

# **ERITREA:**

## **THE GUERRILLAS OF THE RED SEA**

By Jean Louis Peninou

An eyewitness report by J .L . Peninou, first appeared in Liberation, a French daily from September 22 to 27 , 1975. This translation from the French is by Eritreans for Liberation in North America (EFLNA) in cooperation with comrades from Turkey, Greece, Iran, and USA.

Peninou's report provides with a glimpse of life in the base areas of the vanguard, the Eritrean People's Liberation Forces, and a synopsis of the country's colonial history and the people's struggle for self-determination and national independence. EFLNA is republishing the report on popular demand. In the first edition only the second part of the report was published. The present edition, however, includes the first part of the report as well.

It must be noted here that the opinion and historical interpretation expressed in the essay belong solely to J. R. Peninou. Footnotes have been used to express ELENA'S viewpoint on a few remarks and interpretations made in the report.

Revolution is a dynamic process and the Eritrean revolution is advancing at an extremely fast pace. We would like to remind our readers to keep in mind as they read Peninou's report that significant changes and much progress have been made since the time of his visit (August, 1975). EFLNA'S postscript is an attempt to update readers with more recent developments. For regular news and analysis of the developments of the Eritrean revolution and the surrounding region, we would like to invite readers to subscribe to Liberation, bi-monthly organ of EFLNA.

EFLNA is responsible for any errors in translation.

## **THE RESISTANCE IN A FORGOTTEN COUNTRY**

It was night and in the back of a truck that with a small group of resistance fighters of the Popular Liberation Forces (PLF) I first entered Eritrea. In this landscape of sand and rocks bordering the desert of the Sudan on the northern border of Eritrea nothing happened to hinder our passage. We walked together in groups, at a rather fast pace without taking any particular precautions.

Far away, in the west, lighting from a storm, illuminated the north-south mountain range, which stretched through the desert for 200 kilometers until it met the plateaus of the south, the true heart of the country.

A few kilometers from there, Ethiopian soldiers, who were on border patrol, stayed behind the walls of their outpost. For several months they have been afraid to leave the protection of their outpost and have contented themselves with waiting for provisions which arrived by helicopter two times per month.

If we spent the night in the desert it was only to please the Sudanese government which was embarrassed each time it received a note from the Ethiopian authorities protesting its ineffective border patrol.

The night passed without our encountering anyone. In the light of dawn, as far as we could see there was nothing but orange desert, studded here and there by particles of slate-rock.

Behind a knoll, a family of nomads was managing to drink morning tea under a miserable tent. Four or five children were playing around some goats, and I wondered where they were able to graze. As we approached their level the man exchanged friendly greetings with the fighters of the front. Neither out of fear nor dubious zeal, simply out of kindness. The woman, veiless, covered herself in an obstinate silence, which revealed her strong humility.

The nomadic population of the region, being completely occupied with daily survival was unable to offer many men to the forces of Liberation, but they collaborated closely with the resistance fighters. The enemy had lost control of these people since about two years ago and this province was now a base of the EPLF. The nomads served as channels of transport and communicated the movements of the enemy, which were very rare.

For many years the nomads had provisioned the resistance fighters with food supplies, e.g. eggs and milk. Today they cannot do this any longer as they hardly have enough for themselves. War and famine has everywhere transformed poverty into misery. The herds which were the only resource of the area had been for the most part machine-gunned by the Ethiopian air force.

A few cloths that were in rags, a few utensils with which to prepare tea and a meager bit of food each day, four or five bad mats, a long curved sword; this was all that was carried by the family. If one adds to this the two camels and the goats one has the sum total of the possession of the family.

### **A Camp Every Three Hours**

One hour after, we arrived at the first camp of the popular forces and the same "austerity" was everywhere apparent. 150 men, in unmatched pieces of military clothing, worn carelessly, were installed there in order to survey the frontier and to assure the security of the convoys of reinforcement.

The men did not bear anything which indicates either rank or their responsibility. Their equipment was simple. They had neither tents nor tables nor beds; they slept outdoors wrapped in a piece of woolen or cotton cloth, which they folded and carried around their belts during the day. In an elevated area there were some mounds of branches where the men would lie in the sun on warm days. Now at the end of August, it often went up to 40° C in the shade, and other than the men on guard, everybody else, after noon, tried to find himself a bit of shade.

