³⁴⁰

The military gains that resulted from the skilful operations of the famous commander and his colleagues could not, however be sustained. Once again, the high command committed two strategic blunders following the capture of Karra Mesheg and Märañña. First, instead of converging on Aläm Kätäma and smashing the insurgents with two fists, the 3rd Division was ordered to suspend its operation indefinitely. For the next 14 days, troops of the 3rd Division remained idle at Märañña and Karra Mesheg.³⁴¹ The time lost at those critical times was in fact contrary to military tactics that had proved successful elsewhere. During such critical moments, Napoleon used to advise commanders never to lose time. For him, the “loss of time is irreparable in war.” “Space, we can recover,” he adds “lost time never.”³⁴² Clausewitz, on his part, stresses the indispensability of time: “By rapidity many measures of the enemy are nipped in the bud.”³⁴³

Soon after the capture of Karra Mesheg and Märañña, the insurgents around Aläm Kätäma were thrown into panic. The radio messages intercepted by the army showed that the situation was full of doom and gloom for the insurgents at least around Aläm Kätäma. But, by suspending the offensive, the high command gave the insurgents a breathing space that enabled them not only to rehabilitate and regroup but also to snatch the strategic initiative once again and then wage a war of annihilation against the 3rd Division. Second, as the 3rd Division penetrated deeper into northern Shäwa, the strategic points along its supply route all the way to Dässé should have been protected by strong army units. The other alternative was to move a few infantry divisions from Lämi to Aläm Kätäma and keep in touch with the 3rd Division. The high command took neither of these measures.³⁴⁴

By the time the high command designed another ill-timed and clumsy offensive named “Zämächa Näbälbal II” (Operation Flame II), it was too late. The operation had the aim of

destroying the insurgents at Aläm Kätäma, sweeping through Därra, Boräna, Tänta and Wogäl Téna and then hunting down the scattered EPRDF fighters. The operation was planned to involve the 102nd Airborne Division, six infantry divisions (the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 8th, 26th and 27th), 10 infantry brigades (the 1st, 11th, 18th, 19th, 89th, 95th, 149th, 152nd, 164th and 502nd), five special commando brigades (2/82/1, 3/82/3, 4/82/1, 4/82/2 and 4/82/3) and one brigade of the presidential guard. Moved from Märaña, the 4th Division was assigned to capture Aläm Kätäma, Rima, Därra, Dängoré Maryam and Gända Bärbäéré in collaboration with the 19th and 89th infantry as well as the 3/82/3 special commando brigades. In the meantime, the 605th Corps would move forces to Kolash and Mt. Zoma and mount an auxiliary offensive. From such strategic points it was expected to fire artillery shells and BM rockets to EPRDF positions. Similarly, the 3rd Division would make contacts with the 4th Division. Whereas the 605th Corps was to give support to both units, the 11th, 18th and 114th brigades were assigned to control Därra.³⁴⁵

On the southern Wollo sector, the 8th division and the 4/82/1 special commando brigade supported by a battalion of BM rockets would gather at Gimba and then control Ajbar, Tänta and Tärré. The 26th Division would block EPRDF movements from Boräna to Aqesta and Gimba.³⁴⁶

During the second phase of the operation, the 3rd Division would hand over Dägolo, Märaña and Karra Mesheg to the 605th Corps, the 1st, 164th and 502nd brigades. The 3rd Division would then return to Dässe area leaving the 95th Brigade at Wära Ilu, the 4/82/2 and 4/82/3 special commando brigades at Säñño Gäbya and Däraq Amba respectively. But that proved more difficult than it was previously thought.³⁴⁷

Operation Flame II was to be launched on June 4, 1990 (Genbot 27, 1982 E.C), at 0100 hours. By then, the insurgents had completed their preparation to mount a pre-emptive offensive from Gimba in the north to Karra Mesheg in the south. For the government troops, the situation was a chilling reminder of the Enda Sellasé military disaster. The insurgents gathered even those fighters who had been on sick leave to wipe out the 3rd Division, which was believed to be Mängestu's pride. This time, too, the insurgents adopted Mao Tse Tung's strategy, the concentration of troops and Napoleon's maxim, manoeuvre on the rear. Just a day before the launching of Operation Flame II, the insurgents struck government positions at 0630 hours. The 261st, 262nd and the 504th infantry and the 4/82/1 special commando brigades at Gimba

disintegrated. The fall of Gimba into EPRDF hands put the 3rd Division in jeopardy. In order to safeguard its supply route, the 3rd Division sent back three battalions of the 10 brigade to Guguftu but they were intercepted and scattered by the insurgents. After capturing the strategic areas of Gimba on June 3, 1990, the insurgents advanced to Guguftu and Ṭäbasit mountains. At this critical moment, the TRA commander, who saw problems on the horizon, suggested in good faith that the 3rd Division should be pulled back to Guguftu, before the insurgents severed its supply route. But his proposal was flatly rejected by higher officials. He was instead instructed to immediately redeploy the 8th and 26th infantry divisions and prevent the insurgents from advancing to the Guguftu-Wärä Ilu line. Then the two divisions would control Sääñño Gäbya and the Ṭäbasit, Guguftu and Yäwol mountains as well as Kabé town in collaboration with the 10th infantry and three special commando brigades (4/81/1, 4/82/1 and 4/82/3). The 3rd and 4th divisions were also ordered to capture Aläm Kätäma on June 3, 1990 at 1800 hours. If the two divisions managed to control Aläm Kätäma, the 4th and the 7th divisions would move to Rima and Därra respectively.³⁴⁸

On June 4, 1990, the more strategic Yäwol Mountains along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu road fell into EPRDF hands. On the same day, the 3rd and the 4th divisions were again ordered to control Aläm Kätäma without delay. Accordingly, on June 4, the 19th brigade crossed the Wonchet River and captured Säs Amba, only about 5 kilometres short of Aläm Kätäma. But it was pushed back at 2400 hours by a larger EPRDF force. On June 5, 1990, the 502nd brigade also captured Zoma, an imposing plateau overlooking Aläm Kätäma and Säs Amba. Like the 19th brigade, it was forced to retreat due to fierce counter-offensive by the insurgents.³⁴⁹ Zoma is a saddle land between the Wonchet and Jäma Rivers and it has immense strategic importance. An army that controls Zoma could shell Märañña (north) and Lämi (south) with artillery fire.

On June 5, at 0300 hours, the 4th Division again captured Säs Amba. But the insurgents mounted an immediate counter-offensive using heavy machine guns, mortars and ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns and ejected the 4th Division from Säs Amba. Attempts to capture Zoma by moving troops from Ennawari failed. While defending Zoma and Säs Amba, the insurgents were transferring most of their fighters from south Gondär and south Wollo to Aläm Kätäma, Märañña and Karra Mesheg so as to encircle and destroy the 3rd and 4th divisions. On June 5, 1990, between 1630 and 1730

hours, the insurgents made a feint attack which seemed to be a rehearsal for a major offensive. On June 6, the TRA commander was again warned by his superiors that unless the 4th and 3rd divisions captured Aläm Kätäma, they could be encircled and destroyed by the insurgents. He was also ordered to capture Kolash (40 kilometres northeast of Aläm Kätäma) and Zoma at any cost.³⁵⁰

Just before the EPRDF offensive, the two divisions faced a critical shortage of rations and ammunition. While the embattled soldiers were being starved, a helicopter loaded with uniforms and shoes landed at Märañña. For many troops, that was a deliberate attempt by some higher officials to sabotage the efforts of the 3rd Division.³⁵¹

While rations were still scarce, the insurgents launched an offensive on the 4/82/2 special commando brigade at Karra Mesheg on June 11, 1990 at 1400 hours. But they were beaten back at 2200 hours. On the next day, at 0215 hours, the insurgents again mounted a simultaneous attack on Karra Mesheg and Dängoré (about 5 kilometres south of Märañña). At 0830 hours, the insurgents overran the defences of the 4/82/2 special commando and the 89th infantry brigades at Karra Mesheg and Dängoré respectively. Division and brigade commanders tried to regroup the two scattered brigades. In the meantime, the 9th brigade sent to regain Dängoré found it difficult to dislodge the insurgents. The starved troops of the 2nd Paracommando and the 92nd infantry brigades were assigned to recapture Karra Mesheg. On June 12, 1990, following a 13 hour tenacious fighting, the two brigades finally managed to regain Karra Mesheg and capture enormous weapons, though with heavy human losses. In the meantime, the 10th and 18th infantry, the 8th airborne brigades and the 605th commando battalion were sent from Ennäwari to capture Zoma. The mission was costly to the assailants. On June 13, they fought between 0600 and 1530 hours and captured Zoma. Shortly, however, they were driven out of Zoma by the insurgents.³⁵²

The worst was yet to come. The 3rd and 4th divisions faced serious manpower depletion. The remaining troops were weakened by starvation. As Denis Davydov, a Russian cavalry officer, once put it: "an army unable to refurbish itself will inevitably dwindle and disappear."³⁵³ That misfortune was awaiting the government troops at Märañña and Karra Mesheg. After they were beaten back on June 12, 1990, the insurgents concentrated fighters around Karra Mesheg and Märañña. On June 15, 1990 (Säné 8, 1982 E.C), they launched the final offensive by attacking

Karra Mesheg at 0230 hours and Dängoré at 0500 hours. Between 0930 and 1040 hours, they overran the defences of the 89th brigade at Dängoré and that of the 2nd Paracommando brigade at Karra Mesheg. Both brigades retreated to Märañña town.³⁵⁴



Fig. 5.22. The northern parts of the Karra Mesheg fortress.



Fig. 5.23. Distant view of Karra Mesheg

At this critical moment, a helicopter landed at Märañña to evacuate Colonel Säräqä and his staff officers. But he is reported to have refused to leave his army behind. The helicopter instead evacuated the wounded. In the last hours of fighting, several military vehicles, tanks, artillery pieces and BM rocket launchers were blown up before falling into the hands of the insurgents. On June 15, 1990, at 1230 hours, Colonel Säräqä disconnected his radio communication with his superiors.³⁵⁵

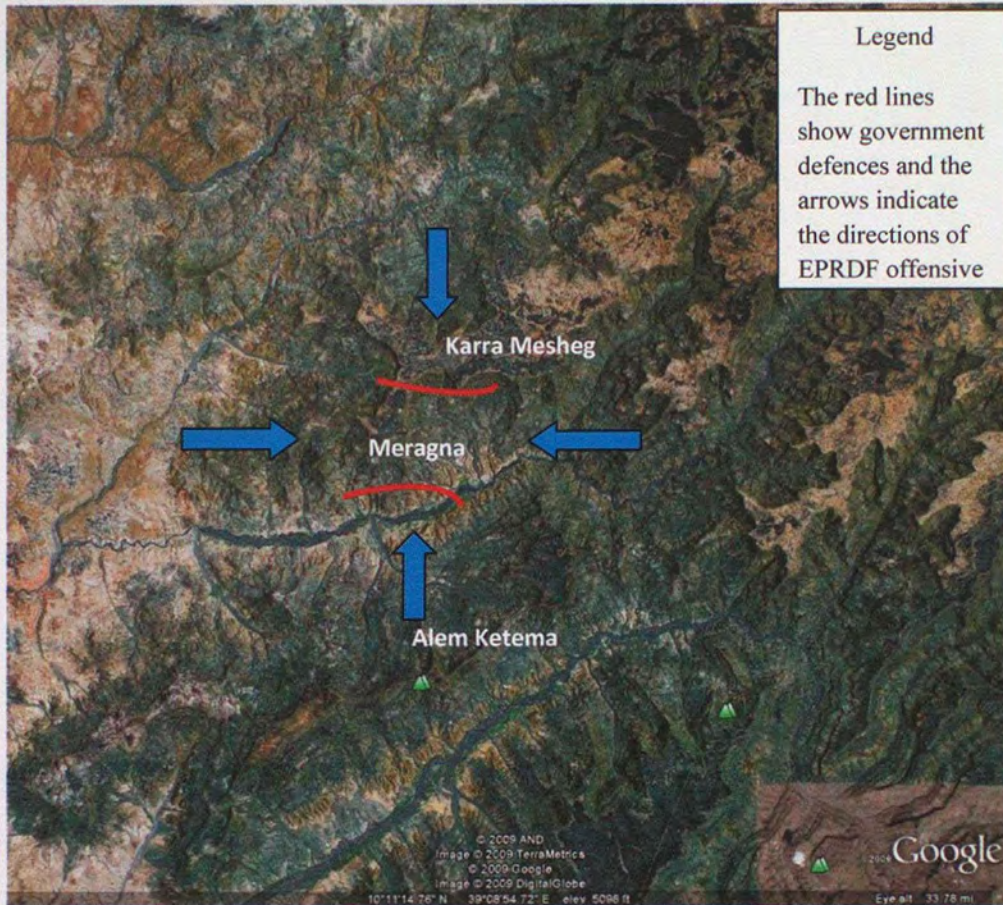


Fig. 5. 24. The Battle of Karra Mesheg-Märañña. The Wonchet and Jäma Rivers are seen north and south of Aläm Kätäma respectively (adapted from Google Earth, 2009).

He and his staff officers finally fell into the hands of the insurgents at Läbqa just before crossing the Wonchet River. The remaining troops retreated toward Aheyya Fäj and they were regrouped at Däbrä Berhan after days of arduous retreat. The 11th, 97th and 160th infantry brigades, the 6th mechanized brigade as well as the 5th and 6th airborne brigades which had been sent from Lämi to attack the insurgents at Aläm Kätäma, were ordered to fall back soon after the fall of Märañña into EPRDF hands.³⁵⁶



Fig. 5.25. Tanks and artillery guns disabled and left behind at Märañña town by the army.

In the three day fighting (i.e., June 11, 12 and 15, 1990), 3,858 troops of the 3rd Division were put out of action (323 killed, 1,017 wounded and 2,518 missing). The division also lost, among other things, 13 T-55 tanks, 10 122mm artillery pieces, 30 82mm mortars, 8 ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns, 76 RPG-7 launchers, 122 heavy machine guns, 45 light machine guns, 162 M-14 rifles and 3840 AKM rifles as well as 55 various military vehicles.³⁵⁷

The senior commanders seem to have never learnt from earlier military setbacks, particularly the Sheré disaster. The 3rd Division was ordered to advance deep into northern Shäwa without safeguarding its supply route all along the Dässé-Wärä Ilu-Märañña road. The high command had apparently ignored one of the main tenets of military logistics. As Erwin Rommel reminds us, "Everything possible must be done to protect one's own supply lines."³⁵⁸ The other strategic mistake committed by the high command was the suspension of the army's offensive after the capture of Märañña. Finally, instead of moving troops from both Lämi and Märañña to Aläm Kätäma, the army units at Märañña were ordered to cross the Wonchit valley alone and capture Aläm Kätäma. Such strategic blunders brought about the destruction of the 3rd and the 4th divisions.

5.2.4. The Last Days of the Army

Following the loss of Meşewa and the destruction of the 3rd and 4th divisions in northern Shäwa, it became profoundly clear that the fall of Asmära and Addis Abäba into the hands of the insurgents would be a matter of time. Since the capture of Meşewa by the EPLF, the SRA faced insurmountable logistical problems. All supply routes leading to Asmära were cut off by the insurgents. As a result, the SRA began to get all its supplies only by air.³⁵⁹ The situation was so critical that, at times, Ethiopian Airlines had to cancel international flight schedules in order to transport the much-needed supplies to Asmära.³⁶⁰ Government troops knew that, if they were to survive, Asmära airport should be safe from EPLF attacks so that supplies could keep on trickling. They had thus to keep the insurgents at bay. They had to at least prevent Asmära airport from coming within EPLF's artillery range. That is why, it seems, the repeated EPLF offensives from various directions were repulsed by government troops until May 1991.³⁶¹

While the SRA's hold had already shrunk to a radius of 50 kilometres around Asmära, the TRA was still struggling not to lose its grip on the major supply routes, mainly the Addis Abäba-Assäb, Addis Abäba-Dässé and Addis Abäba-Gondär roads.³⁶²

On its part, the EPRDF was preparing to launch the last offensives toward Addis Abäba. Originally, EPRDF's plan was to advance to the capital from Dässé. But its intelligence sources revealed that there was a high concentration of government troops along the Dässé-Tarma Bärdäbrä Berhan line. Then the EPRDF entertained the idea of mounting a deceptive offensive in Asosa to force the government to transfer some of the army units stationed between Däbrä Berhan and Dässé. Such a plan needed the consent of the OLF and the SPLA. Unfortunately for the EPRDF, both fronts rejected the plan of operation in that area. EPRDF was thus left with one option: to sweep through Gondär and Gojjam before marching on the capital. The campaign was named "Operation Téwodros" and it was led by Hayyälom Ar'aya.³⁶³ According to the plan of the operation, EPRDF units from Tegray and Wollo would move along the Chinese built Woldya-Wärräta road to attack government forces in south Gondär. While other units from Boräna (south-western Wollo) and Märhabété advanced to Däjän and Goha Şeyon (towns

overlooking the Abbay George from the north and south respectively), additional EPRDF forces from Molalé, Mähal Méda and Säla Dengay fronts were transferred to Gojjam. Simultaneously, two EPLF mechanized brigades advanced to Gondär and Dässé through Däbarq and Woldya respectively to reinforce the EPRDF fighters.³⁶⁴

The EPRDF launched its offensive on February 23, 1991 (Yäkatit 16, 1983 E.C), by mounting a lightning attack on units of the 4th Mechanized Division stationed in the southern corners of south Gondär. The companies separately stationed at Säné Maryam, Arb Gäbya, Däbrä Sina and Gälawdéwos, all in south Gondär were quickly displaced by the insurgents. In the next few hours, EPRDF forces also attacked isolated army units based at Woji (a small town located between Däbrä Tabor and Wärräta), Tis Abbay, Wärräta and Addis Zämän. Meanwhile, the insurgents shelled the 4th Mechanized Division's command post at Hamusit (a small town situated between Baher Dar and Wärräta) with artillery fire.³⁶⁵

This time, too, commanders seemed to be unwilling or unable to learn from earlier failures. Instead of positioning troops along the main supply routes, they stationed isolated platoons and companies at non-strategic points which turned out to be easy prey to the insurgents. That helped the EPRDF to cut off the main road at Zänzälema (a small village 5 kilometres from Baher Dar) and Tāra Gädam, a strategic height near Addis Zämän. The 4th Mechanized Division could not, therefore, get supplies or reinforcements from either Baher Dar or Gondär.³⁶⁶

While the insurgents were encircling the 33rd Brigade based at Wärräta, troops of the 4th Mechanized Division from Hamusit retreated to Baher Dar. Colonel Beruk Däjäné, commander of the division, and his staff officers also rolled their tanks to Baher Dar. As they approached Zänzälema, they were caught in a deadly cross-fire coming from machine guns well positioned on strategic hills on either side of the road. That made further advance difficult. Minutes after he dismounted his tank, Colonel Beruk was hit on the chest with heavy machinegun fire and died instantly. Other officers had to make a detour and followed the shore of Lake Tāna before reaching Baher Dar. The 4th Mechanized Division deisintegrated.³⁶⁷

Some 50 kilometres away, the 33rd Brigade was still fighting alone against the insurgents. In order to destroy the 33rd brigade at Wärräta and the 154th Brigade at Addis Zämän separately, the

insurgents blocked the Wärräta-Addis Zämän road. In an attempt to rescue the 154th Brigade, two battalions were rushed from Qulquwal Bär (a highly strategic pass between Gondär and Addis Zämän). In the meantime, the 33rd Brigade was ordered to force its way to Addis Zämän and join the 154th Brigade. On its way, the 33rd Brigade overran EPRDF positions and captured several tanks before uniting itself with the 154th Brigade.³⁶⁸

The situation on the Baher Dar front was, however, grave. In addition to controlling the Ṭis Abbay power station, the insurgents began to fire artillery shells at Baher Dar Airport. All jet fighters were thus transferred to Däbrä Zäyet.³⁶⁹

The EPRDF units were effectively using their *qoräta* (cutting off) tactics on all the fronts. While some units were getting very close to Baher Dar, the May Day and Awash Divisions advanced from Ṭis Abbay toward Mäshänti and Märäwi to cut off the retreating government troops and commanders. Major General Asrat Berru, head of the Revolutionary Operations Command for Region 2 (i.e., Gondär and Gojjam), and Brigadier General Wasihun Negatu, acting commander of the 603rd Corps, tried in vain to regroup the retreating troops. Before leaving Baher Dar, they held a meeting with other officials to decide what measures to take regarding the huge amount of petrol stored in the town. Cognizant of the potential dangers of blowing it up or emptying it to Lake Ṭana, they decided to leave it intact to the EPRDF.³⁷⁰

As part of Baher Dar fell into EPRDF hands on February 25, 1991 (Yäkatit 18, 1983 E.C), at 1440 hours, General Asrat and General Wasihun disconnected their radio communication with Addis Abäba and retreated to Dangela. The insurgents tried to intercept the commanders and capture the weapons and supplies of the 603rd Corps at Mäshänti. But the commanders somehow managed to force their way to Dangela and then to Buré.³⁷¹

As troops of the 603rd Corps continued their retreat, the insurgents sealed off the main supply route at Däjän. In an attempt to reverse the increasingly worsening military situation, the government had already trained 63,897 new recruits by the fall of 1990 at various training camps. Out of these, 20,000 men formed two additional airborne divisions (204th and 205th). Just out of the Belatté training centre, the 204th Airborne Division was on its way to Gojjam. But the

airborne troops came to learn that the main road had already been severed by the insurgents. They were then ordered to take defensive positions around Feché.³⁷²

On their part, troops of the 603rd Corps had only one way left to retreat to Addis Abäba: the Buré-Näqämté road. Before retreating along the Buré-Näqämté road, units of the 603rd Corps were reinforced by new recruits who had just completed their training at Ber Shäläqo camp. Two brigades from the same training camp were sent to Däjän to open up the main road to Addis Abäba. But they were beaten back at Däbrä Marqos. Däbrä Marqos town fell to the EPRDF on February 27, 1991 (Yäkatit 20, 1983 E.C), at 1230 hours. Then, the insurgents rushed to Buré from Däbrä Marqos and Dangela. By the time they reached Buré, government troops had already retreated to Kirämu, north-eastern Wälläga. On March 6, 1991 (Yäkatit 27, 1983 E.C), the government troops at Kirämu were joined by three brigades of the newly organized 205th Airborne Division. Three days later, Mängestu arrived at Kirämu to patch up the morale of troops which had already reached its lowest ebb. But, apart from criticizing the retreating commanders, there was nothing he could do by way of boosting the morale of combatants.³⁷³

While the government troops were retreating along the Buré-Näqämté line, units of the 603rd Corps based in northern Gondär still continued to put up determined resistance for two weeks. On February 24, 1991 (Yäkatit 17, 1983 E.C), at 1615 hours, EPRDF and EPLF units mounted a coordinated assault on government positions at Gädäbyé, a strategic place situated between Amba Giorgis and Dabat. On the same day, other EPRDF units attacked the 133rd Brigade stationed between Aykäl and Säräba along the Gondär-Mätämma road. The brigade held on to its position until the arrival of a battalion for reinforcement. Those government troops that were still fighting at Ṭara Gädam received logistical support from Azäzo, for the airport was still in operation. On February 25, starting from 1600 hours, the EPRDF mechanized unit based between Wärräta and Addis Zämän struck government positions at Ṭara Gädam and Qulquwal Bär with artillery shells and BM-21 rockets. As a result, the 33rd and the 154th Brigades were forced to retreat to Qulquwal Bär.³⁷⁴

On the Aykäl front, though, two battalions of the 133rd Brigade not only held on to their positions but also managed to push the insurgents back and regain Säräba and Aykäl.³⁷⁵

As fighting intensified, the army around Gondär received rations, radio batteries as well as arms and ammunition by air. While the insurgents were bringing in more than 10 tanks to Ṭara Gädam, the 154th Brigade, which had suffered heavy losses, was taken to Dägoma for rehabilitation. On February 28, 1991, at 1125 hours, EPRDF forces resumed their offensive by attacking Qulquwal Bär. Although jet fighters from Asmära and Azäzo tried to bombard EPRDF positions, Qulquwal Bär fell into the hands of the insurgents at 1500 hours. The Azäzo airport now came within EPRDF's artillery range and jet fighters and helicopters had to move to Däbrä Zäyet.³⁷⁶

Now the main fighting came 5-10 kilometres closer to Azäzo and 7-10 kilometres to Amba Giorgis. On March 2, 1991 (Yäkatit 23, 1983 E.C), the insurgents began to shell Azäzo airport with artillery fire. On the same day, another EPRDF unit from Qunzela (a small town on the western shore of Lake Ṭana) advanced to Gorgora through Dälgi. On March 5, at 1700 hours, the insurgents captured Chuwahit, another small town between Gorgora and Gondär. Jet fighters from Asmära bombed EPRDF positions in an attempt to halt the advance of the insurgents to Gondär. Although the insurgents were still firing artillery shells at the airport, transport airplanes escorted by jet fighters managed to land at Azäzo on March 6, to unload the much-needed supplies for the army. Eventually, though, all resistance collapsed on March 8, 1991 (Yäkatit 29, 1983 E.C), and Gondär fell into EPRDF hands.³⁷⁷

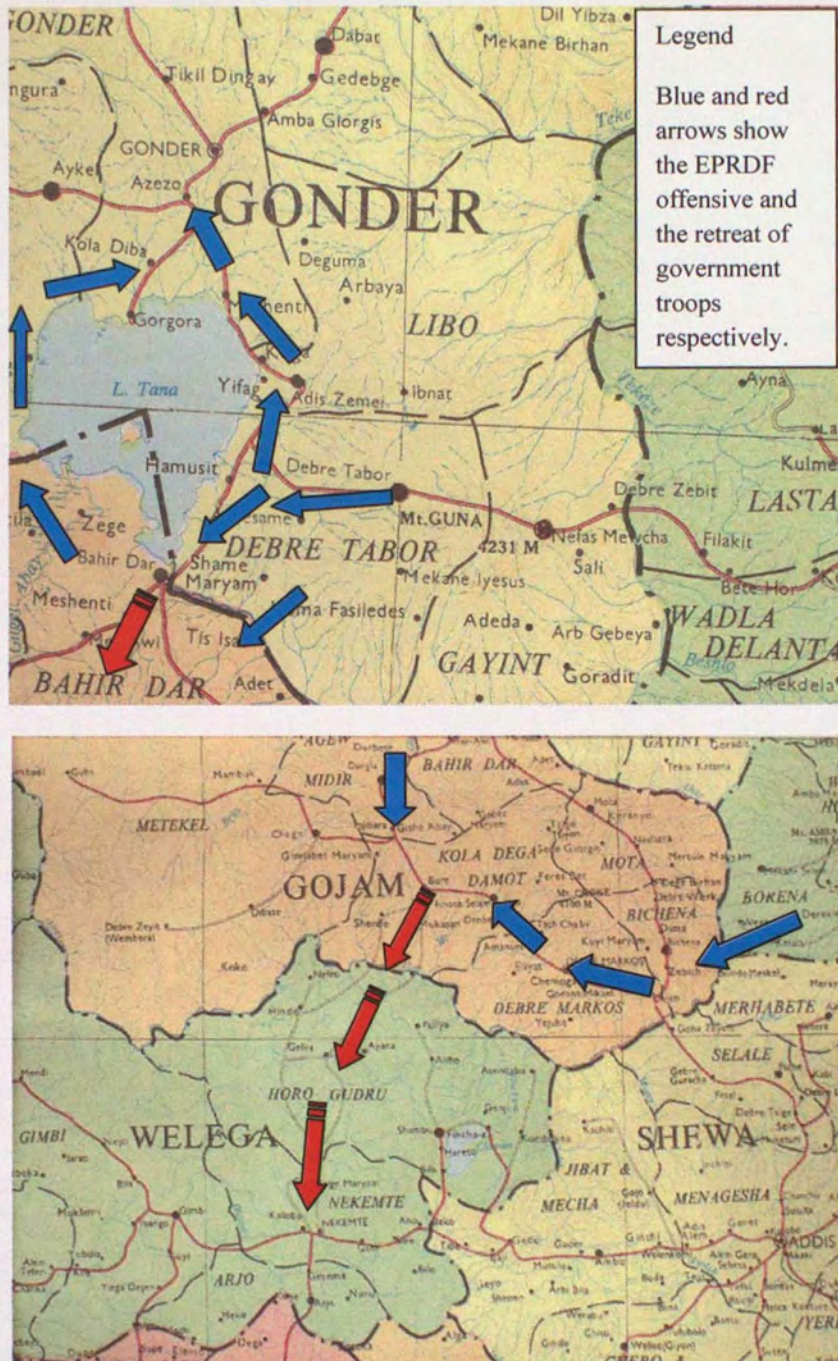


Fig. 5.26. The EPRDF Offensive in February/March 1991.

On the Kirämu front, the retreating troops were further reinforced by an infantry battalion with 10 tanks from the presidential guard and the 30th and 31st Infantry Divisions, newly organized units made up of ex-POWs released by the insurgents. The total number of troops concentrated on the Kirämu front reached 26,804 men.³⁷⁸

More troops were still concentrated along the Däbrä Berhan-Dässé road as well as around Feché. In order to force the government to transfer some of the divisions from the Däbrä Berhan-Dässé line to Wälläga, the EPRDF launched another campaign named "Bilisumaf Walqituma" which means "freedom and equality" in Oromo language. The EPRDF deployed two new divisions of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) trained in Boräna, Wollo.³⁷⁹

On March 11, 1991 (Mägabit 2, 1983 E.C), at 0330 hours, therefore, the EPRDF forces attacked the 31st Division. Although the division was reinforced by the 205th Airborne Division, it retreated in disorder leaving the paratroopers behind. The Airborne Division was finally forced to retreat. On the following day, the insurgents captured the Abbay Bridge by displacing the 28th and the 150th brigades. In order to halt the advance of the insurgents, the 30th Division was deployed to Agämsa. The division temporarily succeeded in pushing the insurgents back 8-10 kilometres. On March 13, the insurgents intensified their artillery barrage on the 30th Infantry and the 205th Airborne Divisions as well as the 603rd Corps' command post. Another EPRDF force blocked the road between Agämsa and Kirämu. Even though some of the armoured vehicles managed to force their way to Kirämu, most were either destroyed or captured by the insurgents.³⁸⁰

The government kept on trying to halt the insurgents by throwing more reinforcements. On March 14, several special commando brigades were rushed from Däddésa to Angär. In addition, the 61st BM rocket battalion from Feché and the 33rd tank battalion from the FRA were also sent to Kirämu. As they were receiving additional reinforcements, commanders of the 603rd Corps learned that some EPRDF units were on their way to the Fincha power station. In an attempt to push the insurgents back, the government organized a new task force. As the EPRDF's Operation Téwodros came to a close, the government ironically mimicked and called the new task force "Téwodros."³⁸¹

After controlling many parts of Wälläga, the EPRDF forces came closer to Ambo where the final engagement took place. As expected, the government was forced to transfer some of its army units from Ṭarma Bär to Ambo. Still, there were seven divisions along the Dässé-Addis Abäba line: four around Dässé and three between Ṭarma Bär and Däbrä Berhan. Even then, the EPRDF commanders thought that it was the right time to launch the final offensive named "Operation

Waläleñ.” On May 20, 1991 (Genbot 12, 1983 E.C), the whole area between Dässé and Ṭarma Bär fell into EPRDF hands. As the insurgents were preparing to control Däbrä Berhan, Mängestu H. Maryam fled the country the next day first, to Nairobi and then to Harare, Zimbabwe.³⁸²

The flight of Mängestu precipitated the collapse of the army. Eventually, while the EPLF controlled Asmära on May 24, 1991 (Genbot 16, 1983 E.C), the EPRDF forces entered Addis Abäba four days later.³⁸³

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS: WHY DID THE ARMY LOSE THE WAR?

On May 21, 1991 (Genbot 13, 1983 E.C), Mängestu H. Maryam fled the country and as noted earlier that precipitated the disintegration of the army. As rightly described by Bahru, Mängestu's downfall was "an event of historic proportions" for "it marked not only the end of a regime ... but also the smashing of a military apparatus which, at least in its modern shape, was about half a century old." Bahru justifiably argues that it was "the Ethiopian – and not simply the Därg's army" that has been destroyed. "It is not only a military regime that has come to its demise; it is also the military as an institution that has been wiped out."¹

What makes the collapse of the army so puzzling is the fact that it was beaten by insurgent groups that mustered much smaller fighters and lower firepower. This inconvenient truth contradicts conventional wisdom as well as Napoleon's maxim: "Victory goes to the large battalion."²

The intriguing question, therefore, is why the Ethiopian army (nearly half a million strong), one of the heavily armed ground forces in Africa, lost the war against the northern insurgents whose combined manpower was less than one-third of its number.³

In trying to answer this basic question, it may be inappropriate to enumerate all the army's mistakes and misfortunes. I would rather concentrate in the discussion below on some fundamental factors that made the army vulnerable to the onslaught of the insurgents and finally brought about its demise.

6.1. Failure to Apply the Right Counter-Insurgency Strategy and Tactics

In March 1978 the Ethiopian army scored a decisive victory over the Somali forces by applying conventional military tactics and strategy.⁴

Soon after the defeat of Somalia, the Därg declared that "the victory in the east would be repeated in the north."⁵ The government was determined to score another victory over the

northern insurgents by applying the same conventional tactics and strategy employed against the Somali forces. That was the genesis of the problem. To its credit, the army momentarily managed to expel the insurgents from the extensive territory they had occupied through a highly coordinated counter-offensive. That was achieved mainly because the victory over Somalia was still fresh, morale was fairly high and the revolutionary fervor was quite strong among government troops. But the victory was only temporary. As later events were to show, the application of conventional tactics against the northern insurgents could not work.⁶

History has shown that a counter-insurgent force with the strongest military muscle could not achieve a lasting military victory as long as insurgents are fully supported by the population.⁷

When confronted with such insurgency, government troops are advised to employ tactics and strategy quite different from that of a conventional war. Various authorities recommend a set of tactics and strategy to be employed in counter-insurgency operations. For John McCuen, an American army officer, insurgents could only be defeated by applying their "strategy and principles in reverse."⁸ But David Galula, the French colonel and counter-insurgency expert, and Robert Taber, a journalist who had been covering insurgencies, reject McCuen's hypothesis on the grounds of impracticality. In trying to show the inapplicability of McCuen's theory, Galula plausibly argues: "Insurgency warfare is specially designed to allow the camp afflicted with congenital weakness to acquire strength progressively while fighting. The counterinsurgent is endowed with congenital strength, for him to adopt the insurgent's warfare would be the same as for a giant to try to fit in to a dwarf's clothing."⁹ On his part, Taber maintains that the counter-insurgent could not use the insurgent's strategy primarily because he "has extensive holdings to protect." In contrast, the insurgent has no "expensive and cumbersome military establishment to maintain..." The counter-insurgent, on the other hand, "suffers the dog's disadvantages: too much to defend."¹⁰

If that is the case, what kind of effective tactics and strategy should be employed in counter-insurgency operations? First and foremost, the planning of a counter-insurgency operation should be based on a belief in Mao Tse Tung's famous analogy between an insurgent and a fish. According to him, as the sea is vital for a fish so is the population for the insurgent. Once the insurgent wins its active support, the population is "his camouflage, his recruiting office, his communication network and his efficient, all-seeing intelligence service."¹¹

With this contention in mind, the principal objective of a counter-insurgency operation should be to win the hearts and minds of the population affected by an insurgency. Needless to say, the active support of the population is as absolutely vital for government forces involved in counter-insurgency as for insurgents. Galula advises that the counter-insurgent needs not only to get support "in the form of sympathy and approval but also in active participation in the fight against the insurgent." Without the active support of the population, the counter-insurgent would find it "impossible" to destroy the insurgent's clandestine political organization without which victory would be temporary and superficial. For Galula, victory means "the permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not enforced upon the population but maintained by and with the population."¹²

McCuen, on his part, warns that if counter-insurgent forces employ such methods as "intimidation, sanctions and dislocation" in an attempt to alienate the insurgents from the population, "they will antagonize and lose the vital support of the people."¹³

If that is the best advice that authoritative counter-insurgency specialists can give, let us now examine what the Ethiopian army was doing in practice against the northern insurgents.

Time and again, the military intelligence and the military security services reported that the northern insurgents enjoyed the support of the great majority of the population in the areas of their operation.¹⁴ Despite this vital intelligence at hand, the government attempted to win a purely military victory by deploying superior manpower and concentrating stronger firepower.¹⁵ In 1978, while sweeping through North-Western Gondär, Tegray and Eritrea, the army's counter-offensive primarily aimed at driving the insurgents out of the territory they had occupied. In the wake of that military victory, the government in fact tried to extend its administrative structure in the newly controlled areas without gaining the active support of the local population and destroying the underground political organization of the insurgents. While expelling the insurgents from extensive territory, the army left behind no other units in the newly controlled areas that could prevent the insurgents from coming back and reestablish themselves within the population.¹⁶

According to Galula, counter-insurgency operation should involve two types of forces: mobile and static units – each with distinct objectives. The mobile units would carry out military

operations; the static groups would stay behind to accomplish a wide range of tasks. Among other things, the static units would protect the population, win its active support, conduct census, implement socio-economic reforms, gather intelligence about insurgents and destroy their clandestine political organization. Galula underlines that counter-insurgency operation should be accompanied by such activities highlighted above. Otherwise, military victory alone could not bring about the permanent isolation of insurgents from the local population and their eventual defeat.¹⁷

In retrospect, it was this vital package of activities that had been largely missing in the army's counter-insurgency operation against the northern insurgents. The army's sweeping victory between June 1978 and January 1979 had raised the expectation that the government might achieve total military victory over the northern insurgents. But that proved wrong as the fighting stalemated and the army failed to regain Naqfa.¹⁸

The failure to storm Naqfa prompted the Soviet military advisers to propose the training of mountain infantry divisions. That resulted in the birth of four infantry divisions trained in conventional mountain warfare. In addition to the Soviet advice, attempts were made to draw essential lessons from the war in Vietnam. A couple of months before the launching of the Red Star Operation, the Därg invited General Vo Nguyen Giap, the brilliant Vietnamese military commander who led the revolutionary war against the French and American forces, for a visit to Ethiopia.¹⁹ General Giap is said to have been flown over the Sahel mountains and asked for advice. He is reported to have hinted the difficulty of achieving a military victory over the insurgents strongly entrenched in those mountains.²⁰ In this regard, the Vietnamese had an essential experience worth adapting. During the war, the North Vietnamese forces had guiding principles enshrined in the 'Oath of Honour.' The ninth point of the oath underlined the need "to respect the people, to help the people, to defend the people ... in order to win their confidence and affection and achieve a perfect understanding between the people and the army."²¹

Admittedly, there were times when the Därg took some measures by way of winning the support of Eritreans. A case in point was what it did in Eritrea on the eve of Operation Red Star. As part of a conciliatory gesture, Mängestu toured Eritrea, including the Dahlak islands, in early December 1981.²² A couple of months later, a three-day colourful ceremony was held at the port

city of Meşewa known as the Meşewa Festival. In the meantime, the government began to distribute among the population in Eritrea consumer goods which had been in short supply. In an attempt to further impress the Eritrean population, the government allocated a huge sum of money for the reconstruction of infrastructure damaged by the war. For instance, 5.5 million Birr was earmarked for the city of Asmāra alone. Besides, the government launched a propaganda campaign to win public support in Eritrea. To that end, Asmāra Radio began to broadcast programmes on the Red Star Multi-Faceted Campaign, as it was known initially.²³ The main reason for publicizing the Red Star Operation well before the zero hour might have been to obtain public support in Eritrea. Otherwise, the military operation should have been kept secret even if nothing seemed to remain hidden from the insurgents.²⁴

In addition to the above political and socio-economic measures, a symposium on Ethiopia's anti-colonial struggle was held in Asmāra at the end of January, 1982. That was accompanied by the erection of monuments in Eritrea honouring *Ras Alula Engeda (Abba Nägga)* and *Zare'ay Dāräs*, another attempt to win the hearts and minds of Eritreans.²⁵

If the government had undertaken all these military, political and socio-economic measures, why did the Red Star campaign fail? In the first place, all these goodwill gestures were not only too late, but also short-lived and cosmetic. Once the military operation was launched, socio-economic programmes were put aside. Dawit W. Giorgis, the then administrator of Eritrea laments: "The spectacular 'Red Star' campaign with all its enthusiasm, and idealism, all its hope of finally solving the Eritrean problem, came to a dead end. Except for some reconstruction of destroyed power and communications installations, none of the other projects were completed."²⁶

Secondly, apart from teaching monotonously theories of Marxism-Leninism, the government made no attempt to indoctrinate troops to carefully handle the population in insurgency-affected areas. To the contrary, the mountain infantrymen were trained to beat insurgents in mountain warfare but not to win the support and affection of the local population. In the end, the population that could have been the best source of intelligence identified itself with the insurgents. Not only did it deny the army information about the insurgents, it usually reported every movement of government troops to them.²⁷

The government's failure to win public support was exacerbated by the victory of the insurgents. The loss of Afabét in 1988 marked not only a major reverse in the army's counter-insurgency operations but also the complete alienation of the government from the rural population in northern Ethiopia. Possibly out of desperation, government troops began to take severe measures against civilians who were suspected of supporting the insurgents. For instance, on May 12, 1988 (Genbot 4, 1980 E.C), the army put to death a number of civilians at She'eb, during an operation aimed at regaining Afabét.²⁸ Similarly, during the first phase of Operation Adwa in June 1988, combatants of the 9th Division resorted to excessive force intended to punish civilians around Hågärä Sälam in Tegray who were accused of supporting the insurgents.²⁹

The government aggravated its own alienation from the population by carrying out air strikes on civilian targets. Between 1988 and 1991, the air force bombed targets in villages and towns that were believed to have something to do with the insurgents. Obviously, that resulted in the death of many civilians in Eritrea, Tegray, Wollo, Gondär and northern Shäwa.³¹

Besides, the various offenses committed by disillusioned and ill-disciplined government troops added fuel to the flames of public opposition. Between 1988 and 1991, frequent reports of rape were reaching the MOND. Even married women and nuns living in monasteries were not spared.³² One can imagine how such offenses could shock the population that had already been alienated owing to other grievances.