### **No Road**

The camp at Maba is the first of a series of camps that extend on the road to the south, the principal line of supplies of the EPLF. They were located at three to four hour distance from one another.

Following our road, we encountered from time to time caravans that were going on the same route as we were.

The camel is the principle form of transportation here. A dozen animals, led by a camel-herder who usually goes on foot, constitutes an average size caravan.

This form of transportation is inexpensive and appropriate to the terrain but it is slow, 4 kilometers per hour except when some kind of urgent situation makes it necessary to accelerate the pace.

Recently the front acquired some motor vehicles: trucks which in spite of the war were colored in bright colors, as they were everywhere in this part of the world, landrovers

purchased abroad, and tractors taken from the enemy. But the absence of roads or good trails greatly reduced the use of this equipment. The guerillas have been trying for some time to build a road which would tie up the northern part of the country which approaches to the capital, Asmara. This work was accomplished without any mechanized land digging device, totally through manual labor, and would probably be completed by the beginning of winter.

In the meantime, in order to move on the sand and rock, landrovers were needed. And the front did not have many of these.

A few hours more on the road, we finally entered the mountains. The summits were not very high but they were clearly visible, broken up here and there by valleys. There were always very few inhabitants (in summer most of the nomads migrated with their herds towards the high plateaus of the south).

### **No Ideology, No Guns**

We overtook a small group of 35 men, dressed mostly in civilian clothes. These were new recruits from Sudanese refugee camps. They had passed through the frontier the evening before, and were walking toward their training camp. All were young. I stopped to talk with them. They had only one wish: to fight against Ethiopian troops as soon as possible. However, they were forced to wait a good three months before going to the front lines, near Asmara - for the EPLF distributes guns only after a training period and the completion of a basic political education program.

While we discussed this delay, which some of them considered to be a useless waste of time, a lookout man rapidly descended from an adjacent mountain ridge to warn us that two military planes had been spotted. We had to take cover. All around, there was enough bush to hide us easily. The foliage had been reinforced in some places to allow several men to hide in the same spot. As I was quick to discover, this little air raid maneuver occurred several times every day.

After starting out, we were on the road for only an hour when we had to stop again. Heavy raindrops were falling, and the riverbed, dry a little while ago, was suddenly flooded by a torrent of muddy water that kept the landrover from advancing.

### **Blekat**

We arrived at our destination in the evening. The landrover saved us lots of time. Going back, it took me three days to cover the same distance on camel back.

A more marked military presence on the hilltop or on the main junctions of the valley led me to believe that I was approaching a concentration of important forces.

At first sight, I recognized that this was the case. I did see some groups cooking supper, unloading a camel convoy, or marching in columns to some mysterious place. But they seemed swallowed up by the rather vast mountainous amphitheater from which we had just emerged. Here, hidden among the slopes of the mountain basin, different departments of the EPLF had built their general headquarters. Repair shops, countryside clinic, information center, etc., were based in this wilderness. There was even a little lonely Ethiopian prisoner of war camp nearby.

Several hundred persons are permanently stationed at Blekat, seat of the central command for nearly a year. But just a little while ago, there were 2,000 men here. Someone

mentioned that at night, the sight of hundreds of flaming torches had given the impression of a huge celebration.

But in July, the Ethiopians began a heavy bombardment of the camp. They have returned several times a week since then, and their air strikes have become increasingly accurate. Last week, there were ten deaths. The large site, now vulnerable, is nearly dismantled. Tents have been taken down to eliminate visible targets, the hospital has been moved to another valley, etc.

Now is the time to reorganize.

## **ERITREA - FROM ONE COLONIZER TO ANOTHER**

The ancient Medre Bahri, "country of the sea," to whom the Italian colonizers gave to the name Eritrea (the old Greek name for the Red Sea), stretches a little more than 1,000 kilometers along the African coast of the Red Sea. Three million inhabit this 119,000 square kilometer territory, a bit smaller than Greece.

The population is 70% peasant, 15% nomad, and 15% city dweller. Although exact figures are not available, Eritrea is about 55% percent Moslem & 45% Christian (mostly members of the Coptic Church).