The government had already turned the peasantry against itself through its unpopular policies such as the forcible quota system of the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC), as well as the resettlement and villagization programmes. To the great dismay of the rural population, the army was assigned not only to round up peasants for resettlement but also to demolish the houses of peasants before moving them to new villages during the villagization programme.³³ As a result, government troops were seen by the peasantry as enemies rather than as protectors of the people. As the government troops were retreating from Näfas Mäwcha to Kemer Dengay in October 1989, a peasant in Gayent is said to have told them: "You have destroyed our houses during the villagization process. Now God sent you an enemy that could destroy you."³⁴

Such grievances were skillfully exploited by the insurgents to win the support of the peasantry. During the battle of Sheré, for instance, the TPLF enjoyed unprecedented support from the local

population.³⁵ Similarly, the EPRDF forces received crucial support from the peasantry in Gayent during the battles of Guna in late 1989 and early 1990. During the government counter-offensive in January, 1990, troops are reported to have beaten up the peasants of Guna for supporting the insurgents instead of attempting to win them back.³⁶ That is in fact comparable to what McCuen calls the "shot-gun approach." McCuen warns that intimidation and punishment would definitely deprive an army of the badly needed public support.³⁷

One could thus argue, at the end of the day, it was primarily because the army lost the support of the population that it subsequently in one way or another contributed to the collapse of the army.

6.2. Intelligence Failure

The crucial importance of timely and "superior" intelligence for a counter-insurgency operation is underlined by Taber, Galula and McCuen.³⁸ Obviously, the best sources of intelligence about insurgents are the local people. Since the clandestine organization of the insurgents is usually set up at the village level, "each villager normally knows who the cell members are."³⁹

Here again, the population should primarily be won over, protected and humanely treated by the army. The local people should feel that the counter-insurgency operation would improve their lives. Socio-economic reforms aimed at improving the lives of the local population are good strategies to win the confidence and support of the population. Finally, every villager should feel safe to provide intelligence about the insurgents to the army.⁴⁰

In spite of this, the army, however, lost the support of the population. The local population in Eritrea and Tegray regarded the insurgents as its own children and usually did not give any intelligence to the army that might harm them. With a few exceptions, even the local agents who had been bought off were not ready to pass to the military intelligence sensitive information that may put the insurgents in jeopardy. It was mainly due to lack of the active support of the local people that the military intelligence or the military security services failed to weed out the political cells of the insurgents from the population.⁴¹

Despite withholding vital information from government troops, the population, on the other hand, continuously fed the insurgents about the army's movements and disposition. In addition,

infiltration of the army and other government organizations enabled the insurgents to enjoy an intelligence edge. As a result of such advantages, no plan of a government operation remained hidden from the insurgents. A classified report submitted to the chief-of-staff is corroborative of that trend. In October 1989, the chief-of-staff reported that top military secrets were falling into the hands of the insurgents before reaching government army units.⁴² One of the principal factors for the undoing of the government's operations was thus the leaking of military secrets to the insurgents. That made the army vulnerable to the insurgents' onslaught and accelerated its demise.⁴³

6.3. Problems of Command and Control

Military strategists tell us that unity of command is one of the essential pre-requisites for military victory.⁴⁴ Unity of command means placing all combatants operating in a given region under the leadership of a single commander. Unity of command is one of the secrets behind Napoleon's victories. Napoleon himself underscores the indispensability of the unity of command. Reflecting on his experience, Napoleon says: "I should have accomplished nothing worthwhile had I been compelled to reconcile my actions with those of another."⁴⁵

If unity of command becomes one of the rules of thumb in a conventional war, it is even crucial for counter-insurgency operations. In line with that, Galula contends: "more than any other warfare, counterinsurgency must respect the principle of a single direction."⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the Ethiopian command structure under the Därg did not tolerate such a military principle. For one thing, Mängestu appeared to be deeply suspicious of the officer corps. As a result, he was not at all willing to grant full powers to army commanders. Although he was determined to score a military victory over the insurgents, he seemed unprepared to see the rise of a "military hero." He was obsessed with closely controlling the army. Army commanders had to get his approval to move even a brigade.⁴⁷ By the time permission was granted, it would be too late. Worse still, commanders were ordered to carry out plans of operation in which they had not taken part.⁴⁸ That again is in direct contradiction to accepted military principles. As Napoleon once remarked: "a general who has to see things through the eyes of others will never be able to command an army as it should be commanded."⁴⁹

With the introduction of the triangular command structure, commanders were further stripped of their remaining power. That forced commanders to refrain from taking initiatives even when circumstances dictated. This drawback distanced the army from another military principle: "victory belongs to the camp that seizes and keeps the initiative."⁵⁰ Ironically, however, commanders were quite often criticized or accused of failure to take the initiative in the wake of military reverses.⁵¹

Military setbacks could also be attributed to conflict and rivalry among commanders. That partly emanated from Mängestu's system of appointment. He blatantly admits that commanders were appointed in such a way that they could watch out and spy on each other.⁵² Besides, differences in educational background and training undermined the esprit de corps of the officer corps. For instance, the graduates of the Harär Military Academy are said to have been showing contempt for those of Holäta. Such conflict and rivalry among commanders contributed in one way or another to the execution of Brigadier General Tariku Ayné as well as to the Sheré military disaster.⁵³

On the other hand, the strong hatred toward Mängestu and the opposition against his tight control over the army pushed some senior commanders not only to stage a coup but also to sabotage the army's operations. There is now adequate evidence indicating that some eminent army units were deliberately sent to a death trap prepared by the insurgents.⁵⁴ In addition to such acts of sabotage, the high command committed serious strategic blunders that resulted in the destruction of army units. Two tragic examples are the Sheré and the Märañña disasters. In the end, all such problems in the command structure caused not only the slaughter of a great number of combatants but also the ultimate collapse of the army.⁵⁵

6.4. Conscription, Training and Organizational Problems

One important factor that contributed to the Ethiopian victory over Somalia in 1978 was the drafting and deployment of hundreds of thousands of peasants after a mere three month training at Tatäq.⁵⁶

Similarly, during World War II, the Soviets finally prevailed over the German forces by throwing more and more human waves to the war fronts.⁵⁷

Once they made the shift to the Ethiopian side, Soviet military advisers were insisting that the same strategy should be applied not only against Somalia but also to the counter-insurgency operations in northern Ethiopia. Reinforced by the Soviet philosophy, the Taṭāq experience came to influence the government's conscription policy. Since the government attached much importance to quantity (i.e., numerical superiority), it carried out a number of forceful recruitment campaigns right up to 1991. The Dārg usually resorted to conscription simply because the number of volunteers was far lower than the required number of recruits. Following the introduction of the compulsory National Military Service in 1983, forceful recruitment began to be practiced even more widely than ever before.⁵⁸

The government did not seem to be worried about the impact of conscription on the army's performance. Studies show that draftees who join an army against their will usually lose their morale and conviction to fight. They are also more likely either to desert their units or surrender to the enemy.⁵⁹ The Ethiopian experience was no different. Individual and group desertions from training camps as well as from various fronts were quite common. For example, in 1984 alone, 3,185 national servicemen were reported to have been missing from various training centres.⁶⁰ Desertions were not limited to training camps. In November 1981, 281 soldiers from the 2nd and the 7th Divisions defected to the insurgents.⁶¹ As the war continued with no hope of victory or respite, the number of deserters continued to rise. Between 1977 and 1986, in Eritrea alone, a total of 7,213 troops are reported to have deserted the SRA.⁶²

The TRA, too, was also suffering from desertions. Months after its creation, the TRA reported that out of its total manpower loss, those troops identified as missing accounted for 57 per cent.⁶³

One method of combating desertion could have been rigorous and persuasive indoctrination. Although the training programme at various centres included a considerable dose of indoctrination, more emphasis was given to Marxist-Leninist theories rather than patriotism. The remainder of the training time was devoted to conventional military tactics.⁶⁴

It is highly unfortunate that the fundamental element of counter-insurgency warfare was missing in the training programmes. Counter-insurgency experts strongly stress that government forces involved in such operations should be "thoroughly indoctrinated" to win the support of the population and get its active participation in defeating the insurgents.⁶⁵ In the Ethiopian case, though, no such training was given to government troops. That is why, it seems, soldiers frequently committed various offences that antagonized the rural population.⁶⁶

In addition to its training deficiency, the army had also organizational problems. The Ethiopian army under the Därg was a heterogeneous force. It was composed of the *Näbälbal*, Paracommando, airborne, commando, special commando (Sparta), mountain infantry, regular infantry, national service, and militia units.⁶⁷

Studies show that heterogeneity in military organization may hamper unit cohesion. Defined by Stephen Crane as "a mysterious fraternity born out of smoke and danger of death," unit cohesion is one of the essential elements that determine the morale of combatants.⁶⁸ The Ethiopian experience proved the same thing. On several occasions, front-line commanders found it very difficult to maintain unit cohesion among heterogeneous groups of soldiers. For instance, well-trained units like the airborne and the Sparta units did not want to be mixed up with other infantry forces during engagements. They did not want to be criticized for failure along with other units. They repeatedly demanded that they should be deployed independently to show their competence instead of being combined with poorly trained and less capable infantry units. Contrary to their request, the Sparta brigades in particular, were forced to join infantry units that had already suffered manpower depletion. That created bitter resentment among the Sparta troops and contributed a lot to their poor performance.⁶⁹

Troops of the 103rd Commando Division, particularly the 1032nd Brigade, had similar experiences. In 1988, the 1032nd Commando Brigade was merged with the 6th Airborne Brigade to revitalize the latter, which had suffered 90 percent manpower loss in successive battles. The move was strongly opposed by members of the commando brigade. But, commanders turned a deaf ear to their protests. Following the merger, commandos and airborne troops began to view each other as alien fighters rather than as comrades in arms. The result was disastrous. In a one day engagement alone (April 23, 1988) (Miyaziya 15, 1980 E.C), the newly merged brigade lost 710 troops while the homogeneous 8th Airborne Brigade deployed just next to it suffered

relatively much lower casualty (4 killed and 11 wounded). That is a solid evidence showing the devastating impact of merging heterogeneous units that had little or no unit cohesion on morale.⁷⁰

Heterogeneity also very much affected the TRA. The ad hoc committee assigned to find out the causes for the destruction of the 604th Corps indicated that the absence of homogeneity and lack of esprit de corps within the TRA were some of the contributing factors for the disaster.⁷¹

Lack of esprit de corps was even more evident between the militia and other army units. While admiring one's own group and undermining that of others was common among combatants, the militia had far more grievances than other army units. Although they were sharing the brunt of fighting, the militiamen were treated with contempt by the regular troops mainly due to their illiteracy. The problem was aggravated by the government's differential treatment of the militia and regular units in terms of payment and rations. While the regulars were paid a monthly salary of 90 Birr, militiamen were given only 20 Birr. Besides, unlike the regular troops, militiamen were not entitled to get freshly cooked food. The most distressing grievance was that militiamen were not given annual leave of absence to visit their families. Finally, since most of them were illiterate, they were not allowed to join military academies and become officers.⁷²

Since 1977, militia units were asking the government to put an end to its mistreatment. To add insult to injury, militiamen who had been on the forefront were either executed or imprisoned. That greatly affected their morale. It was only in July 1984 that the monthly salary of militiamen was raised to 90 Birr.⁷³ Even then, they were not yet entitled to other privileges. Consequently, militia units are reported to have been performing poorly in many counter-insurgency operations. By the time a circular was issued in November 1988, allowing militiamen to be enlisted and treated as regulars, it was too late.⁷⁴ The damage on their morale had already been done and the circular had little impact on their conviction. By then, the strategic initiative had already been snatched by the insurgents and the army was losing major battles.

6.5. War Weariness and Disillusionment

There is probably no other human activity more stressful than combat. Soldiers involved in extended fighting would normally experience combat fatigue. The extreme form of combat fatigue is nervous breakdown.⁷⁵ Research conducted on combat fatigue during World War II shows that "after as few as 100 to 200 days of combat ... the average infantryman was [found to be] a mental and physical wreck, incapable of further performance."⁷⁶

If infantrymen are believed to be unable to carry on effective combat after 200 days, the poor performance of the Ethiopian army may not be surprising. A considerable number of infantrymen had been in foxholes for up to 14 years. During those years, they took part in a number of engagements ranging from brief skirmishes lasting a few hours to major operations spanning several months. Between 1977 and 1991, the two longest engagements were the war with Somalia and the Red Star Operation which lasted for 232 and 95 days respectively.⁷⁷

Before launching Operation Red Star, the government agitated combatants that the campaign would stamp out the insurgency and bring about a lasting solution to the Eritrean problem. Many combatants expected that they would go back to their villages after finishing off the insurgents. But the Red Star Operation failed to liquidate the insurgency. As the war dragged on for years, government troops began to feel disillusionment and war weariness.⁷⁸

Following the failure of another major campaign, Operation Bahrä Nāgash, in late 1985, the morale of combatants further declined. The problem was more evident in the Nadāw Command than in other units. Between 1985 and 1987, the Nadāw troops were ordered to remain in their defensive positions. But making soldiers inactive was no better. As Clausewitz warns, "passive defence is doomed to certain defeat."⁷⁹ By early 1988, a major military reverse was in the making. On the eve of the battle of Afabēt, the morale of the Nadāw troops was at an all time low. When the EPLF mounted its major offensive on March 17, 1988 (Māgabit 8, 1980 E.C), it met little resolute resistance. As a result, it captured Afabēt within 48 hours.⁸⁰

The destruction of the Nadāw Command brought about far-reaching consequences. Not only did it shatter the morale of government troops but it also greatly affected Ethio-Soviet relations. For the first time, three Soviet military advisers fell into EPLF hands and another one lost his life at Afabēt.⁸¹ That was not, however, the main reason that resulted in a change in Soviet policy. The

fundamental factor was the new policy introduced by the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, who eased the cold war tensions by “effectively terminating the role of his country as a world power.”⁸² Gorbachev was no longer willing to resume the supply of arms to Ethiopia. When personally asked by Mängestu for the delivery of military hardware during his July 1988 visit to the Kremlin, Gorbachev remained firmly adamant in his refusal to resume his country’s role as a major supplier of arms to Ethiopia. Instead, he advised Mängestu to “seek a non-military solution” to the war.⁸³

Mängestu’s unsuccessful visit to Moscow was later followed by other frustrating military reverses, the major one being the Sheré disaster and TRA’s retreat to Wollo. These military reverses dealt a heavy blow to the morale and discipline of government troops.⁸⁴

Thereafter, scary reports about the deterioration of discipline and morale among combatants began to reach the MOND. One such report reveals that more than half of the troops were retreating from battles without firing a shot.⁸⁵ Another report that assessed the army’s tactical weaknesses in various fronts summarizes the grim reality as follows:

The retreat which is being practiced by the army is not tactical. It is rather a mass flight. Heavy weapons should have been destroyed just before retreat. But the army is leaving them behind intact to the enemy. Most of the weapons now being used by the rebels were left behind by the army. The rebels are now given tanks and anti-aircraft guns with adequate ammunition.⁸⁶

Worried by the worsening military situation, Brigadier General Telahun Argaw, commander of the 605th Corps, on his part reported that due to war weariness and the decline of morale, combatants were unable not only to mount offensive but also to defend themselves.⁸⁷ Likewise, in May 1990, the 603rd corps reported that the feeling of war weariness and hopelessness was so widespread that soldiers were waiting for an opportune moment to disappear from the war front.⁸⁸

The government itself spread the insurgents’ propaganda among its own troops by redeploying ex-POWs. Such ex-POWs were the first to flee or surrender. The other war weary and demoralized troops would follow suit.⁸⁹

Concomitant to war weariness and low morale were increasing disciplinary problems. Random shooting, looting and rape became more frequent as the army approached its doom.⁹⁰

In conclusion, the strategic and institutional problems of the army discussed so far were so chronic that they enormously undermined its strength and sapped its morale. As Gebru underlines, a couple of years before its final disintegration, the military had already been “a hollow colossus” plagued by internal problems.⁹¹ An army general, on his part, rightly puts it: “If we have thoroughly examined these internal problems, instead of asking why the army miserably failed to achieve victory, we would be inclined to enquire how the army could survive so long!”⁹² A critical examination of the turmoil the army was in and the multi-faceted problems it encountered would make it difficult to accept the thesis that it has lost the war because it was less heroic or less courageous than the insurgents. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the insurgents finally prevailed primarily because they enjoyed the support of the population and superior intelligence in addition to fielding more determined fighters and commanders.⁹³

Notes to Introduction

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⁸A. Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War 1935-1941* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), pp. 36-37; H. Marcus, *Haile Sellassie I: The Formative Years 1892-1936* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1987), pp. 135-136; Tekeste (1990), p. 7; Sileshi, p. 19.

⁹Bahru (2008), p. 286. Most sources concur that the IBG had four infantry battalions in 1935. But Badoglio and Del Boca claim that there were six infantry battalions.

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⁹⁹ MOND Archives, Operation File No. 325(B), Br. General Collins to Lt. Gen. Käbbädä Gäbré, 14/2/72.

¹⁰⁰ Korn, p. 3; F. Halliday & M. Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso, 1081), p. 75.

¹⁰¹ MOND Archives, Operations File Nos. 325(A) & 325(B), Yä Zämächa Report (Report of Operation) 1963-1965 E.C.

Notes to Chapter Two

¹ Gännät Ayyélä, *Yä Létäna Colonel Mängestu H.Maryam Tezetawoch (Recollections of Lt. Colonel Mängestu H.Maryam)*. Addis Ababa: Mega Publishing House, 1994 E.C), p. 255.

² *Ibid.*, p.276.

³ Ottaway, pp.87-88, 93-96, 156, 163; MOND Archives, Operations 518B, Yä Somalia Mängest Worära Aṭaqalay Zägäba (A Comprehensive Report of the Somalia Invasion) 1966-1971 E.C., pp.3-7.

⁴ MOND, Administration 5827, Selä Näbälbal Ṭor (About the Näbälbal Force), ND, pp. 1-2

⁵ *Ibid.*; Informant: Märdasa Lélisa.

⁶ MOND, Administration 5827, pp. 1-4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 5; For a few weeks, the 205th Näbälbal battalion joined the Gäseṭ force in its march from Gondär to Humära to annihilate EDU insurgents.

⁸ *Ibid.*; Informant: Märdasa Lélisa.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Informants: Abbäbä W. Maryam

¹¹ Kasayé, p.122.