The two main languages are Tigrigna, spoken by half of all Eritrea, mainly from the highlands, and Tigre, spoken by those from the northwest or western lowlands. Most Eritrean Moslems understand Arabic. Six other, unwritten languages are of lesser significance: Saho, Afar, Bilen, Beja, Baza, and Barya.

Amharic (language of the Ethiopian nobility) is the official language imposed in 1956 by Addis Ababa.

An Italian colony since 1888, a British protectorate from 1941 to 1952, federated to Ethiopia by U.N. mandate in 1952, and annexed by Ethiopia in 1962, Eritrea has had free elections only once in her history, in 1950, when the bloc of parties favoring independence received an unmistakable majority of support.

### **A Mussolinian Dream**

"Without the Italians, Eritrea would not exist;" this bitter formula, quoted by a young militant of the front, cheaply writes off ancient history, and suggests that, in the classrooms of Asmara, the world is still seen through European binoculars. Yet it contains much truth.

Colonialism did not only shape Eritrea's borders; it also shaped her social system. At first, only Eritrea's ports interested her Italian invaders – especially since the First World War (which proved disastrous for Italy) ruined all their hopes of advancing towards the interior.

But with Mussolini everything changed. "IL Duce" hoped to transplant hundreds of thousands of unemployed Sicilians to settle on this far-off land, with its lovely climate. Only tens of thousands actually migrated to take advantage of this equatorial mirage – this paradise on earth – which their leader had promised them.

But in ten years, the country found itself in possession of an exceptional road and railway network. Massawa became the main Red Sea port, and many small factories opened in Asmara and Massawa.

All land located below 800 meters in altitude was expropriated by decree in 1926, declared Italian state property, and distributed to any Italian who wanted it.

In fact, on these often uncultivated lands, nomad terrain since time immemorial, only several large estates are seen today, exploiting exclusively "indigenous" labor, who work for a few mouthfuls of bread. But the decree of 1926 was the law of the land throughout the lowlands. At the same time, strict feudalism was established over the ruins of tribal and village ownership in neighboring Ethiopia. The peasants of the highlands, untouched by the requisition, continued to live under the system of village ownership, without medicine or schools, with their archaic tools and narrow minded priests -- ignored by the Italian colonizers.

### Separate Development

The Second World War hastened the transformation of the country. After the conquest of Ethiopia by the Italian army, which was composed of large numbers of Eritreans (Ethiopia has never forgotten this), \* Mussolini's empire crumbled. Eritrea was the first African country "liberated" by the Allies in 1941; the British took charge, promising to grant Eritrea independence at the close of the war. To feed the allies, canneries, breweries, textile mills, etc. were created, employing several thousand industrial workers in Asmara.

By 1945, Eritrea did not bear the faintest of resemblance to neighboring Ethiopia. In Eritrea, the countryside, divided among small village landowners, nomads, and European plantations, bordered on already industrialized cities where fascism had created its habitual plethora of bureaucratic positions.

In Ethiopia, the consecration of the scarcely  $\frac{3}{4}$  century old feudal empire reduced tribesmen to serfs, established the total supremacy of the Amhara's nobility, and limited state activity to forcible tax collection.

\*Like all colonized peoples of the Third World, Eritreans were forcibly conscripted and used as cannon fodder by Italy in its colonial wars in Libya, Somalia and Ethiopia. It should also be noted that a great number of valiant Eritreans resisted forceful conscription and deserted to form a common cause with their neighbors in Ethiopia in resisting Italian occupation of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

### The U.N. Creates a Colony

What to do with Eritrea? The victors of the Second World War had not determined the destiny of the small Italian colony during their big conferences where they divided up the world. Several powers expressed their concern: England, then stationed in Eritrea, Italy (trying to whitewash her fascism away) who wanted to resume her former position, and finally, Ethiopia. Haile Selassie, at the peak of his power, cherished the dream of a huge Ethiopian empire, and openly claimed Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea. In any case, he badly wanted access to the sea.

At the same time, freed of the fascist yoke and taking advantage of the world-wide agitation following the end of hostilities, political life developed rapidly in Eritrean cities.

Clandestine unions rose around 1943 and gained such powerful influence over young workers in Asmara and Massawa that they seemed, at that period, the strongest labor unions in Africa. Political groups which formed in "educated" circles ardently discussed the future of the territory. They removed the ban on native Eritreans continuing their education beyond the fourth grade; they organized demonstrations for equal treatment with Italians - still quite numerous - and Africans.