¹² C. Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.p. 62.

¹³ Taddäsä Tele, *Yä Anabest Meder: Yä Etyopya Särawit Yä Tarik Zägäba (Land of Lions: A Historical Record of the Ethiopian army)*(Addis Ababa: Roma Printing Press, 1999 E.C), pp. 158-159, 186, 276; Informants: Abbäbä W. Maryam and Gezaw Bälaynäh.

¹⁴ R. Lefort, *Ethiopie: La Revolution Heretique* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1981), p. 296.

¹⁵ Taddäsä (1999 E.C), pp. 158-159, 186, 276; Informant: Märdasa Lélisa.

¹⁶ MOND Archives (Harär), National Revolutionary Operations HQ to all administrative regions, 9/1/70 E.C (19/9/77).

¹⁷ Taddäsä (1999 E.C), pp. 158-159, 186, 276.

¹⁸ Informant: Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; MOND Archives, Operations 518B, p.21.

²⁰ Informant: Märdasa Lélisa, Bähaylu Kendé and Täsfayé H. Maryam.

²¹ MOND, Administration 380, Mängestu H.Maryam to Ministry of Defence, 14/12/71 E.C (20/8/79).

²² Informants: Märdasa Lélisa, Negatu Bogalä, Mulu Sahlé and Damṭäw Gétahun.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Tedla Bekele, 'Some Internal Causes for the Defeat of the 39th Mountain Infantry Brigade in the Northern Front 1981-1991,' B.A thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1993, p.15.

²⁶ MOND, Operations 704, Yä Mesraq Ez Zämächa Report (Operations Report of the Eastern Command), 1973 E.C., pp.3-4; for further discussion see Gebru Tareke, "Operation Lash: A Successful Response to Insurgency," *Horn of Africa*, Vol. 19. Newark: Rutgers University, 2001.

²⁷ MOND, Operations 040, Br. Gen. Asrat Berru to Chief of Staff, 25/6/73 E.C (4/3/81); Informants: Mulu Sahlé, and Damṭäw Gétahun.

²⁸ MOND Archives, Administration 3102C, NMS HQ to MOND, 16/10/73 E.C (23/6/81).

²⁹ Gännät, p. 239; Informants: Wubätu Şäggayé, and Märdasa Lélisa.

³⁰ MOND Archives, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zämächa Report (A Ten Year Operations Report), 1977 E.C., pp. 21-23.

³¹ Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam, *Yä Ṭor Méda Melo (Battlefield Reminiscences)* (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1997 E.C), p. 259.

³² Täsfayé, pp. 259-260.

³³ MOND, Administration 137A, Näqämt Hospital to Ground Forces HQ, 10/11/73 E.C (17/7/81).

³⁴ Informants: Täsfayé H. Maryam, and Nägga Mulaw.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See Appendix- VII.

³⁷ Clapham, (1988), p. 109.

³⁸ MOND, Administration 2392, NMSCDD to MOND, 3/11/77 E.C (10/7/85).

³⁹ MOND, Administration 2392, Br. Gen. Afäworq W. Mikaél to Maj. Gen. H.Giorgis H.Maryam, 25/10/77 E.C (2/7/85).

⁴⁰ MOND, Administration 2392, NMSCDD to Chief of Staff, 25/10/77 E.C.

⁴¹ MOND, Administration 3701, NMSCDD to Administration, Organization and Mobilization Main Department, 21/9/76 E.C (29/5/84).

⁴² MOND, Administration 2392, Br. Gen. Afäworq G. Mikaél to Maj. Gen. H.Giorgis H.Maryam, 25/10/77 E.C; Administration 4627, Yä Abyotawi Ṭor Hayloch Aṭäqalay Yä Zämächa Report (A Comprehensive Operations Report of the Revolutionary Armed Forces), 1977-1979 E.C.

⁴³ Bahru (2008), p. 288.

⁴⁴ Informants: Negatu Bogalä and Täsfayé H.Maryam.

⁴⁵ MOND, Administration 4627, Yä Abyotawi ..., pp. 1-4.

⁴⁶ Informants: Molla Assäfa, Gäbräyäs W. Giorgis and Mohammäd Säyed.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ MOND, Administration 747, Ya 103 Commando Keflä Tor Yä Säw Hayl (The man power of the 103rd Commando Division), 1980 E.C., P.7; Şägga Mogäs, 'Mäkälakäya Särawitu Lämen Wädäqä? Yä Yebab Iyäasu Commando Tenses (Why did the defence force collapse? The origin of the commando unit at Yebab Iyäsus)' *Tobyä*, Vol.3, No.3, 1987 E.C., pp.13-14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Şägga, pp. 14, 40.

⁵¹ Informants: Taddäsä T. Haymanot, Nägash Eshätu, Tayyé Berhanu and Kasayé Chamäda; see also Kasayé, pp. 262, 279.

⁵² MOND, Administration 5269, Project Spartakiad-81, p.1. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Union was excluded from the Olympic Games by the capitalist states. The Soviets reacted by holding their own games named "Spartakiad." The Soviets derived the term from the name of a slave, Spartacus who led a revolt against his Roman masters. Displays of mass gymnastics in the former Czechoslovakia and Albania during the Communist era were also called Spartakiad.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ MOND, Administration 1713, Yä 1/81/3 Leyu Commando Brigade Amätawi Report (An annual report of the 1/81/3 Special Commando Brigade), Nähasé, 1982 E.C., p.6.

⁵⁵ MOND, Administration 5269, Project Spartakiad-81, p.6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ MOND, Operations 100, Yä Project Spartakiad 81-2 Selšana (The training of the 81-2 Spartakiad), ND, p. 1; Operations 644, Leyu Commando Brigedoch Yägätämachäw Woqtawi Chegeroch (The current problems facing the Special Commando Brigades), Hämlé, 1982 E.C, p.10.

⁵⁸ MOND, Operations 644, Leyu Commando... pp. 3, 10.

⁵⁹ MOND, Administration and Finance 187, Mängestu H.Maryam to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 9/2/82 E.C (19/10/89).

⁶⁰ MOND Operations 159, Bä Project 1/83 Endiqätär Yätäfaqädä Mädäbäña Särawit (Regular forces to be employed by Project 1/83), 1983 E.C.

⁶¹ Informant: Täsfayé H. Maryam; MOND Archives, Operations 532, Br. Gen. Gétanäh Haylé to Chief of Staff, 13/8/83 E.C; NMSCDD to Operations Department, 28/7/83 E.C (6/4/91).

⁶² "A Country Study: Ethiopia- Armed Forces" Library of Congress, electronic version, 1991, pp. 1-2.

⁶³ Berouk Mesfin, 'The Role of Military Power in Ethiopia's National Security 1974-1991,' M.A thesis in PSIR, AAU, 2002, pp. 102-103.

⁶⁴ MOND, Administration 3381, Operations Main Department to Chief of Staff, 15/1/78 E.C (25/9/85).

⁶⁵ MOND, Administration 3384, Maj. Gen. Märe'd Negussé to Defence Minister, 13/1/81 E.C (23/9/88).

⁶⁶ MOND, Logistics 755, Education Main Department to Logistics Department, 3/8/82 E.C (11/4/90).

⁶⁷ MOND, Administration 2058A, Lt. Gen. Täsfayé G. Kidan to Chief of Staff, 30/8/78 E.C (8/5/86).

⁶⁸ Lefebvre, pp. 152-153.

⁶⁹ Dawit, pp. 36, 38.

⁷⁰ Korn, p. 145; J. Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Nottingham: the Russell Press Ltd., 1978), p.171.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Dawit, p.34.

⁷³ Kasayé, pp. 73-74, 97.

⁷⁴ R. Patman, *The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa: Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 218-219.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, see also B. Porter, *The USSR in the Third World: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 185.

⁷⁶ Patman, p. 221; Porter, p.185.

⁷⁷ Patman, p. 223; Informants: Abbäbä W. Maryam and Wasihun Negatu.

⁷⁸ Patman, p. 233; Gebru (2000), p.659.

⁷⁹ MOND, Operations 518B, Appendix- III.

- ⁸⁰ "Foreign Military Assistance: the Soviet Union", A Country Study: Ethiopia, Library of Congress Country Studies, electronic version, 1991, p.1.
- ⁸¹ Gännät, pp. 253-254.
- ⁸² MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Delivered to MOND of PDRE 1974 – 1991, September, 1991, p. 1.
- ⁸³ MOND, Finance 182, Agreement Between the PMAC and the USSR on Granting Credit for Socialist Ethiopia, 6/3/87; Finance 182, Agreement Between the PDRE and the USSR on Deliveries of Special Equipment, June 14, 1988. The SSDF and the SNM were created in 1978 and 1982 respectively with Ethiopian support to wage guerrilla warfare against the Somali government. In addition to Ethiopia, Libya and South Yemen were supplying arms to the SSDF and the SNM.
- ⁸⁴ MOND, Administration 842A, V. Zinovkin, USSR Economic Affairs Counselor to Minister of Defence, 28/10/87.
- ⁸⁵ MOND, Administration 5807, Zeqetāña Waga Bämaqrāb Yätämārātu Hagaroch (Those Countries Selected for Submitting Lower Price), ND, p.1.
- ⁸⁶ MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Supplied Free of Charge, 1991, p. 8.
- ⁸⁷ MOND, Finance 103, Military Equipment Deliveries 1974, 1990, June 1990, pp. 1-2.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.* "Ch'onma-ho" in North Korean language means flying horse.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
- ⁹⁰ MOND, Operations 168, Kä Qäy Kokāb Eskä Bahrä Nägash (From Red Star to Bahrä Nägash), 1978 E.C., pp. 1-5. Throughout the Därg period, \$1USD was exchanged for 2.07 Birr.
- ⁹¹ MOND, Operations 168, Kä Qäy Kokāb Eskä..., pp.5-8.
- ⁹² M. Fontrier, *La Chute de La Junte Militaire Ethiopienne 1987-1991* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), p.137; Taddäsä (1999 E.C), p. 364-366.
- ⁹³ Gännät, p.277.
- ⁹⁴ Gebru Tareke, "From Af Abet to Shire: The Defeat and Demise of Ethiopia's 'Red' Army 1988-89," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.242; "Foreign Military Assistance: the Soviet Union", A Country Study: Ethiopia, Library of Congress Country Studies, electronic version, 1991, p.1.
- ⁹⁵ MOND, Operation 493, Yäwädämu Enna Yäṭāfu Wanna Wanna Mäsariyawoch (Major Weapons Destroyed and Lost), 1967-1981 E.C., p.1.
- ⁹⁶ Fontrier, p.197.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-225; "Regime Stability and Peace Negotiation," A Country Study: Ethiopia, Library of Congress Country Studies, electronic version, 1991, p.1.

⁹⁸ Bahru (2001), p. 267.

⁹⁹ Fontrier, pp. 202-205.

¹⁰⁰ MOND, Finance 182, Bäjemer Lay Yallu Enna Ketetel Yämiyasfälegachäw Serawoch (Ongoing Activities that Need Follow up), 28/10/81 E.C (5/7/89), p.1.

¹⁰¹ MOND, Administration 754B, Yä Hagär Mäkälakäyan Yä Ṭor Ṭetq Felagot Lämamuwalat Yätädärägä Ṭenat (A Study Conducted to Fulfil the MOND's Needs for Arms), Mäskäräm, 1981 E.C, p.17.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ MOND, Operations 493, Operations Department to Chief of Staff, 15/8/82 E.C (23/4/90).

¹⁰⁶ MOND, Operations 513-514, Maj. Gen. Kenfä Gabre'l Denqu to Operations Department, 5/12/82 E.C (11/8/90).

Notes to Chapter Three

¹ MOND Archives, Administration 2673, Yä Meder Ṭor Yäsäw Hayl (Manpower of the Ground Forces) Miyazya, 1982 E.C., p.1

² Informants: Negatu Bogalä, Kasayé Chämäda and Wubätu Şäggayé

³ Informants: Jagama Kéllo, W. Sellasé Bäräka and Gezaw Bälayanäh.

⁴ MOND, Administration 5821, Selä Nábälbäl Ṭor (About the Nábälbäl Force), ND. pp. 1-2.

⁵ Informants: Märdasa Lélisa and Täsfayé H. Maryam.

⁶ MOND, Administration 5827, Selä Nábälbäl Ṭor, p. 5.

⁷ MOND, Operations 518B, File No. 518B, Adhariw Yä Somalia Mängest Selakahédäben Gels Wärära Aṭäqalay Zägäba 1966-1971 (A Comprehensive Report of the Flagrant Invasion Carried out by the Reactionary Somali Government 1966-1971 E.C), 1971 E.C., pp. 12-13, 18-19.

⁸ MOND, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät ... p. 6.

⁹ Informants: Gezaw Bälaynäh, Abbäbä W. Maryam and Märdasa Lélisa. The Därg went straight from 12th to the 14th Division by skipping 13 probably because number 13 was associated with bad luck. Throughout the Därg period, there was no 13th Division.

¹⁰ MOND, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär Bä Hua'sä Yä Täfäšämu Wotadärawi Enqesqaséwoch (Military Activities Carried out by the SRA in Eritrea) ND, p. 8.

¹¹ Informant: Märdasa Lélisa; MOND, Administration 3102C, NMS Civil Defence Main Department to MOND, 16/10/73 E.C (23/6/81).

¹² MOND, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät ... , pp. 15-16, 18, 22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁴ MOND, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär ... p. 15.

¹⁵ MOND Archives, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät... pp. 21-22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25 - 27. While Mänter came into existence as a new force, the Weqaw Command was dissolved in March 1984 due to the heavy casualty it suffered when the EPLF captured Algéna.

¹⁷ MOND, Administration 2634, Administration, Organization and Mobilization Department to MOND, 18/10/77 E.C (25/6/85); Administration 137A, Br. Gen. Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam to Lt. Co. Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam, 4/9/73 E. C (12/5/81).

¹⁸ MOND, Administration 2634, Br. Gen. Abbäbä W. Maryam to Logistics Main Department, 2/7/77 E.C (11/3/85).

¹⁹ MOND, Administration 5840, Ya 1977 Zämächa Report (The 1977 Operations Report), 1977 E.C., pp. 1.2.

²⁰ MOND, Administration 5829, 605th Corps to TRA, 6/12/80 E.C (12/8/88).

²¹ MOND, Operations 168, Yä Huasä Zämächawoch (Operations of the SRA), 1978 E. C., pp. 1-5.

²² MOND, Administration 747, Yä Sementu Ezoch Yäsäw Hayl (Manpower of the Eight Commands), Hedar, 1980 E.C., p.1.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ MOND, Administration 747, Yä Aratu Ezoch Yäsäw Hayl (Manpower of the Four Commands), Hämlé, 1980 E.C., p.1. Here again, the government omitted the number 613 due to superstitious association of number 13 with bad luck.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*; Informant: Negatu Bogalä.

²⁷ MOND, Operation 060, Ba 603 Kor Genbar Yätädärägä Wegiya (The Fighting that Took Place On the 603rd Corps' Front), 16/6/83 – 5/7/83 E.C (23/2/91 – 14/3/91), pp.1-4.

- ²⁸ Informants: Täsfayé H. Maryam and Märdasa Lélisa.
- ²⁹ MOND, Administration 747, Yä Sementu Ezoch ..., P. 1.
- ³⁰ MOND, Administration 3701, Yä Inspection Buden Yä Sera Mämäriya (Guidelines of the Inspection Team's Duties), ND, p.1.
- ³¹ MOND, Administration 795, Yä Meder Tor Derejetawi Mäwaqer (Organizational Structure of the Ground Forces), ND, p.1.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ MOND, Administration 5375, Selä Nurse Mäkonenoch Yätädärägä Tenat (A Study Conducted About Nurse Officers), ND, p.3.
- ³⁵ MOND, Administration 5822, Yä Mähandis Gedaj Afäşaşäm (The Execution of a Combat Engineer's Mission), ND, pp. 1-2.
- ³⁶ Informants: Wasihun Negatu and Märdasa Lélisa.
- ³⁷ MOND, Operations 011, Yä Mägänaña Kefl Tägbar (Duties of the Communication Unit), ND, p.6.
- ³⁸ MOND, Operations 060, Ba 603 Kor Genbar ..., pp. 1-5; Administration 1212A, Bä So'asa Genbar Yämigañ Yäsäw Hayl (Manpower Found on the TRA's Front), 1983 E.C., p. 1.
- ³⁹ MOND, Operations 011, Yä Commando Keflä Tor Aquam (Organization of a Commando Division), ND, p.9; Operations 096, Yä Ayär Woläd Keflä Tor Aquam (Organization of an Airborne Division), ND, p.1; Administration 5269, Project Spartakiad-81, p.1.
- ⁴⁰ T. Kane, *Military Logistics and Strategic Performance* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 1-2.
- ⁴¹ M. Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 231.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- ⁴³ "Military Logistics: A Brief History," www.rickard.karoo.net/articles/concepts_logistics.html, p. 1.
- ⁴⁴ B. Somervell, "United States Army Services of Supply," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1943, JSTOR, p. 162.
- ⁴⁵ See for instance MOND, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät ... , pp. 5-10.
- ⁴⁶ Informant: Abbäbä W. Maryam.

- ⁴⁷ MOND, Administration 971, Yä Derejet Mämriya Halafinat Enna Tägbar (Duties and Responsibilities of the Logistics Department), ND, p. 1.
- ⁴⁸ MOND, Administration 971, Yä Derejet Enna Gänzäb Meketel Minister Mäwaqer (Structure of the Vice Minister for Logistics and Finance), ND, p. 1.
- ⁴⁹ Informant: Abbäbä W. Maryam.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ MOND, Administration 1406, Purchasing Department to Distribution Department, 4/9/74 E.C (12/5/82).
- ⁵² MOND, Administration 740, Br. Gen. Bädllu Duki to Maj. Gen. Abbäbä W. Maryam, 25/9/80 E.C (2/6/88); Administration 1472, Ya Soasä Yä Logistics Degaf (Logistical Support of the TRA), Genbot, 1980 E.C.
- ⁵³ MOND, Administration 740, Ground Forces Food Administration to the Purchasing Department, 25/9/80 E.C (2/6/88).
- ⁵⁴ MOND, Operations 168, Yä 15ña Egräña Shaläqa Yä Wegiya Tarik (History of the Combat of the 15th Infantry Battalion), 1/12/71 E.C (7/8/79)., pp. 1-4.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4 – 7.
- ⁵⁶ MOND, Operations 518B, Adhariw Yä Somalia Mängest ..., p. 7.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 30-43.
- ⁵⁹ MOND, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär ..., pp. 8 - 11.
- ⁶⁰ Gebru Tareke, "Operation Lash: A Successful Response to Insurgency," *Horn of Africa*, Vol. 19 (Newark: Rutgers University), 2001), p.103.
- ⁶¹ MOND, Operations 704, Yä Mesraq Ez Yä 1973 Yä Zämächa Report (Operations Report of the Eastern Command for the Year 1973 E.C.), pp. 3-4.
- ⁶² Gebru, (2001), p. 109.
- ⁶³ MOND, Operations 704, Yä Mesraq Ez ..., pp. 4-5.
- ⁶⁴ MOND, Operations 040, Br. Gen. Asrat Berru to Chief of Staff, 25/6/73 E.C (4/3/81).
- ⁶⁵ Informant: Abbäbä W. Maryam.
- ⁶⁶ MOND, Administration 3842, Kä Zämächa Mämriya Yätäwäsädä Yä Elät Hunéta Report (Daily Situation Report Taken from the Operations Department), 16/6/74 E.C (23/2/82)., pp. 1-2; Informant: Abbäbä W. Maryam.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ MOND, Administration 2747, Yä Weqaw Ez Yä Fetäsha Report (Inspection Report of the Weqaw Command), 29/8/74 E.C (7/5/82), pp. 1-5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ MOND, Operations 044, Yä Elät Hunéta Report (Daily Situation Report), 14-15/6/74 E.C (21-22/2/82), p.1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² See Appendix – VIII.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ MOND, Administration 2058A, Yä Abyotawi Särawit Yä Qäläb Gefit (The Revolutionary Army's Food Transportation), Tahsas, 1977 E.C., pp. 1-4.

⁷⁵ MOND, Administration 4649, Bä Sämén Tor Genbar Yä Huasä Abey Kenwanéwoch (Main Accomplishments of the SRA in the Northern Front), 1977 E.C., p.1.