Foreign powers searching for support among the local population (a sign of the times!) contributed unknowingly to developing political life. Slowly, these three distinct political

organizations emerged near 1950: the Union Party demanded ties with Ethiopia; its supporters were comprised of Christians from the highlands, subjected to intense Coptic Church propaganda, and Christian and Moslem tribal chiefs from the lowlands, who have little difficulty accommodating to Ethiopian feudalism. The militant Moslem League, supported at first by the British (who at that time, for want of a better alternative, favored independence), reunited a large number of Moslems, villages and townspeople, frightened by Ethiopian Christian expansionism. Finally, the Independence Party enjoyed the support of the labor unions, and the sympathy of the majority of the urban population.

In an unprecedented move, the U.N. charged the four major powers with the responsibility for determining Eritrea's future. After discarding the idea of a 25-year "British mandate" they agreed to partition Eritrea; Ethiopia would receive the high plateaus and the corridor to the port of Assab; and the rest of the lowlands would be given to Sudan, still a British colony. Unanimous protests caused the U.N. to discard this solution.

To counter the British, Haile Selassie entered into secret agreement with the U.S.; in exchange for military bases and mineral and petroleum concessions, the U.S. would wholeheartedly support Ethiopia's aspirations.

When the U.S. fact-finding committee delivered its report, only Pakistan and Guatemala supported Eritrean independence.\* In 1950, the General Assembly adopted an American resolution to create a federated Eritrean-Ethiopian state, "under the Ethiopian crown."

At no time were the Eritrean people consulted. The U.N. chose the constitutional form of the federated nation, its flag, members of its Supreme Court, and decided that Tigrigna and Arabic be the two official languages.

\*The fact-finding committee that was sent to Eritrea by the General Assembly of the U.N. was composed of five member countries: Burma, Guatemala, Norway, Pakistan, and South Africa. Guatemala and Pakistan supported independence; Norway favored partition of the country and the giving of half of it to Ethiopia; Burma and South Africa proposed a federal union between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Unlike the sham federal resolution sponsored by the U.S., that of Burma and South Africa was a genuine one with the necessary structure to guarantee the autonomy of the two states and the continuation of the federal union.

### A Barbarous Annexation

The egalitarian cloak with which the U.N. covered the cession of Eritrea to Ethiopia was quickly sent back to the shop for accessories the situation required.

In the 1952 elections, all political parties except for the Unionist Party, were banned. The Ethiopian emperor personally named a representative to Asmara, and effectively gave him the right to veto all the decisions of the Eritrean parliament. Then since the constitution written by the U.N. anticipated the establishment of a federal government, Haile Selassie created an ad hoc committee, whose members were chosen by him.

In 1953, all Eritrean newspapers were banned - except for Zemen, the Union Party organ. The banning of the Voice of Eritrea, the labor movement newspaper, was followed by huge worker demonstrations in Assab and Massawa, which were brutally dispersed. In 1956, Arabic and Tigrigna were replaced by a new official language - Amharic, the tongue of the Ethiopian nobility. Despite a long student strike (soon supported by the teachers), Amharic was introduced into Eritrean schools at the beginning of the 1956 semester. By 1962, the emperor forbade Eritrean teachers to use any language other than Amharic - which few of them spoke.

Tesfai, a militant of the Front who nurses a stubborn grudge against those teachers who acquiesced, laughingly recalls that era: "Since the teacher's Amharic was as bad as ours, they had to write everything. They had our marks prepared in advance – all they had to do was distribute them every now and then. It was easy to be a teacher in Ethiopia!"

### The 1958 General Strike

Similarly, Addis Ababa systematically destroyed the Eritrean economy. Italian entrepreneurs were implicitly forced to relocate their factories to the Ethiopian capital, under penalty of high taxes. Foreign plans for setting up industrial projects at Asmara were vetoed. The cableway between Asmara and Massawa was dismantled and sold by the governor for personal profit.

Several thousand unemployed workers had to migrate to the Sudan, Ethiopia, Italy and the U.S. to find jobs. Even today, the majority of skilled workers in Addis Ababa are Eritreans.