⁷⁶ MOND, Administration 020B SRA's Budget and Finance Department to SRA's Logistics Department, 9/6/77 E.C (16/2/85); SRA's Budget and Finance to Maj.Gen. Räggsa Jimma, 18/10/77 E.C (25/6/85).

⁷⁷ MOND, Administration 786, SRA Commander to Chief of Staff, 27/9/82 E.C (4/6/90).

⁷⁸ MOND, Administration 020A, SRA's Logistics Department to the Inspector General, 2/3/79 (11/11/86) E.C.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ See Appendix – IX.

⁸¹ MOND, Administration 020A, SRA's Logistics Department to the Inspector General, 2/3/79 E.C.

⁸² MOND Harär Archives, Ya 1978 Yä Wotadärawi Dähnenät Tebäqa Report (The 1978 Report of the Military Security), 1978 E.C., p.16.

⁸³ MOND, Administration 020A, Inspector General to Minister of Defence, 7/5/79 E.C (15/1/87).

⁸⁴ MOND, Finance 182, Ground Forces' Annual Spare Parts Requirement, 1987, p.1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ MOND, Finance 182, Memorandum, 18/10/85, p.1.

⁸⁷ MOND, Operations 168, Kä Qäy Kokäb Eskä Bahrä Nägash (From Red Star to Bahrä Nägash), 1978 E.C., pp. 2-5.

⁸⁸ Täsfayé, pp. 303-304.

- ⁸⁹ MOND, Administration 2058B, Maj. Gen. Haylu G. Mikaél to Ground Forces Transport and Maintenance Departments, 3/7/80 E.C (12/3/88).
- ⁹⁰ MOND, Administration 2058A, Minister of Defence to Commander of the Ground Forces and Vice Minister for Logistics and Finance, 8/3/80 E.C (18/11/87).
- ⁹¹ MOND, Administration 2058B, Maj. Gen. Haylu G. Mikaél to Ground Forces Transport and Maintenance Departments, 3/7/80 E.C (12/3/88).
- ⁹² MOND, Administration 1439, Ya Huasä Woqtawi Yä Derejet Hunéta (The Current Logistical Situation of the SRA), 1981 E.C., pp. 1-4.
- ⁹³ MOND, Operations 267, Br. Gen. Addis Aggelachäw to Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 21/7/80 E.C (30/3/88).
- ⁹⁴ MOND, Administration 1472, Yä Soasä Yä Derejet Hunéta (TRA's Logistical Situation), Genbot 1980 E.C., pp. 3-9.
- ⁹⁵ MOND, Administration 2725, Yä Huasä Yä Derejet Gefit Amätawi Report (Annual Report of the SRA's Logistical Transportation), 1980 E.C., pp. 1-2, 6-8.
- ⁹⁶ MOND, Administration 1439, Yä Huasä Yä Derejet Hunéta (Logistical Situation of the SRA), Mäskäräm, 1981 E.C., p.1.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-12.
- ⁹⁸ Informant: Haylu Bäräwaq.
- ⁹⁹ Informants: Samuél Gobäzé and Alämu Mäbraté.
- ¹⁰⁰ MOND, Administration 108-120C, Br. Gen. Mäsfen Tächané to Maj. Gen. Seyoum Mäkonnen, 16/11/81 E.C (23/7/89).
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⁹³Gebru (2000), p. 660.

⁹⁴MOND Archives, Operations 518B, Appendices 1, 5.

⁹⁵The monument erected in Addis Ababa (inaugurated on December 17, 2007) to commemorate Cuban troops who died during the Somali-Ethiopian war contains the names and photos of those 163 men.

⁹⁶MOND Archives, Administration 5385, MOND to Col. Täsfayé W. Sellasé, 17/08/80 E.C (25/4/88).

⁹⁷MOND Archives, Administration 5385, ICRC Visits to Ethiopian and Somali POWs, November, 1987.

⁹⁸MOND Archives (Harär), p. 23; Operations 518B, Appendix-3.

⁹⁹Lefebvre, p.176.

¹⁰⁰Patman, p. 231.

¹⁰¹Dunnigan, p. 19.

¹⁰²Gebru (2000), p. 661.

¹⁰³Informant: Tächané Mäsfen.

¹⁰⁴Gebru (2000), p. 661.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶D. Connell, *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1997), p. 179; Gebru Tareke, "From Lash to Red Star: the Pitfalls of Counter Insurgency in Ethiopia 1980-82," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 479; Dawit, p. 109.

¹⁰⁷Bahru (2001), p. 258; see also C. Legum, & B. Lee, *Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1977), p. 56; R. Pateman, *Eritrea: Even the Stones Are Burning* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1998), p. 134; Ottaway, p.160; R. Sherman, *Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1980), p. 86; Dawit, pp. 88-89.

¹⁰⁸H. Erlich, *The Struggle Over Eritrea 1962-1978* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1983), pp. 101-102; Ottaway, p. 160.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of National Defence (MOND) Archives, Operations 157, Ya 15ña Egräña... p. 4 ; Gilkes (1991), p. 727.

¹¹⁰ MOND Archives, Intelligence 110, Naqfa Yämigäñäwen Tor Kä Wonbädéwoch Lämalaqäq Yäqäräbä Hasab (A Proposal Submitted to Relieve the Army at Naqfa from Rebels), 7/7/69 E.C (16/3/77).

¹¹¹ MOND Archives, Operations 157, p.11.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7; See also Täsfayé (1997 E.C), pp. 75, 79-80, 106, 110, 114-117, 123.

¹¹² Gilkes (1991), p. 727.

¹¹⁴ Täsfayé (1997 E.C), pp. 124, 128; MOND Archives, Operations 157, pp. 7-8. The period between late 1976 and early 1977 was characterized by power struggle within the Därg between Mängestu and his associates on one hand and a group that was later accused of supporting the EPRP, on the other. On February 3, 1977, Mängistu emerged as an undisputed leader by executing seven Därg members.

¹¹⁵ Informants: Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam and Wondmagäñ Seläshi.

¹¹⁶ MOND Archives, Operations 157, p.8.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; See also Täsfayé (1997 E.C), p. 168.

¹²¹ MOND Archives, Operations 157, pp. 11-12.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 40.

¹²⁴ MOND Archives, Administration 380, 15ña Egräña Shaläqan Kä Wonbädé Selä Malaqäq (Relieving the 15th Infantry Battalion from Rebels), 23/5/69 E.C (31/1/77).

¹²⁵ MOND Archives, Operations 157, p. 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-19; J. Firebrace, *Never Kneel Down: Drought, Development and Liberation in Eritrea* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1985), p. 53; L. Ellingson, "The Origins and Development of the Eritrean Liberation Movement," *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*. Chicago, 1978), p. 624; Gilkes, p. 728; Sherman, p. 88; C. Legum & B. Lee, *The Horn of Africa in Continuing Crisis* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1979), p.

27; R. Machida, *Eritrea: The Struggle for Independence* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1987), p.68; Connell, p. 94; F. Halliday, & M. Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso Editions, 1981), p.114.

¹²⁹ Firebrace, p. 53; Machida, pp. 70-71; Legum & Lee (1979), p. 28; Halliday & Molyneux, p. 171; Ottaway, p. 171; D. Pool, *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), p.139; Connell (1997), pp. 94-95.

¹³⁰ Bahru (2001), p. 254; H. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 198-199; Dawit, p. 41.

¹³¹ MOND Archives, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät Yä Zämächa Report (A Ten Year Report of Operations), 1977 E.C, pp. 9-14.

¹³² Informants: Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam and Tächané Mäsfen; see also Connell (1997), pp. 171-172; Täsfayé (1997 E.C), pp. 245-246.

¹³³ Täsfayé (1997 E.C), pp. 250-252.

¹³⁴ MOND Archives, Operations File No., 062, Bä Naqfa Bär Yätädärägä Wegiya (The Fighting at the Gates of Naqfa), 1971 E.C, pp. 1-6; Operations File No., 168, Naqfa Genbar (The Naqfa Front), 1972 E.C; see also Mesfin Gabriel, "The War Nobody Wins," *New African*. No. 145 (London, 1979), p. 38; Africa Watch, *Evil Days: Thirty of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), pp. 115-116; Araya Tseggai, "The History of the Eritrean Struggle," *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace* (Nottingham: Russell Press Ltd., 1988), p. 81.

¹³⁵ MOND Archives, Operations 062, Bä Naqfa Bär...,p. 15.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Hussein Ahmäd, *Mäswaetnät Enna Senat (Sacrifice and Endurance)*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa: Star Printing Press, 1997 E.C), p.121.

¹³⁹ Gännät, p. 261.

¹⁴⁰ Informants: Märdasa Lélisa, Negatu Bogalä, and Bähaylu Kendé; see also Tedla, pp. 1-3; Gilkes (1991), p. 731.

¹⁴¹ Connell (1997), P. 217; Halliday & Molyneux, p. 173; Dawit, p.114.

¹⁴² MOND Archives, Administration 4635, p. 7.

¹⁴³ Firebrace, p. 54; Gebru (2002), p. 474.

¹⁴⁴ Gebru (2002), p. 477; Mäsfén, p. 38.

¹⁴⁵ R. Pateman, "Eritrea Under the Derg," *Journal of Eritrean Studies*. Vol. 1, No., 2 (Los Angeles: RICE, 1987), p. 5; Gebru (2002), pp. 476-477.

¹⁴⁶ MOND Archives, Administration 4635, pp. 15 -23.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ MOND Archives, Administration File No., 3842, Yä Mäbräq Ez Yäsaw Hayl (Manpower of the Mäbräq Command), 9/5/74 E.C (17/1/82).

¹⁵⁰ Informants: Bähaylu Kendé, Negatu Bogalä, and Abbeyyé Färrädä.

¹⁵¹ Hussein, pp. 122-123.

¹⁵² MOND Archives, Operations 086, Wäqtawi Yä Märäja Gemet (Current Intelligence Estimate), 10/2/75 E. C (20/10/82), pp. 1-5.

¹⁵³ MOND Archives, Operations 044, Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta Report (A Daily Situation Report of the Red Star Operation), 1974 E.C; Operations File No., 260, Weqaw Ez (The Weqaw Command), 1974 E.C; Informants: Ṭäräfworq Tolosa, Taddäsä T. Haymanot, and Abära Jämbäré.

¹⁵⁴ MOND Archives, Administration 4635, pp. 16-18.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Administration 3842, Kä Zämächa Mämriya Yätäwosädä Yä Elät Report (A Daily Report Taken from the Operation Department), 1974 E.C., pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁷ Hussein, p. 130; Gebru, p. 482; Gännät, p. 238.

¹⁵⁸ MOND Archives, Operations 086, Wäqtawi Yä Märäja..., pp. 5- 10; Informants: Märdasa Lélisa and Bähaylu Kendé.

¹⁵⁹ Gebru (2002), p. 483.

¹⁶⁰ MOND Archives, Administration 4635, pp. 19 - 22.

¹⁶¹ Connell (1997), p. 218.

¹⁶² MOND Archives, Operation 044, pp. 1-2; Administration 4635, pp. 20-21.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ MOND Archives, Administration 4635. p. 24.

¹⁶⁸ Gebru (2002), p. 488.

- ¹⁶⁹ Informants: Märdasa Lélisa, Abbeyyé Färrädä and Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷¹ Gebru (2002), pp. 493-494.
- ¹⁷² MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Wogän Ṭor Lay Yätayu Dekmätoch Enna Mänse'éwoch (The Weaknesses and their Causes Evident in the Army), 1974 E.C.
- ¹⁷³ Informants: Märdasa Lélisa, Abbeyyé Färrädä and Negatu Bogalä.
- ¹⁷⁴ MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär ..., p. 24.
- ¹⁷⁵ Informants: Abbeyyé Färrädä, Tayyé Berhanu and Mulu Sahlé.
- ¹⁷⁶ MOND Archives, Operations 168, p. 25.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- ¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-34.
- ¹⁸⁰ Gännät, pp. 253-255.
- ¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸² MOND Archives, Operations 168, pp. 36-39.
- ¹⁸³ Gännät, pp. 255-256.
- ¹⁸⁴ Täsfayé (1997 E.C), pp. 298-302.
- ¹⁸⁵ MOND Archives, Operations 168, pp. 37-39.
- ¹⁸⁶ Informant: Bähaylu Kendé.
- ¹⁸⁷ Täsfayé (1997 E.C), pp. 303-304.
- ¹⁸⁸ MOND Archives, Operations 168, p. 39.
- ¹⁸⁹ MOND Archives, Operations 168, pp. 49-50.
- ¹⁹⁰ Gännät, p. 257.
- ¹⁹¹ MOND Archives, Operations 168, Yä Shabiya Yä Wegiya Selt (EPLF's Combat Tactics), N.D., pp. 1-5.
- ¹⁹² Täsfayé (1997 E.C), p. 315.
- ¹⁹³ Pateman (1998), p. 143.
- ¹⁹⁴ MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Högär ... p. 45.

- ¹⁹⁵ Dawit, p. 108.
- ¹⁹⁶ K. Ruane, *War and Revolution in Vietnam 1930-1975* (London: UCL Press, 1998), p. 21.
- ¹⁹⁷ G. Chaliand, *The Art of War in World History From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 647.
- ¹⁹⁸ Informants: Märdasa Lélisa, Bähaylu Kendé and Täsfayé H. Maryam.
- ¹⁹⁹ Gebru (2004), p. 245.
- ²⁰⁰ Gännät, p. 259; see also Gebru (2004), p.247.
- ²⁰¹ Dawit, p. 364.
- ²⁰² Informants: Märdasa Lélisa and Täsfayé H. Maryam.
- ²⁰³ Gebru (2004), pp. 247-248.
- ²⁰⁴ MOND, Administration File No. 754A, Bä Wägän Yädäräsä Gudat (Damage Inflicted on Government Troops), 1980 E.C.
- ²⁰⁵ Gebru (2004), pp. 247-248.
- ²⁰⁶ Gännät, p.247.
- ²⁰⁷ Gebru (2004), pp.248-249; see also Gilkes (1995), p. 45; Alemseged Tesfai, *Two Weeks in the Trenches: Reminiscences of Childhood and War in Eritrea* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, 2002), p. 100.
- ²⁰⁸ Informants: Shäwaräga Bihonäñ, Taddäsä T. Haymanot and Märdasa Lélisa.
- ²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²¹⁰ Alemseged, pp. 102, 104-105.
- ²¹¹ Chaliand, p. 960.
- ²¹² Gebru (2004), pp. 250-251.
- ²¹³ *Ibid.*
- ²¹⁴ Alemseged, p. 101.
- ²¹⁵ MOND Archives, Operations 069, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta (Operations Daily Situation) 8-9/7/80 E.C (17 - 18/3/88), p.1.
- ²¹⁶ Wrong, p. 333.
- ²¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 333-334; Alemseged, pp. 120-121. Saleh told me that EPLF radio operators were listening to the conversation between an Ethiopian pilot and his superiors. The pilot was heard

saying “Why should I destroy my own property!” when ordered to bomb government convoys that were stuck at Ad Shärüm. He was nearly reluctant to take orders from his superiors.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ MOND Archives, Operations 069, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta (Operations Daily Situation), 9-10/7/80 E.C (18 – 19/3/88), p.1.

²²⁰ Gebru (2004), p. 250-253.

²²¹ Gännät, p. 277.

²²² Okbazghi Yohannes, *Eritrea: A Pawn in World Politics* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), p.272; Hussein, p. 141; see also Gebru (2004), p. 253; Dawit, p. 365.

²²³ MOND Archives, Administration 5173, Colonel Täsfayé Terfé to Operations Main Department, 20/8/80 E.C (28/4/88).

²²⁴ Gebru (2004), pp. 254-255.

²²⁵ Informant: Wubätu Şäggayé.

²²⁶ Informant: Saleh Mahmud.

²²⁷ Gebru (2004), p. 255-256; Dawit, p.365.

²²⁸ Hussein, p. 143; Informants: Wubätu Şäggayé and Kasayé Chämäda.

²²⁹ Hussein, p. 145; Informants: Nägga Mulaw and Kasayé Asäggahäñ.

²³⁰ MOND Archives, Operations 008, Yä Elät Telegram (Daily Telegraph), 1980 E.C; Informant: Şadqan G.Tänsay.

²³¹ MOND Archives, Operations 267, Br. General Addis Agellachäw to Maj. General Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 20/7/80 E.C (29/3/88).

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ MOND, Administration 5829, Lt. Col. Lägäsä Dañé to TRA Operations Department, 6/12/80 E.C (12/8/88); Informant: Täwoldä G. Wold; TPLF, News Release: TPLF-EPDM Joint Victories, May 30, 1988, London, pp.1-2.

²³⁴ MOND, Administration 108-120C, Br. Gen. Tächané Mäsfen to Maj. Gen. Seyoum Mäkonnen, 26/11/81 E.C.

²³⁵ Tekeste Melake, “The Battle of Shire (February, 1989): A Turning Point in the Protracted War in Ethiopia,” *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1994), p. 969; *Addis Zämän, Amharic Daily*, 7/9/80 E. C (15/5/88), p.1.

- ²³⁶ *Addis Zämän*, 13/9/80 E.C (21/5/88), p. 5; Gebru (2004), p. 256.
- ²³⁷ MOND, Operations 554, Zämächa Adwa (Operation Adwa), 7/10/80 E.C (14/6/88). pp. 1-5; Yä Zämächa Adwa Me'eraf And Zägäba (Report of the First Phase of Operation Adwa), 1980 E.C., p.1.
- ²³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²³⁹ *Ibid*; Informant: Haylu Bäräwaq.
- ²⁴⁰ Gebru (2004), p. 259.
- ²⁴¹ "Ya Hayyälom Tezetawoch (Recollections of Hayyälom)," *Efoyta*, Vol. 3, No., 1 (Addis Ababa: Mega Publishing Enterprise, 1986), p. 22.
- ²⁴² Informant: Şadqan G. Tänsay.
- ²⁴³ Tesfamariam Tesfahunegn, 'The Battle of Shire 19 February 1989' (Addis Ababa University, B.A thesis in History, 1998), p. 22.
- ²⁴⁴ Informant: Nägash Eshätu; Ya Hayyälom Tezetawoch, pp. 22-23; Tesfamariam, p. 30.
- ²⁴⁵ Informants: Haylu Bäräwaq and Nägash Eshätu.
- ²⁴⁶ Tesfamariam, pp. 29-31; Gännät, p. 262; Informants: Haylu Bäräwaq and Nägash Eshätu.
- ²⁴⁷ MOND, Operations 554, Br. Gen. Kenfä Gäbr'el Denqu to Lägäsä Asfaw, 29/11/80 E.C (5/8/88).
- ²⁴⁸ Informant: Anonymous.
- ²⁴⁹ MOND, Operations 554, Zämächa Adwa Me'eraf Arat (Phase Four of Operation Adwa), 21/11/80 E.C (28/7/88).
- ²⁵⁰ Tesfamariam, pp. 34-38.
- ²⁵¹ Gebru (2004), p. 261.
- ²⁵² MOND, Operations 368, Zämächa Aksum (Operation Aksum), 14/4/81 E.C (23/12/88); Tesfamariam, p. 43.
- ²⁵³ Gännät, p. 262.
- ²⁵⁴ Tesfamariam, pp. 43-46.
- ²⁵⁵ Gebru (2004), pp. 262; Informants: Mulugéta Därso and Dubbé Ejjigu.
- ²⁵⁶ Tesfamariam, pp. 48, 51.
- ²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

- ²⁵⁸ Şägga Mogäs, Mäkälakäya Särawitu Lämen Wädäqä? (Why Did the Defence Force Collapse?) *Tobyä*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Enterprise, 1987), p.30.
- ²⁵⁹ Tesfamariam, pp. 53-59; Gebru (2004), pp. 264-266; Tekeste (1994), pp. 974-975.
- ²⁶⁰ Informants: Şadqan G.Tänsay and Seyyé Abreha .
- ²⁶¹ Tesfamariam, p. 54.
- ²⁶² Gebru (2004), p. 266.
- ²⁶³ Informant: Şadqan G.Tänsay.
- ²⁶⁴ MOND, Operations 476, Maj. Gen. Mulatu Nägash to Lägäsä Asfaw, 12/6/81 E.C (19/2/89).
- ²⁶⁵ Informants: Kidu Berhané, Seyoum Bärhé, and Kasahun Rätta; MOND, Administration 5817, Maj. Gen. Mare'd Negussé to Maj. Gen. H.Giorgis H. Maryam, 5/4/80 E.C (15/12/87).
- ²⁶⁶ Informant: Şadqan G.Tänsay.
- ²⁶⁷ Tesfamariam, pp. 59-64; Gebru (2004), pp. 267-268.
- ²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶⁹ MOND, Administration 108-120C, Br. Gen. Tächané Mäsfen to Maj. Gen. Seyoum Mäkonnen, 26/11/81 E.C (2/8/89).
- ²⁷⁰ Informants: Täsfayé H. Maraym and Tächané Mäsfen.
- ²⁷¹ Gännät, pp. 262-263.
- ²⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 272-273.
- ²⁷³ Bahru (2008), p. 293; Gännät, pp. 301-305.
- ²⁷⁴ MOND, Operations 516, Br. Gen. Wondwosän Säyfu, TRA's Operations Officer, to National Revolutionary Operations Department, 22/9/81 E.C.
- ²⁷⁵ Informant: Şadqan G.Tänsay. Following the disintegration of the EPRP in 1978, some of its former members formed the EPDM and began military operation in northern Wollo.
- ²⁷⁶ MOND, Operations 516, Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla to Maj. Gen. Märdasa Lélisa, 25/12/81 E.C (31/8/89), 26/12/81(1/9/89); Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla to Maj. Gen. Asrat Berru, 16/11/81 E.C (23/7/89).
- ²⁷⁷ Şägga Mogäs, "Kä Allamaşa Woldya: Yä Qädmow Särawit Bä Sämén Wollo" (From Allamaşa to Woldya: The Former Army in Northern Wollo), *Tobyä*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Enterprise, 1987), pp. 13-15.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Informants: Şadqan G.Tänsay and Seyyé Abreha.