Pent up discontent exploded in 1958 in a general strike that paralyzed the country for four days. A gigantic demonstration of striking workers, students, teachers, civil servants and businessmen demanded the end of the de facto annexation. Their movement was savagely crushed as the army machine-gunned into the crowds; the number of dead was unknown – some say 150, some say 1,500.

From that time on, Eritrean resistance took the form of armed struggle. The Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) organized secretly among banned labor union members, youth, former soldiers and members of the Independence Party, and engaged in urban warfare.

With little experience, networks of the "organization of seven" (cells at different levels, comprised of seven members each) were soon decimated by brutal colonial oppression. The last ELM leaders, forced into exile, were quickly cut off from Eritrean political reality. In 1962, discarding the last thread of U.N. cloaking, Haile Selassie proclaimed the annexation of Eritrea, which became Ethiopia's fourteenth province.

Urban and political struggle ended in a bloody checkmate in this country, where 85% of the population lives in small villages and the steppes. But several months afterward, in the western province of Barka, a Moslem group\* calling itself the Eritrean Liberation Front fired at an Ethiopian army detachment, the first shots of a war that continues to this day.

\*In 1961, the armed struggle was started in the western part of the country, a predominately Moslem region. Most of the initial fighters of the front were from the area. It is true that the armed revolution was initiated without a clearly defined political line and the necessary preparatory work. Consequently, the reactionary leadership of the front exploited minor contradictions (tribalism, regionalism, religion, etc.) in the Eritrean society for the pursuit of their selfish interests. However, this does not warrant the assertion that the group that commenced the armed struggle was a "Moslem group", implicitly suggesting that it had religious orientation. The armed struggle was nothing but a continuation of the political struggle that the heroic Eritrean people (Moslems & Christians) waged throughout the 1940's and 1950's for self-determination and national independence. It was the deepest expression of the wishes and aspirations of the toiling and exploited masses, and right from the beginning was warmly welcomed by the people. This has been attested by the fact that young Eritreans from all nationalities, regions and religions joined the revolution in the hundreds as soon as its echoes started reaching them.

### **ERITREA: FROM DAWN TO NIGHT**

One hundred kilometers away, dishearteningly far, the vehement resistance of the city dwellers to annexation has just collapsed. The outbreak of urban terrorism which followed the bloody repression of the 1958 General Strike left behind fortresses filled with militants. The popular urban movement, prime motivating force of the independence movement since the war, no longer exists. Eritrean notables, the former head of the executive removed by the emperor, the president of the parliament was forced to flee, the head of the unions who narrowly escaped an attempt on his life, all believe they will be able to establish contact with the nomads of the west, irredentist\* by nature and always hostile to the Christian Ethiopians.\*\*

One of these courageous fighters, Idris Mohamed Awate, half looter-half patriot, will organize the armed struggle in the interior while they will direct the front from abroad.

In fact, from September, 1961 the number of skirmishes multiplied throughout the province of Barka. A few months later, about 50 policemen who opposed integration with Ethiopia joined the rebels with their arms.

"I knew nothing about the front, but u wanted to fight against the Amharas who forbade us to use our language and tortured our prisoners. We were all waiting for a cup d'état which didn't appear to be coming and for which we had even formed a policeman 's group. One day we were warned that we were going to be arrested. So, we fled toward the front," recalls Salem, who 13 years ago was part of that strange expedition.

\*Nowhere in there long history of resistance against foreign aggression and social oppression had the Eritrean people or any section of it made any claim(s) of other people's lands. It would, therefore, be with no historical basis to call the people of western Eritrea "irredentist".

\*\*The western news media and press describe the struggle of the Eritrean people against Ethiopian colonialism and its backers, U.S. imperialism and Israeli Zionism, as a struggle between "Moslem" Eritrea and "Christian" Ethiopia. This is a gross distortion of the fact. Firstly, Ethiopia is not a Christian country. As in Eritrea, the people of Ethiopia are Moslems and Christians. Secondly, the vast majority of Eritreans, both Christians and Moslems, have always been opposed to the "union" with Ethiopia. All along they have been resolutely struggling to win their independence and regain their identity. But they have never been and cannot be "hostile" to the struggling Ethiopian masters who are their comrades-in-arms. Thus, to state that the Eritrean nomads of the west have always been "hostile to the Christian Ethiopians" is erroneous.

### The Weight of the Origins

Despite this providential arrival, almost all the combatants are recruited from among the nomads or the Moslem peasants of the hinterland of the west. In 1962 there are 300 of them, in 1964, 800. Development is slow. Abroad no one knows what is going on; no state supports them. Even in Addis Ababa the Emperor pretends not to know anything about the "brigands". During these first three years the front's only weapons are those its fighters take from the enemy.

Then, during the winter of 1964-65, the situation changes suddenly. While on the one hand Syria, which is in a highly revolutionary period, gives its loudly proclaimed support to this "Arab rebellion", and sends a few arms, the men of the high plateau region begin to join the resistance in large numbers. Until then they, especially the progressives, had stayed on the reservation. An army of backward peasants frightened them. The resistance of Barka see their numbers suddenly swollen with young people from other regions. Other resistance



spreads to the north along the coast. Five military zones are created and a command headquarters is established at Kessala, a Sudanese town near the border, and a "high command" gathers together the historically important individuals who live in Beirut and Cairo. The China of the Cultural Revolution period accepted some young cadres for training.

### The Dark Year

The upsurge does not last. The youth of the cities whose enthusiasm is sparked by the death of Che in the Bolivian mountains spark the distrust of the hardy nomad partisans who form the backbone of the front. Among the five military zones especially, things did not go well. Several heads of zones turned out to be true warlords. They forcibly commandeered food in the villages and do not hesitate to massacre peasants who refuse to pay tribute, as they did at Senebere at the beginning of 1967. In a countryside where tribal quarrels and village wars over water rights and land have punctuated social life for centuries, the more the ELF extends itself the more it is fragmented.

In the fifth zone, for example, the commander, who is of Bilene origin, massacres several dozen resisters of different ethnic origin in order to assure the continued supremacy of his group. Elsewhere, in response to Haile Selassie's use of the Coptic Church, some groups of Moslem fighters conduct veritable pogroms against Christian villages.

Even more serious, the heads of the front profit from looting. During the winter of 1966-67, 10,000 head of livestock were stolen from the peasants on the high plateaus, driven to the Sudan and sold for their own profit by the leaders of the General Command. Several individuals open bank accounts or invest in construction in Khartoum, start transportation companies and the like. Following a series of obscure events, a delegation sent to Kessala with the protestations of a number of fighters (the leaders must return to the country, they must fight with the partisans, the five zones must be re-unified) wind up in prison in the Sudan.

A wave of arrests and executions among the partisans follows this ill-fated attempt. In a few months 300 militants accused of "treason" and "espionage" are shot. At the same time the Ethiopian army launches its first sizable offensive against the rebellion. The army acts according to its fashion; brutally and without mercy. In a few weeks, 120 villages, particularly in the lowlands, are razed and burned, 60,000 refugees flee to the Sudan.

The military reversals of the partisans, the drop in their numbers (8,000 in 1966, barely 6,000 in 1968), the rivalries between zone commanders, as much as the summary executions of progressives which the fighters learn of only by hearsay weeks after the event, result in the long run in a profound discontent.

In September, on the initiative of three of the five zone commanders, 2,000 to 3,000 partisans gather in the mountains of the north and elect delegates by company.

"The Assembly of the 400" sits for 22 days. Rejecting the former command, it designates a directorship of 12 persons while recognizing the authority of the "Supreme Council", far away organ of power from Beirut and Cairo which preaches appeasement. Negotiations with the command of Kessala, supported by the other two zones of the Barka province, result a year later in the designation of a new united General command. The former leadership, strangely enough receives a majority in exchange for the swift convening of a national congress. The zones are abolished and a commission of inquiry is set up to look into crimes which took place in the preceding period. Two months later everything needs to be redone. Once reinstalled at the head of the front, the leaders of Kessala throw their opponents in the leadership into prison. A second wave of imprisonments and executions follows in the

hinterland among the partisans, accompanied in some regions by terror campaigns against the civilian Christian population. Several hundred disheartened and desperate fighters turn themselves in to the Negus\* troops. Others, about 800 of them, individually desert the partisans for various stated reasons and escape to Sudan. A few armed bands, fewer in number, secede and win some remote areas far from the Ethiopians and far from their brothers.