²⁸⁰ MOND, Operations 262, Bä Soasä Genbar Yätäkänawonu Zämächawoch (Operations Carried out in the TRA's Front), 26/12/81-15/1/82 E.C (1/8/89 – 25/9/89).

²⁸¹ MOND, Operations 516, Br. Gen. Märdasa Lélisa to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 2/13/81 E.C (7/9/89).

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 30/12/81 E.C (5/9/89); Şägga, Kä Allamaṭa Woldya, p. 16; Hussein, p. 149.

²⁸³ Şägga, p. 16.

²⁸⁴ Şägga Mogäs, "Kä Woldya Eskä Midda: Kä Mängaga Yätäfäläqäqaw Yä Särawitu Del," (From Woldya to Midda: The Victory Snatched from the Army's Jaws), *Tobyä*, Vol. 3, No. 7 (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Enterprise, 1987), pp. 29-30; MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report (TRA's Operations Report), 26/12/81-15/1/82 E.C (1/8/89 – 25/9/89).

²⁸⁵ Informant: Şadqan G.Tänsay; MOND, Intelligence 021, Yä Soasä Wätadärawi Märaja Mämriya Amätawi Report (Annual Report of TRA's Military Intelligence Department), 1982 E.C.

²⁸⁶ MOND, Operations 536A, NROC to 603rd Corps, 15/1/82 E.C (25/9/89); informants: Asgälä Täsfahun, Mulualäm Abbadi and Bäyänä Haylé.

²⁸⁷ MOND, Operations 536A, Br. Gen. Abbäbä H. Sellasé to Operations Department, 25/1/82 (5/10/89), 1/1/82 E.C (11/9/89).

²⁸⁸ Informant: Haylé Mälläsä.

²⁸⁹ MOND, Administration 84-91B, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Report (Daily Report of Operations), 28-29/1/82 E.C (8 – 9/10/89); Operations 536A, Deputy Chief-of-Staff to Chief-of-Staff, 30/1/82 E.C (10/10/89); 603rd Corps to Operations Department, 27/1/82 E.C (7/10/89).

²⁹⁰ MOND, Administration 84-91B, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Report (Daily Report of Operations), 29-30/1/82 E.C (9 – 10/10/89).

²⁹¹ MOND, Intelligence 021, Yä Soasä Wätadärawi Märaja, 1982 E.C; Şägga, "Kä Woldya Eskä Midda ..." p. 31.

²⁹² MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report (TRA's Operations Report), 7-9/2/82 E.C (17 - 19/10/89), pp. 1-2; see also Operations 536A, 603rd Corps to Operations Department, 8/2/82 E.C (18/10/89).

²⁹³ MOND, Operations 546, Br. Telahun Argaw to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 11/2/82 E.C (21/10/89).

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Maj. Gen. Rāggasa Jimma to 605th Corps Commander, 12/3/82 E.C (21/11/89); Operations 536A, Deputy Chief-of-Staff to 603rd Corps Commander, 7/2/82 E.C (17/10/89); Br. Gen. Abbābā H. Sellasé to Operations Department, 25/2/82 E.C (4/11/89).

²⁹⁵ MOND, Administration 84-91B, Fourth Revolutionary Army (FRA) to Chief-of-Staff, 5/3/82 E.C; Operations 262, Yā Soasā Zāmācha Report, 7-19/2/82 E.C (17 – 29/10/89).

²⁹⁶ MOND, Operations 418 Zāmācha Māket (Operation Defend), 24/3/82 E.C (3/12/89), pp. 1-5.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ MOND, Operations 262, Yā Sārawitoch Enna Yā Koroch Yā Zāmācha Report (Operations Report of Armies and Corps), 9-15/4/82 E.C (18 – 24/12/89), pp. 1-6.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ MOND, Administration 5822, Br. Gen. Abbābā H. Sellasé, Hulātāñaw Yā Dābrā Tabor Wedqāt (The Second Failure in Dābrā Tabor), 30/8/82 E.C (8/5/90), p. 2; Hussein, p. 151; Informants: Häylā Mäsqāl Woldā Şadeq and Nāgga Aragaw.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ MOND, Operations 427-436, Kā Ṭālat Yātāṭālāfā Yā Radio Māle'eket (A Radio Message Intercepted from the Enemy), 1/5/82 E.C (9/1/90); Informant: Mākuanent Mālkamu and Seyoum Bārhé.

³⁰⁴ Informants: Abbābā H. Sellasé, Wasihun Negatu and Tamrat Tebābu.

³⁰⁵ MOND, Operations 262, Ya Soasā Samentawi Yā Zāmācha Report (TRA's Weekly Operations Report), 6-14/5/82 E.C (14 – 22/1/90); Intelligence 022-24, Yā Soasā Wātadārawi Mārāja Amātawi Report (TRA's Intelligence Annual Report), 1982 E.C.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ Informants: Şadqan G. Tänsay and Seyyē Abreha.

³⁰⁸ MOND, Intelligence 022-24, Yā Soasā Wātadārawi Mārāja Amātawi Report (TRA's Military Intelligence Annual Report), 1982 E.C., pp. 52-56.

³⁰⁹ Taddāsā (1997 E.C.), pp. 1-3; Fontrier, p. 227.

³¹⁰ Taddāsā (1997 E.C.), pp. 26, 32.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³¹² Informants: Abiy W. Maryam.

³¹³ Taddāsā (1997 E.C.), pp. 97-100; see also Fontrier, 229.

³¹⁴ Taddäsä (1997 E.C), pp. 106-107.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 134, 149-156.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 188-193.

³¹⁷ MOND, Operations 493, Bä Ahunu Gizé Yallä Tāwagi Hayl Enna Mäsariya (Currently Existing Combatants and Weapons), 1982 E.C., p.1.

³¹⁸ Informants: Anonymous.

³¹⁹ Abbäbä, pp. 4-6, 21-22; Informants: Mäsärät Gälaw, Alämu Mäbraté and Wasihun Negatu.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10, 14-16.

³²¹ MOND, Administration 237, Mängestu H. Maryam to Täsfayé G.Kidan, H.Giorgis H. Maryam, and Dämessé Bulito, 16/11/80 E.C (23/7/88).

³²² Informant: Şadqan G.Tänsay.

³²³ See for instance, R. Stetler, *The Military Art of People's War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 123; Taber, p. 56; Fuller, p. 49; Clausewitz, p. 18.

³²⁴ Clausewitz, p. 28.

³²⁵ Abbäbä, pp. 21-23.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-32.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 48, 57; Informant: Mäsärät Gälaw. After overrunning government defences between Mt. Guna and Baher Dar, EPRDF forces found it strategically advisable to retreat from the plains of Dära and Fogära and entrench themselves in the Aläm Saga mountain ranges.

³²⁸ MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report (TRA's Operations Report), 10-17/7/82 E.C (19 – 26/3/90), pp. 1-2; Ba Soasä Genbar Yätädärägä Wegiya Acher Zägäba (A Brief Report on the Fighting in the TRA's Front), 16-30/7/82 E.C (25/3/90-8/4/90), pp. 1-3.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 1-11/8/82 E.C (9 – 19/4/90), pp. 1-2; Ya Soasä Genbar Samentawi Report (Weekly Report of the TRA's Front), 8-13/8/82 E.C (16-21/4/90), pp. 1-2.

³³² MOND, Operations 418, Yä Soasä Tor Asälaläf (Deployment of TRA's Forces), 1982 E.C., pp. 1-6. In major operations, it had become quite common to deploy famed units like the 3rd Infantry and the 102nd Airborne Divisions. Although such units suffered heavy manpower depletion in earlier operations, they were given fresh recruits to replace losses. As a result, they managed to resurface right up to 1991.

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ MOND, Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 13-19/9/82 E.C (21 – 27/5/90), P.1.

³³⁶ Informants: Şadqan G. Tänsay, Täfärra Mammo, Nägga Mulaw, and Solomon Taddäsä.

³³⁷ MOND, Operations 493, Bä Mäto Hulätäña Ayär Wäläd Keflä Tor Lay Yädärsä Gudat (The Damage Inflicted on the 102nd Airborne Division), 25/9/82 E.C (2/6/90), pp. 1-5; Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 13-19/9/82 E.C (21 – 27/5/90), pp. 1-4; Operations 418, TRA's Commander to Task Force 3A Commander, 15/9/82 E.C (23/5/90); Informants: Solomon Taddäsä, Şäggaw Lägäsä, Haykäl Fädlu and Nägga Mulaw.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ MOND, Operations 513-514, Yä Soasä Zämächa (TRA's Operations), 20/9/82 E.C (28/5/90); Intelligence 022-24; Anonymous, Zämächa Näbälbal: Kä Karra Mesheg Eskä Märañaña (Operation Flame: From Karra Mesheg to Märañaña), *Ethiop*, Vol. 2, No. 17, 1993, pp. 23-24.

³⁴¹ Şägga, Kä Woldya Eskä Midda, p. 32; MOND, Intelligence 022-24.

³⁴² Fuller, p. 50.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁴⁴ Şägga, Kä Woldya Eskä Midda, p. 32.

³⁴⁵ MOND, Administration 2521, Zämächa Näbälbal 02 (Operation Flame II), 25/09/82 E.C (2/6/90), pp. 1-6.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ MOND, Operations 513-514, TRA's Operations Department to MOND's Main Operations Department, 26/9/82 E.C (3/6/90); TRA's Commander to Chief-of-Staff, 26/9/82 E.C; TRA's Commander to 605th Corps' Commander, 26/9/82 E.C; for Mao and Napoleon's strategy see Mao Tse Tung, *Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968), pp.79-80; G. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 148-149.

³⁴⁹ MOND, Operations 513-514, Deputy Chief-of-Staff to TRA's Commander, 27/9/82 E.C (4/6/90); TRA to Main Operations Department, 28/9/82 E.C (5/6/90).

³⁵⁰ MOND, Operations 513-514, TRA to Main Military Intelligence Department, 28/9/82 E.C; Main Operations Department to TRA's Operations Department, 29/9/82 E.C (6/6/90).

- ³⁵¹ Anonymous, Zämächa Näbälbal, p. 24.
- ³⁵² MOND, Operations 536A, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 4-5/10/82 E.C (11-12/6/90), pp. 1-4.
- ³⁵³ Chaliand, p. 655.
- ³⁵⁴ MOND, Operations 513-514, TRA to Main Operations Department, 8/10/82 E.C (15/6/90); Operations 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 4-5/10/82 E.C (11-12/6/90), pp. 1-4.
- ³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Informants: Andargachäw Kassa and Adanä G.Egzu.
- ³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵⁷ MOND, Operations 513-514, Maj.Gen. Kenfä Gäbr'el Denqu to Main Operations Department, 5/12/82 E.C.
- ³⁵⁸ Chaliand, p. 959.
- ³⁵⁹ MOND, Logistics 755, SRA to MOND, 26/9/82 E.C (3/6/90).
- ³⁶⁰ Gännät, p. 276.
- ³⁶¹ MOND, Operations 086, SRA's Intelligence Department to MOND's Main Intelligence Department, 12/1/83 E.C (22/9/90).
- ³⁶² Informants: Kasayé Chämäda and Wasihun Negatu.
- ³⁶³ Informants: Şadqan G. Tänsay, Seyyé Abreha and Täfärra Mammo.
- ³⁶⁴ Fontrier, p. 289.
- ³⁶⁵ MOND, Operations 060, Ba 603 Kor Genbar Yätädärägä Wegiya (The Fighting that Took Place in the 603rd Corps' Front) 16/6/83 – 5/7/83 E.C (23/2/91-14/3/91), pp. 5-6.
- ³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ³⁶⁷ Informants: Tameru Chomän and Wasihun Negatu.
- ³⁶⁸ MOND, Operations 060, pp. 7-8.
- ³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷⁰ Informant: Wasihun Negatu.
- ³⁷¹ MOND, Operations 060, p. 9.
- ³⁷² *Ibid.*, MOND, Operations 159, Bā Project 1/83 Yämiqätär Mädäbäña Säravit (Regular Troops to be Enlisted Based on Project 1/83), p. 1.
- ³⁷³ MOND, Operations 060, pp. 9-11; Informant: Wasihun Negatu.
- ³⁷⁴ MOND, Operations 060, pp. 11-13.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16; see also Fontrier, p. 293.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁷⁹ Informants: Şadqan G. Tänsay and Seyyé Abreha.

³⁸⁰ MOND, Operations 060, pp. 19-20.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

³⁸² Informants: Şadqan G. Tänsay and Seyyé Abreha.

³⁸³ Bahru (2001), p. 268.

Notes to Chapter Six

¹ Bahru (2008), p. 283.

² D. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. xii.

³ MOND Archives, Intelligence 012-14, Yä Märäja Astäwaş'o (Intelligence Summary), 16-26/8/83 E.C (24/4/91-4/5/91), p. 1. According to the Military intelligence Department, by April 1991, the EPLF and EPRDF had a total of 165,389 fighters. For EPLF figures see D. Pool, "The Eritrean People's Liberation Front," *African Guerrillas* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), p. 19.

⁴ MOND Archives, Operations 518B, Yä Somalia ..., pp. 37-38.

⁵ *Addis Zämän*, 26/8/70 E.C, p.1.

⁶ Informants: Negatu Bogalä, Taddäsä T.Haymanot and Abbeyé Färrädä.

⁷ R. Taber, *The War of the Flea: Guerrilla Warfare, Theory and Practice* (London: Paladin, 1977), p. 35.

⁸ J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter Revolutionary War: The Strategy of Counter Insurgency* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), p. 77.

⁹ Galula, p.51.

¹⁰ Taber, pp. 21-22, 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

¹² Galula, pp. 52-54. In his recent memoir, Major General Gétachäw Gädamu, the then commander of the Gäset Force, also underlines the indispensability of population support to the army's operation. See Gétachäw Gädamu, *Yä Gäset Del Enna Fätänawochu (The Victory and Challenges of Gäset)*(NP, 1997 E.C.), p. 55.

¹³ McCuen, p. 34.

¹⁴ See for example MOND Archives, Administration 2463, Military Intelligence to Operations Department, 13/5/71 E.C (21/1/79).

¹⁵ MOND Archives, Administration 4635, Yä Aser Amät ..., pp. 1-10.

¹⁶ Informants: Negatu Bogalä, Amsalu Wasé and Täsfayé H. Maraym.

¹⁷ Galula, pp. 56, 61, 65.

¹⁸ MOND Archives, Operations 168, Naqfa Genbar (The Naqfa Front), ND, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹ *Addis Zämän*, 21/3/73 E.C (30/11/80), pp. 1, 5, 9.

²⁰ Informants: Anonymous.

²¹ McCuen, p. 60.

²² *Addis Zämän*, 22-25/3/74 E.C (1 - 4/12/81), p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6/5/74 E.C (14/1/82), p. 1; 7/5/74 E.C (15/1/82), p.1; 18/5/74 E.C (26/1/82), p.1.

²⁴ Informants: Amsalu Wasé, Abbeyé Färrädä and Negatu Bogalä.

²⁵ *Addis Zämän*, 20-25/5/74 E.C (28 - 2/2/82), p.1.

²⁶ Dawit, P. 109.

²⁷ Informants: Damtäw Gétahun, Mulu Sahlé and Täräfworq Tolosa.

²⁸ Connell (1997), p. 232.

²⁹ Tesfamariam, pp. 24-25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³¹ For casualty figures and list of towns bombed see Africa Watch, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), pp. 239, 247, 256-257, 268-271.

³² MOND Archives, Intelligence 110, Br. Gen. Abbäbä G. Mäsqäl to Chief of Staff, 19/8/82 E.C (27/4/90); Informant: Haylé Mälläsä.

- ³³ Dawit, p. 299; Informant: Mäsärät Gälaw. People used to express their anger by giving their own meaning to the AMC's Amharic acronym, *Esägäd* as *Ebritännaw Säw Gäday Derejet* (The Impudent Human Killer Organization).
- ³⁴ Informant: Mäsärät Gälaw.
- ³⁵ Bahru (2001), p. 264; Tesfamariam, p. 13; Gännät, p. 272.
- ³⁶ Informants: Bälay Tamänä, Kasaw Aduña and Mäkuwanent Mälkamu and Mälaku Täsämma.
- ³⁷ McCuen, p. 61.
- ³⁸ Taber, p. 136; Galula, p. xiii, 50; McCuen, p. 62.
- ³⁹ Galula, p. 87.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-84.
- ⁴¹ Informant: Taddäsä T. Haymanot and Nägash Eshätu.
- ⁴² MOND Archives, Operations 493, Chief of Staff to main departments of MOND, 13/2/82 E.C (23/10/89).
- ⁴³ *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 26, No. 17, August 14, 1985, p. 6; Informants: Admasu Alämu, Kasahun Rätta and Taddäsä T. Haymanot.
- ⁴⁴ Fuller, p. 44; Clausewitz, pp. 42-43; Dunnigan, p. 16.
- ⁴⁵ Fuller, p. 45.
- ⁴⁶ Galula, p. 61.
- ⁴⁷ Gilkes (1995), pp. 41-42.
- ⁴⁸ MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär ... p. 46-51.
- ⁴⁹ Fuller, pp. 45-46.
- ⁵⁰ Galula, p. xii.
- ⁵¹ MOND Archives, Operations 168, pp. 46-51.
- ⁵² Gännät, p. 289.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 262; Informant: Täsfayé H. Maryam.
- ⁵⁴ Kasayé, pp. 212-213; Informants: Taddäsä T. Haymanot, Tayyé Berhanu, and Haylu Bäräwaq.
- ⁵⁵ Kasayé, pp. iv-v; Gännät, pp. 35-36.
- ⁵⁶ Informants: Märdasa Lélisa, Täsfayé H. Maryam and Gezaw Bälaynäh.

⁵⁷ H. Salisbury, *The Soviet Union: The Fifty Years* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World Inc., 1967, p. 362; J. Strawson, *Hitler as Military Commander* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1995), pp. 176-177.

⁵⁸ Informants: Negatu Bogalä, Abära Jämbäre and Abbäbä H. Sellasé.

⁵⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/conscription>, p. 1.

⁶⁰ MOND Archives, Administration 3701, National Military Service and Civil Defence Department to Administration, Organization and Mobilization Department, 21/9/76 E.C (29/5/84).

⁶¹ MOND Archives, Administration 3850, Northern Command Military Intelligence to MOND's Military Intelligence Main Department, 1/3/74 E.C (10/11/81).

⁶² MOND Archives, Operations 168, Bä Eritrea Keflä Hagär ... p. 45.

⁶³ MOND Archives, Operations 155, Yä Eritrea Enna Yä Tegray Guday Men Mähon Aläbät (What Should be Done About Eritrea and Tegray), Hedar, 1981 E.C., p. 1.

⁶⁴ Informants: Damtäw Gétahun, Molla Assäfa, Mohammäd Säyed, Mäkonnen Asfaw and Kasahun Asäggahañ.

⁶⁵ Galula, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁶ Informants: Damtäw Gétahun, Molla Assäfa, Mohammäd Säyed, Mäkonnen Asfaw and Kasahun Asäggahañ.

⁶⁷ Informants: Märdasa Lélisa, Nägga Mulaw and Molla Assäfa

⁶⁸ F. Manning, *Morale and Cohesion in Military Psychiatry*,

<http://www.bordeninstitute.army.mil/published-volumes/militarypsychiatry/mpch1.pdf>, pp. 5-8.

⁶⁹ MOND Archives, Operations 644, Leyu Commando Bergedoch Yägätämachäw Woqtawi Chegeroch (Current Problems Confronting the Special Commando Brigades), Hämlé, 1982 E. C., pp. 9-10.

⁷⁰ MOND Archives, Administration 020B, Br. Gen. Tämäsgän Gämächu to Inspector General, 23/8/80 E.C (1/4/88), Operations 368, Maj. Gen. Asrat Berru to Maj. Gen. Mare'd Negussé, 8/9/80 E.C (16/5/88).

⁷¹ MOND Archives, Administration 108-120C, Br. Gen. Tächané Mäsfen to Maj. Gen. Seyoum Mäsfen, 26/11/81 E.C (2/7/89).

⁷² Informants: Wubätu Şäggayé, Abära Amadé, Mehrat Abatä and Lätta Särbéssa.

⁷³ Taddäsä, (1999 E.C), pp.425-428.

⁷⁴ MOND Archives, Administration 3794, Mängestu H. Maryam to Feqrä Sellasé Wogdäräs, 17/3/81 E.C (26/11/88).

⁷⁵ Dunnigan, p. 480.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷⁷ MOND Archives, Operations 518B, Bä Adehariw Yä Somalia..., p. 42; Connell, p.218.

⁷⁸ Informants: Ayalqebät W. Yohannes, Molla Assäfa and G.Yäs W. Giorgis.

⁷⁹ Clausewitz, p. 37.

⁸⁰ Informants: Shäwaräga Bihonäñ and Wubätu Şäggayé.

⁸¹ Gilkes (1995), p. 39.

⁸² Bahru (2001), p. 264.

⁸³ *Africa Confidential*, Vo. 30, No. 4, February 17, 1989, p. 4; *Foreign Report*, August 11, 1988, p. 7; M. Webber, "Soviet Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Final Phase," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 3, No.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.13.

⁸⁴ Informants: Negatu Bogalä, Kasahun Rätta, and Haylu Bäräwaq.

⁸⁵ MOND Archives, Operations 155, Yä Eritrea Enna ..., p. 1.

⁸⁶ MOND Archives, Administration 780B, Bä Täläyayu Wegiyawoch Yätayu Yä Selt Dekmätoch (Tactical Weaknesses Observed in Various Engagements), ND, p.1.

⁸⁷ MOND Archives, Operations 546, Br. Gen. Telahun Argaw to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 11/2/82 E.C (21/10/89).

⁸⁸ MOND Archives, Administration 2466, Selä 603 Kor Wäqtawi Hunéta (About the Current Situation of the 603rd Corps), Genbot, 1982 E.C., p. 1.

⁸⁹ Tekeste (1993), p. 20.

⁹⁰ MOND Archives, Intelligence 110, Br. Gen. Abbäbä W. Mäsqäl to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 19/8/82 E. C (27/4/90).

⁹¹ Gebru (2004), p. 242.

⁹² Gännät, p. 38.

⁹³ Informants: Anonymous.

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File No. 110, Br. Gen. Abbäbä G. Mäsqäl to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 26/10/82 E.C.

File No. 110, Naqfa Yämigäñäwen Ṭor Kä Wänbädéwoch Lämallaqäq Yäqäräbä Hasab (A Proposal Submitted to Relieve the Army at Naqfa from Rebels), 7/7/69 E.C.

File No. 230, Operation Mäbräq (Operation Lightning), 29/3/57 E.C;

v. Logistics Files

File No. 755, Chief of Staff to Commander of Ground Forces, 15/8/82 E.C.

File No. 755, Education Main Department to Logistics Department, 3/8/82 E.C.

File No. 755, Ground Forces Logistics Department to Freight Transport Corporation, 22/7/82 E.C.

File No. 755, Ground Forces Logistics Department to Ground Forces Finance Department, 18/7/82 E.C.

File No. 755, Ground Forces Logistics Department to MOND Logistics Main Department, 21/7/82 E.C.

File No. 755, Maj. Gen. Abbäbä W. Maryam to Commander of Ground Forces, 8/7/82 E.C.

vi. Operations Files

File No. 011, Yä Mägänaña Kefl Tägbar (Duties of the Communication Unit), ND.

File No. 040, Br. Gen. Asrat Berru to Chief of Staff, 25/6/73 E.C.

File No. 044, Yä Elät Hunéta Report (Daily Situation Report), 14-15/6/74 E.C.

- File No. 044, Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta Report (A Daily Situation Report of the Red Star Operation), 1974 E.C.
- File No. 060, Bä 603 Kor Genbar Yätädärägä Wegiya (The Fighting that Took Place On the 603rd Corps' Front), 16/6/83 – 5/7/83 E.C.
- File No. 062, Bä Naqfa Bär Yatädärägä Wegiya (The Fighting at the Gates of Naqfa), 1971 E.C.
- File No. 069, Yä Zämächa Yä Elät Hunéta (Operations Daily Situation), 9-10/7/80 E.C.
- File No. 086, Selä Ṭälat Yä Märäja Astäwäše'o (Intelligence Summary About the Enemy), Miyazya 1980 E.C.
- File No. 086, SRA's Intelligence Department to MOND's Main Intelligence Department, 12/1/83 E.C.
- File No. 086, Wäqtawi Yä Märäja Gemet (Current Intelligence Estimate), 10/2/75 E. C.
- File No. 096, Yä Ayär Wäläd Keflä Ṭor Aquam (Organization of an Airborne Division), ND.
- File No. 100, Ya Project Spartakiad 81-2 Selšana (The training of the 81-2 Spartakiad), ND.
- File No. 155, Yä Eritrea Enna Yä Tegray Guday Men Mähon Aläbät (What Should be Done About Eritrea and Tegray), Hedar, 1981 E.C.
- File No 157, Yä 15ña Egräña Shaläqa Yä Wegiya Tarik (A History of the 15th Infantry Battalion's Engagements), 1969 E.C.
- File No. 159, Bä Project 1/83 Endiqätär Yätäfaqädä Mädäbäña Särawit (Regular forces to be employed by Project 1/83), 1983 E.C.
- File No. 168, Bä Eritrea Kelä Hägär Bä Hua'sä Yä Täfašämu Wätadärawi Enqesqaséwoch (Military Activities Carried out by the SRA in Eritrea) ND.
- File No. 168, Bä Wägän Ṭor Lay Yätayu Dekmätoch Enna Mänse'ewoch (The Weaknesses and their Causes Evident in the Army), 1974 E.C.
- File No. 168, Bä Wägän Ṭor Lay Yätayu Dekmätoch (Weaknesses Observed in the Government Army), 1975 E.C.
- File No. 168, Naqfa Genbar (The Naqfa Front), ND.
- File No. 168, Ya 15gna Egräña Shaläqa Yä Wegiya Tarik (History of the Combat of the 15th Infantry Battalion), 1/12/71 E.C.
- File No. 168, Yä Eritrea Wänbädé Anäsas Enna Edgät (The Rise and Development of the Eritrean Rebels), N.D.
- File No. 168, Yä Huasä Zämächawoch (Operations of the SRA), 1978 E. C.

File No. 168, Yä Shabiya Yä Wegiya Selt (EPLF's Combat Tactics), N.D.

File No. 168, Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa (The Red Star Operation), 1974 E.C.

File No. 186, Defence of the Ogadén, July 1966.

File No. 202, A Study of Compulsory Military Service, 1968.

File No. 260, Weqaw Ez (The Weqaw Command), 1974 E.C.

File No. 262, Bä Soasä Genbar Yätädärägä Wegya Acher Zägäbä (A Brief Report on the Fighting in the TRA's Front), 16-30/7/82 E.C.

File No. 262, Bä Soasä Genbar Yätäkänawonu Zämächawoch (Operations Carried out in the TRA's Front), 26/12/81-15/1/82 E.C.

File No. 262, Yä Särawitoch Enna Yä Koroch Yä Zämächa Report (Operations Report of Armies and Corps), 9-15/4/82 E.C.

File No. 262, Yä Soasä Zämächa Report, 13-19/9/82 E.C.

File No. 267, Br. Gen. Addis Aggelachäw to Häylä Giorgis Häbtä Maryam, 21/7/80 E.C.

File No. 325(B), Br. General Collins to Lt. Gen. Käbbädä Gäbré, 14/2/72.

File No. 368, Maj. Gen. Asrat Berru to Maj. Gen. Mare'd Negussé, 8/9/80 E.C.

File No. 418, TRA's Commander to Task Force 3A Commander, 15/9/82 E.C.

File No. 418, Ya Soasä Ṭor Asäläläf (Deployment of TRA's Forces), 1982 E.C.

File No. 418, Zämächa Mäket (Operation Defend), 24/3/82 E.C.

File No. 427-436, Kä Ṭälat Yätätäläfä Yä Radio Mäle'ekt (A Radio Message Intercepted from the Enemy), 1/5/82 E.C.

File No. 427- 436, Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla to 605th Corps, 25/2/82 E.C.

File No. 427- 436, Operations Department to Military Intelligence, 24/4/82 E.C.

File No. 476, Maj. Gen. Mulatu Nägash to Laggäsä Asfaw, 12//6/81 E.C.

File No. 493, Bä Ahunu Gizé Yallä Täwagi Hayl Enna Mäsariya (Currently Existing Combatants and Weapons), 1982 E.C.

File No. 493, Bä 102 Ayär Wäläd Keflä Ṭor Lay Yädäräsä Gudat (Damage Inflicted on the 102nd Airborne Division), 25/9/82 E.C.

File No. 493, Chief of Staff to main departments of MOND, 13/2/82 E.C.

File No. 493, Operations Department to Chief of Staff, 15/8/82 E.C.

File No. 493, Yäwädämu Enna Yätafu Wanna Wanna Mäsariyawoch (Major Weapons Destroyed and Lost), 1967-1981 E.C.

File No. 513-514, Deputy Chief-of-Staff to TRA's Commander, 27/9/82 E.C.

File No. 513-514, Operations Main Department to TRA, 29/9/82 E.C.

File No. 513-514, Maj.Gen. Kenfä Gabre'l Denqu to Operations Department, 5/12/82 E.C.

File No. 513-514, TRA's Commander to Chief of Staff, 26/9/82 E.C.

File No. 513-514, TRA to Main Military Intelligence Department, 28/9/82 E.C.

File No. 513-514, TRA to Operations Main Department, 28/9/82, 8/10/82 E.C.

File No. 513-514, TRA's Operations Department to MOND's Main Operations Department, 26/9/82 E.C.

File No. 516, Br. Gen. Märdasa Lélisa to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 2/13/81 E.C.

File No. 516, Br. Gen. Wondwosän Säyfu, TRA's Operations Officer, to National Revolutionary Operations Department, 22/9/81 E.C.

File No. 516, Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla to Maj. Gen. Asrat Berru, 16/11/81 E.C.

File No. 516, Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla to Maj. Gen. Märdasa Lélisa, 25/12/81 E.C., 26/12/81.

File No. 518B, Adhariw Yä Somalia Mängest Seläkahédäben Gels Wärära Atäqalay Zägäba 1966-1971(A Comprehensive Report of the Flagrant Invasion Carried out By the Reactionary Somali Government 1966-1971 E.C), 1971 E.C.

File No. 522, Bä Tärara Lay Yä Egräña Keflä Tor Yä Maṭqat Wegiya Mäsärätawi Dänboch (Basic Rules of an Infantry Division's Offensive on a Mountain), ND.

File No. 532, Br. Gen. Gétanäh Haylé to Chief of Staff, 13/8/83 E.C.

File No. 532, NMSCDD to Operations Department, 28/7/83 E.C.

File No. 536A, Br. Gen. Abbäbä H. Sellasé to Operations Department, 1/1/82, 25/2/82 E.C.

File No. 536A, Deputy Chief-of-Staff to Chief-of-Staff, 30/1/82 E.C.

File No. 536A, Deputy Chief-of-Staff to 603rd Corps Commander, 7/2/82 E.C.

File No. 536A, 603rd Corps to Operations Department, 27/1/82 E.C.

File No. 536A, Maj. Gen. Räggsa Jimma to 605th Corps Commander, 12/3/82 E.C.

File N. 536A, NROC to 603rd Corps, 15/1/82 E.C.

File No. 546, Br. Gen. Telahun Argaw to Lt. Gen. Addis Tädla, 11/2/82 E.C.

File No. 554, Br. Gen. Kenfä Gäbre'l Denqu to Lägäjäsa Asfaw, 29/11/80 E.C.

File No. 554, Yä Zämächa Adwa Me'eraf And Zägäba (Report of the First Phase of Operation Adwa), 1980 E.C.

File No. 554, Zämächa Adwa Me'eraf Arat (Phase Four of Operation Adwa), 21/11/80 E.C.

File No. 554, Zämächa Adwa (Operation Adwa), 7/10/80 E.C.

File No. 644, Leyu Commando Bergédoch Yägätämachäw Wäqtawi Chegeroch (Current Problems Confronting the Special Commando Brigades), Hämlé, 1982 E. C.

File No. 704, Yä Mesraq Ez Zämächa Report (Operations Report of the Eastern Command), 1973 E.C.

vii. MOND Harär Archives

National Revolutionary Operations HQ to all administrative regions, 9/1/70 E.C.

Yä 1978 Yä Wätadärawi Dähnenät Tebäqa Report (The 1978 Report of the Military Security), 1978 E.C.

Bä Mesraqna Bä Däbub Etyopya Kä Somalia Wärari Hayl Gar Yätäkähédu Yämäkälakäl Enna Yä Mäleso Maṭqat Wegiyawoch, (The Defensive and Counter-offensive Engagements with the Somali Invading Force in Eastern and Southern Ethiopia), ND.

2. British Foreign Office Archives

FO 371/31600, General Butler to the Emperor, December 1 1942.

FO 371/35615, War Office to British Legation, Addis Ababa, June 11, 1943.

FO 371/41460, Military Supplies for Ethiopia under Lend-Lease, February 4, 1944.

FO 371/41460, Supplies of Arms to Ethiopia, March 4, 1944.

FO 371/41462, War Office to British Legation, June 21, 1944.

FO 371/41463, British Embassy to Foreign Office, August 25, 1944.

FO 371/46075, East Africa Command HQ to War Office, May 15, 1945.

FO 371/63141, British Commander-in-Chief, Middle East to War Office, Sept.16, 1947.

FO 371/113545, Armed Forces of Ethiopia, April 20, 1955.

FO 371/125382, British Legation to Foreign Office, June 6, 1957.

FO 371/131270, Armed Forces of Ethiopia, September 2, 1958.

FO 371/131272, British Legation to Foreign Office, October 12, 1958.

FO 371/138071, British Legation to Foreign Office, January 14, 1959.

FO 371/146603, British Commander-in-Chief, Middle East to War Office, January, 1943.

FO 371/146603, Military Aid, May 13, 1960.

FO 371/35615, War Office to British Legation, Addis Ababa, June 11, 1943.

FO 371/46075, War Office to British Legation, June 21, 1944.

FO 371/146607, British Legation to Foreign Office, May 23, 1960.

D. Informants

No.	Name	Title	Date & Place of Interview	Remarks
1	Abbäbä H. Sellasé	Br. General	19/06/07, Addis Ababa	He led the 605 th Corps before becoming commander of the 603 rd Corps.
2.	Abbäbä W. Maryam	Maj. General	Addis Ababa 25/10/07	He was Vice Minister of Defence and Head of Logistics between 1977 and 1991.
3.	Abära Jämbäré	Major	Addis Ababa 12/03/03,	He was security officer of the Nadäw Command and later the Western Command.
4.	Abeyyé Färrädä	Major	22/06/03, Gondär	He was political officer of the 22 nd Mountain Infantry Division and later the Mäket Command.
5.	Abiy W. Maryam	Lieutenant	06/11/07 Addis Ababa	He was an officer in the Ethiopian navy and took part in the battle of Meşewa. He was taken as POW by the EPLF to the Sahel and stayed there for two years.
6.	Adäm Ali	Ato	22/03/06 Mt. Guguftu	A peasant living around Guguftu.
7.	Adanä G. Egzu	Lieutenant	17/03/06, Märañña	He was an ex-fighter of EPDM.
8.	Admasu Alämu	Major	31/03/06 Gondär	He was a brigade commander during the war with Somalia.
9.	Alämu Mäbraté	Lt. Colonel	14/08/07 Baher Dar	He was secretary of WPE for the 603 rd Corps.

10.	Amsalu Wasé	1 st Lieutenant	04/03/06 Gondär	He was a political officer in the SRA.
11.	Andargachäw Kassa	Captain	20/03/06, Märañña	He was commander of a militia force.
12.	Asgälä Täsfañun	Major	29/03/06 Enda Sellasé	An ex-TPLF fighter.
13.	Bähaylu Kendé	Br. General	03/06/03, Addis Ababa	He was commander of the 36 th Brigade and later deputy commander of the 102 nd Airborne Division
14.	Bälay Tamänä	Ato	09/03/06 Mt. Guna	He is a peasant living in Mt. Guna
15.	Bäqälä Amära	Ato	23/03/06 Dässé	He was head of the Ethiopian Red Cross Office at Hayq. His team treated the wounded and buried the dead during the battle of Hayq.
17.	Bäyyénä Haylé	Private	29/03/06 Enda Sellasé	An ex-TPLF fighter in the May Day Division
16.	Berihun Takkälä	Private	27/03/06 Mäqälé	An ex-TPLF fighter.
18.	Boggälä Kassa	Captain	23/03/06 Dässé	He was commander of a veteran brigade.
19.	Chäräqa Worqé	W/o	16/03/06 Mt. Zoma	A peasant woman living on the plateau of Zoma, overlooking Aläm Kätäma town.
20.	Dämessé Mäshäsha	Ato	02/02/06 Jijiga	An English teacher who witnessed the battle of Jijiga. He has a vivid memory of the battle and narrates it with great sensation.
21.	Damtäw Gétahun	Private	18/03/06 Märañña	He served as a private in the 36 th Brigade of the 18 th Mountain Infantry Division.
22.	Dubbé Ejjegü	Corporal	15/03/07, Dabat	He took part in the battle of Dabat.
23.	Edom G. Şadeq	Private	18/03/06 Wärä Ilu	He worked as a spy and fighter for the EPRDF.
24.	Elfnäsh Telahun	W/o	02/02/06 Jijiga	She was taken as a POW by Somali soldiers from Awaré and spent 11 years in Prison in Somalia.
25.	Embibäl Anagräñ	Ato	02/02/06 Jijiga	He was in Dägähabur when the war broke out. He took part in the defence of Jijiga.
26.	Gäbräyas W. Giorgis	Lance	01/04/07	He was a member of the 2 nd Brigade of the

		Corporal	Kuta Bär	26 th (Wolafän) Infantry Division.
27.	Gäbré Dämäwoz	Ato	05/03/07 Wärräta	He worked as an intelligence agent for the EPDM.
28.	Gétachäw Mässälä	Sergeant	02/02/06 Jijiga	He took part in the defence of Jijiga against Somali onslaught in 1977.
29.	Gezaw Bälaynäh	Maj. General	06/07/07 Addis Ababa	He was commandant of the Harär Military Academy, commander of the ground forces and chief of staff of the armed forces.
30.	H. Mäsqał W. Şadeq	Ato	30/03/07, Mähal Méda	He is a resident of Mähal Méda.
31.	Haykäl Fädlu	Captain	21/03/06, Dässé	She worked as a spy before being a squad and then a platoon commander under EPDM.
32.	Haylé Mälläsä*	Br. General	04/06/08, London	He was secretary of WPE for South Gondär.
33.	Haylu Ashagré	Ato	18/03/06 Karra Mesheg	A peasant residing in Karra Mesheg. He witnessed the battle of Karra Mesheg.
34.	Haylu Bäräwaq*	Br. General	03/03/08, London	He was commander of the 603 rd Corps.
35.	Jagama Kéllo	Lt. General	17/10/07 Addis Ababa	He was commander of various army units and adviser to the Därg for a year.
36.	Jämbäru Gässäsä	Captain	03/03/06 Gondär	He was party secretary of the Mänter Command and later the 607 th Corps.
37.	Kasahun Rätta	Major	23/03/06 Dässé	He was a brigade commander. He took part in Operation Lash and the battle of Sheré.
38.	Kasaw Aduña	Ato	09/03/06 Kemer Dengay	He lives in the town of Kemer Dingay. He witnessed the battles of Guna.
39.	Kasayé Asäggahän	Captain	03/04/07, Hayq	He was a junior commander in the 3 rd Division.
40.	Kasayé Chämäda	Br. General	22/06/07, Addis Ababa	He was commander of the 16 th Sänṭeq Mechanized Brigade.
41.	Kidu Berhané	Captain	29/03/06 Enda Sellasé	An ex-TPLF fighter.
42.	Makuannent Malkamu	Ato	08/03/06 Däbrä Tabor	He worked as political cadre for the EPRDF during the battles of Guna.
43.	Mälaku Täsämma	Ato	09/03/06 Kemer Dengay	He is a local dignitary residing in the town of Kemer Dengay.

44.	Mängestu Yeglätu	Colonel	10/02/06 Harär	He was an artillery officer during the Somali-Ethiopian war.
46.	Märdasa Lélissa	Maj. General	17/03/03, Addis Ababa	He was commander of the 18 th Mountain Infantry Division and later acting commander of the 605 th Corps.
47.	Mäsärät Gälaw	Colonel	11/09/07, Baher Dar	He was commander of the 7 th Division and administrative officer of the 603 rd Corps.
48.	Mätkäl Asfaw	Captain	14/03/07 Däbarq	He took part in the battle of Dansha and Däjäna on the side of the TPLF.
49.	Mohammäd Jebril	Haji	03/02/06 Jijiga	An Ethiopian Somali residing in Jijiga town.
50.	Mohammäd Säyed	Sergeant	03/04/07 Hayq	He served as a private and NCO in the 9 th Brigade of the 3 rd Infantry Division.
51.	Molla Assäfa	Private	01/04/07 Kuta Bär	He was a member of the 17 th (Tärb) Infantry Division.
52.	Mulu Sahlé	Officer	07/06/07 Addis Ababa	He was a private in the 36 th Brigade of the 18 th Mountain Infantry Division.
53.	Mulualäm Abbadi	Private	29/03/06 Enda Sellasé	An ex-TPLF fighter.
54.	Mulugéta Därso	Ato	14/03/07, Däbarq	He took part in the battle of Däbarq as a private.
57.	Nägash Eshätu	Major	31/03/06, Gondär	He served as operations officer of the 7 th Infantry Division and later as security officer of the 603 rd Corps.
55.	Nägga Aragaw	Priest	30/03/07, Mähal Méda	He is a priest residing in Mähal Méda.
56.	Nägga Mulaw	Private	02/03/06, Gondär	He was a paratrooper in the 102 nd Airborne Division.
58.	Negatu Bogalä	Major	03/03/03, Addis Ababa	He was political officer of the 19 th Mountain Infantry Division and later the 604 th Army Corps.
78.	Şadqan G. Tänsay	Maj. General	01/11/07 Addis Ababa	He was a chief military strategist and the number two man in the TPLF military committee.
79.	Şäggaw Läggäsä	Ato	16/03/06, Aläm Kätäma	He was a member of the anti- guerrilla force(Shemeq) organized by the government.
59.	Saleh Mahmud	Ato	11/02/08,	He was a fighter in the EPLF army.

			Naples	
60.	Samuél Gobäzé	Captain	14/08/07 Baher Dar	He worked as military security officer of the 26 th Infantry Division.
63.	Seyoum Bärhé	Ato	29/03/06, Enda Sellasé	An ex-TPLF fighter.
61.	Seyyé Abreha	Ato	12/02.09 Addis Ababa	He was head of the TPLF's military committee and later that of the EPRDF.
62.	Shäwaräga Bihonäñ	Colonel	05/07/07, Addis Ababa	He was political officer of the Second Revolutionary Army (SRA).
64.	Solomon Taddäsä	Ato	16/03/06, Aläm Kätäma	He was commander of the anti- guerrilla force known as Shemeq.
65.	Tächané Mäsfen	Br. General	03/06/03, Addis Ababa	He served as air force pilot for more than 30 years and he was also head of planning and operations department of the air force.
66.	Taddälu Aynaläm	Private	27/03/06 Mäqälé	She was a fighter of the TPLF in the Aqaqi Division.
67.	Taddäsä T. Haymanot	Br. General	11/06/03, Addis Ababa	He was head of military intelligence at the Ministry of National Defence.
68	Täfarra Mammo	Br. General	05/04/08 Addis Ababa	He was commander of the Téwodros Division in the EPDM army
69.	Tamrat Tebäbu	Colonel	06/07/07, Addis Ababa	He was intelligence officer of the 603rd Corps.
70.	Tamru Chomän	Captain	04/07/07 Addis Ababa	He was political officer of the 4th Mechanized Division.
71	Tänañä Täsämma	W/o	02/02/06 Harär	She is the elder sister of Br. General Täshomä Täsämma, who committed suicide just before the fall of Meşewa into EPLF hands.
72.	Ṭäräfworq Tolosa	Private	18/03/03, Addis Ababa	He was a soldier in the 21 st Mountain Infantry Division and fought on the Kärkäbät front.
73.	Täsfayé Häbtä Maryam	Br. General	13/03/03, Addis Ababa	He led the airborne unit that jumped at Naqfa in 1976. He also commanded one of the task forces in 1978/79 in Eritrea. Later, he organized and trained the Air Borne Divisions. He is the recipient of the highest medal for gallantry.
74.	Täshomä Mohammäd	Ato	19/03/06 Wora Ilu	A peasant residing near the town of Wära Ilu.

75.	Täwoldä G. Wold	Commander	22/03/06 Dässé	He was an EPDM fighter.
76.	Tayyé Berhanu	Major	06/02/06 Harär	He was commander of the 39 th Mountain Infantry Brigade of the 19 th MID.
77.	Tayyé Täshomä	Constable	14/03/07 Däbarq	An ex-EPRDF fighter.
80.	Umär Säyed	Sheikh	21/03/06 Mt. Guguftu	He is a resident of the small town of Guguftu.
82.	W. Sellasé Bäräka	Lt. General	23/11/07 Addis Ababa	He was commander of the ground forces and marshal administrator of Balé.
81.	Wasihun Negatu	Br. General	27/06/07, Addis Ababa	He was acting commander of the 603rd Corps.
83.	Wondemagän Seläshi	Colonel	2905/03, Addis Ababa	He was a member of the 15th Infantry Battalion and later commander of the 2nd Infantry Brigade based in Eritrea.
84.	Wubätu Şäggayé*	Br. General	04/12/07, Washington	He was commander of the Nadäw Command in 1982 and then commander of the SRA in March 1988.
85.	Yesa Ahmääd	Colonel	04/03/06 Gondär	He was commander of the 16 th (Sänteq) Mechanized Brigade.

* Questions were sent to them and later responses were received by surface mail or e-mail.

D. Documentary Film Archives, Ethiopian Television Film Library

1. Films Produced by the Military Government

LRR-10.504A&B, The Somali-Ethiopian War, 1977-1978.
 LRR- 10.505A, Yä Guna Genbar (The Guna Front), 1982 E.C.
 LRR-10.505A, Yä Qäy Kokäb Zämächa (Operation Red Star), 1974 E.C.
 VCZ-22A, Yä Shefshefit Wegya (The Battle of Shefshefit, Kärän), 1980 E.C.
 VCZ-4196A, Yä Guna Genbar (The Guna Front), 1982 E.C.
 VCZ-4198A, Däbrä Tabor Genbar (The Däbrä Tabor Front), 28-30/4/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4209A, Däbrä Tabor Genbar (The Däbrä Tabor Front), 6-8/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4208A, Yä Hayq Ṭornät (The Battle of Hayq), 10/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4207A, Däbub Wollo Genbar (The South Wollo Front), 1982 E.C.
 VCZ-4208A, Yä Hayq Ṭornät (The Battle of Hayq), 5-9/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4212A, Yä Kuta Bär Genbar (The Kuta Bär Front), 5/5/82 E.C.
 VCZ-4228A, Yä Jägnoch Welo Bä Wollo Genbar (The Day of the Gallants on the Wollo Front),
 Ter, 1982 E.C.
 VCZ-4241A, Kemer Dengay Genbar (The Kemer Dengay Front), 27/5/82 E.C.

2. Films Produced by the EPRDF

LRR-55A, Sälam Bä Tegel (Peace Through Struggle), 1981-1982 E.C.

LRR-309A, Wogagän I (Daybreak, Part I), 1983 E.C.

VCZ-4653B, Tamra Kendachen II (Our Joint Arms, Part II), 1982 E.C.

VCZ-4656A, Yä Sämén Shäwa Felmya (The Engagement in Northern Shäwa), 1982 E.C.

VCZ-4684A, Yä Meşewa Törnät (The Battle of Meşewa), 1982 E.C.

VCZ-4690, Zämächa Téwodros (Operation Téwodros), 1983 E.C.

VCZ-4698A, Zämächa Dagmawi Hawzén (Operation Hawzén II), 1981 E.C.

VCZ-6077C, Negat (Daybreak), 1983 E.C.

Appendix - I



የኢትዮጵያ ፌዴራላዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ገንዘብ ሚኒስቴር

የግብርና ሚኒስቴር

ቁጥር 473/4/1/6
ቀን 80.6.56
ፋ.ቁ. አሰ-122(A)

ለክፍል ለ / ጌጌል ወርዶ ወገን
የአት / ገ.ገ.ወ.ያገር ወኪልነት
አዲስ አበባ

ከ ቡር ሆይ

በአርት ወይም በሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች ለማደግ የተሞላው ዋና በገቢ
በክፍል ወይም በሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች የሚያስፈልጉትን ተፈጻሚነት፡-
አሁን ያሉ የሚገኙት ለደረቀ ሥጋ ወይም ለሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች ገዛት የሚሰጠው
ገንዘብ በተገ ጸዐ.20 = ሰጪ ሣገጃ = በቻ ማህተም ወይም የሚገኘው አፈላ
አያበሰሰ ስለሆነ በዚህ በክፍል ወይም ለሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች ለመፈጸም በባዎ
አዳጋች ከሆኑ በባይ የካቲት 21 ቀን 1956 ዓ.ም በመሰረቱ ከፍላ ወይም በሌላ ስም
ጋር በተደረገው ገዳት ከገዳት ወይም ወይን ስለ ላሽገት የጠፋ ወይም በሌላ ስም
በጋራ ስለተሰጠ ላይ በፍ ያለ ቀረጽ የፈጠረ ማህተም ታውቋል፡- ስለዚህ ይህን ሁኔታ
ከገዳት ላይ ለማስወገድ ይቻል ዘንድ ከ27 ከፍላ ወይም በሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች 6387 20 ጊ
ቫና ተቸገ ለማደግ ለሚገኙት ወይም ለሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች ለ 1200 በው በውገዳገና በገረና ለሚፈረው
ወይም ለሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች ለአገዳ በው በተገ አገዳ በር በው 630 = በሰሣ = በር ሦስት
ከውገዳገት አስከ በኒ ወር ለአፈት ወር 1200x30x4 = 144.000 የአት / በር
ለክፍሉ ወይም ለሌላ ስም የሚገኙትን ወገንዎች ለማስፈን፡-

ከግብር ሰጪ ያር

7

የግብርና ሚኒስቴር
(ከግብርና ሚኒስቴር)

ገባቸው፡- ለክፍል ለ / ጌጌል አባይነት ገ / ሥላሴ
የግብር ወይም የፍ ወይም ወይን

የግብርና ሚኒስቴር - ገንዘብ ሚኒስቴር
የግብርና ሚኒስቴር ገንዘብ ሚኒስቴር
የግብርና ሚኒስቴር ገንዘብ ሚኒስቴር

በተለይ መደፍቻና ኦዮር መቃወሚያቸን ወደ ተፈ ለገው ከቅጣጣ ለግንባታና የተፈለገውን ድርጅትና ውሃ ወደ ገንባር ለማቅረብ ባለጋጭ ምክንያት በብዙ መስዋዕትነት የተጻፉትን በታያች አስከመልቶ ከምንገደደብን ሁኔታ ስኔ አገዳገደርስ የሚያስገባ ስለሆነ፤ የወታደራዊ ተሽከርካሪዎች ችግር መፍትሄ ግንኙን ለሚጠብቀን ገዳጅ ዘገታነት ወሳኝ ነው።

8- ስለዚህ ተጠገነው አገልግሎት ስይ ለውሉ በግዴታነት ተሽከርካሪ ሪፖርት ምክንያት ሌላ የሚጠበቅና በመለየቱም- ምክንያት የቆዩት በአስቸኳይ የሚጠገኑት ፈጣን ኦርጋን አገዳወብደልን አሳስባለሁ።

"የኢ.ሠ.ፓ.አ.ቦ ተሰዕን ይህባል"
አናጠገራለን"



ገልባጭ

ለጋደ የጦር ጋደሎች ጠቅላይ ኢትዮጵያ ሽግፍ
የኢሠፓአቦ ግዕዝ ስራ ስራ ስራ
አዲስ አበባ"

18.11.76

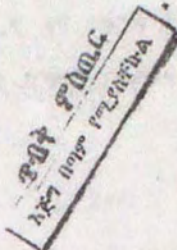
Handwritten notes in Amharic script, including dates like 11/18/76 and names like አዲስ አበባ.

- 2.3 አብዛኛ ያቼ መኪና ምት ከባንብ በተገኘ ባደር የተገዙ ሲሆን፣ ገንዘብ አገገገው ዕዳቸውን በሌላውኛው ወለት እየመረጡ ባንብ በፍርድ ቤት እየከሰባቸው በሥራ ለገገገው የተወሰነባቸው መኪና ምት አሉ ፡፡
- 3. ከላይ በተገለጹት ዋና ዋና ሌሎች ጥያቄዎች መካከል በገገገው ላይ ላለው ምርት በባንብ ላይ የሚከተሉትን እየረገገው ነው ፡፡
 - 3.1 የረገገው ተባብሮ ለሥራ ከደረሰው ጋራዙ ከገንዘብ በኋላ ተከታታይ ባለቤቱን እና በሌላው በግልጽ አባባል በደብዳቤ ወር በጋራዙ ውስጥ የሚገኝ አሉ ፡፡
 - 3.2 ወደ ሌሎች ከገንዘብ በኋላ ተረጋግጦ ሌሎች በግዴታው ቦታ ላይ ይደርሳሉ ፡፡
 - 3.3 ለገገገው መኪና ምት መሃል ላይ በግዴታ ለገገገው ሌላ ሥራ ተተኪ ለገገገውም ይገባል ፡፡
 - 3.4 በአጠቃላይ በገገገው ላይ ላለው ምርት የተለያዩ ጥያቄዎች ያተኮሩ ሲሆኑ ፡፡
- 4. በዚህም የተነሳ አገገገው መኪና ምት ለግዴታው በየገዛው ራሱን የቻለ ዘመን የምናገኘው ሲሆንም በተገኘ ሁኔታ አባባብን ማሟላት አልቻለም ፡፡
- 5. ይህንን ጥገና ለባይ አካል አመልካች ሁኔታውን የሚያጠና በተደጋ ጋራ ገንዘብ ተሰጥቶ ጋር በመሆን የሚገኝ የተገገገውን የተገገገውን በመገንጠል መኪና ምት መለወጥ ነው ፡፡ ይህንን ለግዴታው ገንዘብ በአገገገው ወር በጋራ ያደረገ ሲሆን በመከላከያ ሚኒስቴር በኩል ተገባይ ጥናት ተካሂዶ

.../3/

Appendix - VII

ቁ. ቁ. አ/ገ-18228
ቁጥር መ/1/ሠጠፍ/ግ/1/4/80
ቀን መጋቢት 18, 1980



ለአባታዊ ጸር ኃይሎች ዩናይትድ ፍር. አባተዳደር
ለኃይሎች
ለሠራዊቶች
ለዕዞች
ለመከላከያ ዩናይትድ ፍር
ለመከላከያ ልዩ ባታዎች
ለወታደራዊ ደህንነት ጥበቃ ዩናይትድ ፍር
በ ያ ሉ በ ተ ::

በፈጸሙት ጥፋት በናደጁ ዕዝ ዩናይትድ ስዘዥና በመከተ ዕዝ ዩናይትድ ስዘዥ ላይ የደግሞ ሲሉ የፖለቲካ ጭነት መጠቀም ይታወቃል ::

በጌራው መከፈት ላይ ለተወሰደው እርምጃ የጥፋት መገምገም ያን እንደሆነ እንደተረጋገጠ በመቀላቀል 4/አ/ገ/ ገጽ አባሪ ከዚህ ደብዳቤ ጋር የተከሰባቸው መሆኑን አስታውታለሁ ::

በላዚህ ጉዳይ ከጋራ ለ/ጌራው ተከፋይ ገ/ኪሳን ፣ የአሰጣጥ ግዕዝ ላይ ከሚተ የፖለቲካ ስር አባሪ በቁጥር ዘመ/ግ/003/80 መጋቢት 16 ዓ. 1980 የተገለጸውን ደብዳቤ ይወሰኑ ::

ገለባጭ ፣

ለጋራ ለ/ጌ. ተከፋይ ገ/ኪሳን
የአሰጣጥ ግዕዝ ላይ ከሚተ የፖ.ሰር
አ ሥ መ ሪ ::



አባሪ :- 4 ገጽ

ገጽ ፩ :- በሰ ፍደው ዕዝ ዩና ለዘዥ የተጠጠ ፖለቲካ ደውላኔ ፤

ገደብ/ጊኔራል ታሪኩ ዓይኔ ከጥር 1 ቀን 1979 ጀምሮ ለሰባሁን ድረስ የፍደው ዕዝን በገላፊነትና በለዘዥነት ለየውረድ ስራ ላይ የይተ ዓለ ።

ገደብ በዕዙ ከሌላ ሥራ ችግር ከደረሰበት ጊዜ ጀምሮ ከአወራር ለካ ላት ጋር ያለመገባባት የሚፈጥሩ ሲሆን ፤ ለዚህም ተደጋጋሚ ምክርቶ ከሁሉም አወራር ለካላት ተከትሎ ።

በሌላ በኩል ገደብ ለመሥራት ያሳ ችግር ፍላጎት በጣም የዘቅዘ የሚታይ ከመሆኑም በላይ በአመጽ ምክንያት ወደ ወሰን ሀገር ለመሄድ ይህም ባለተካካላቸው በጦርነት ለመገለል ለገደብ ሲታወቅ በተጨማሪ ሁሉም ባለተካካላቸው በገደብ ለመሰናበት ለገደብ ሲታወቅ ለረገጠዋል ።

በአወራሪ ችግር ላይ የወታደራዊ ወደብር የገንዘብ ለገቢ ስህተት የሚመራ ስራ ላይ ይህም ወደብር በርካታ ተርፎ የሚያስገኝ መሆኑ ሲታወቅ ፤ በሠራዊት ዘንድ በዘብዘ ለገደብ ሲታወቅ በገሰጸ ይነገርባቸዋል ።

ከዚህም በላይ በሠራዊት ውስጥ ባላቸው የረዥም ጊዜ ለገልገሎት ለሥነ-ምርጫ የሚደገቡ የጥርብ ስለ ቆይተው የሚገኙ የሚገፉ ለመሆናቸው በየጊዜው ምክርና ተገባዕ የሚይደሉት ከመሆኑም በላይ በተደጋጋሚ በቀጥታ ሥር ለየዋሉ በመጨረሻም ማስጠንቀቂያ ላይ ይደርሱ መሆናቸው በገሰሁ የሚታወቅ ነው ።

(Handwritten signature and official stamp)

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