To add to the confusion, and the horror, the leaders of Kessala, after years of silence, begin to speak in every political language at once. In Damascus they are Baathists, in Cairo Nasserites, in Riyadh conservatives. For the Eritrean revolution it is midnight in the century.

\*Emperor of Ethiopia

### When the People Impose Unity

In the spring of 1970 several hundred partisans had gone to the Sudan in order not to fight under the command of leaders whom they felt were corrupt and criminal, took a boat to Aden.

The English had just left, and the new leaders of Democratic Yemen felt themselves to be close to the Eritrean left.

A few weeks later a Yemeni boat unloads about 300 of them on the desert coast of Eritrea, in the blast furnace heat of the Danakil country where volcanoes still smoke. Since the north and the west of the country were occupied by Ethiopian troops and the ELF, these men had to cross the desert in order to meet up with another group of partisans/ splitters and establish with the. A common and independent base.

The exhausting March lasted two months. Fatigue and thirst kill as many fighters as do the battles which are fought in order to clear the way through to their goal, but they arrive at their goal: the Forces of Popular Liberation (EPLF) are formed. A third group joins with them a bit later. A great innovation takes place in the development of a political platform during a "national conference". The group has a "national democratic" complexion; its platform takes up again in detail the union's demands, provides for equality of the sexes, favors "democratic dialogue" in order to reduce its differences with the ELF-RC. Recognition of Eritrean independence is posited as a precondition for any talks with the Ethiopians.

From now on there are two fronts. Each must choose; but who has the necessary information to choose? Who even knows about the events which led to the secession of one group from the other. There are no political tracts, no newspapers, even less are there radios. Many rumors circulate, but the militants do not dare to speak too loudly for fear of helping Ethiopian propaganda.

For several years the reasons for the schism remained cloudy and misunderstood by most people. In Europe people believe they understand what is going on by reducing the situation to a state of opposition between Christians and Moslems when, in fact, after years of tensions the religious aspect is probably the least important. Opposition between leaders from different regions, on the other hand, plays a definite role, at least at first.

Civil War causes many dramatic changes. After an attempt at bringing the dissidents back into the fold, the ELF-RC declare war on the PLF in February of 1972. For two and a half years, punctuated by a few ceasefires, a bitter struggle takes place between these two groups, a struggle much more deadly than that between the partisans and the Ethiopians. The ELF-RC which has greater numbers takes the offensive. It progressively pushes its opponents back into the desert-like mountains of the north, but is incapable of annihilating

them entirely. Ambushes, hand to hand combat, nothing is absent from this civil war between the Eritreans.

The Ethiopian army let's the partisans kill each other off and refrains from launching any major military operations. The Emperor counts on the population's feelings of disgust and on the Liberation movement's diplomatic isolation. Mistakenly so, because since the Keren massacre, nationalist sentiment has gained greatly. On that day, December 16, 1970, a few newspapers in the world reported the horrifying massacre. The third city of Eritrea was bombarded with napalm all day long. 1,500 persons out of a total population of 40,000 died.

Martial law, which was proclaimed at this time, and which is still in force today, covers a tough and bitterly felt daily repression. While the partisans are tearing at each other, in the struggle against the Ethiopians, the people find an element of unity which submerges old divisions. Urban terrorism picks up to some extent in Asmara. In December 1972 in the name of the EPLF and of a revolutionary Ethiopian group, a commando of four men and two women tries to hijack an Ethiopian airplane. The adventure ends in blood; 5 killed and the sixth taken prisoner. But during the funeral of one of the victims, in Asmara, thousands of schoolchildren and students demonstrated in the streets, making their feelings unmistakable. Abroad, immigrants - workers and students - form associations and collect funds.

#### The Meeting at Waki Debah

When, in the spring of 1974 the second division of the Ethiopian army, tired of battle, gives the signal for the military revolution destined to carry away the empire of Haile Selassie, national sentiment in Eritrea is higher than ever before. While press censorship remains in effect, military operations are suspended for several months. Freedom of movement is greater, and the partisans of the EPLF take advantage of this in order to regain a foothold on the high plateau region a few kilometers away from Asmara after an absence of two years. The ELF-RC, the only group present in this vital region, is unable to prevent the move.

In September the Negus is officially deposed by the military which also announces that it will accept Sudanese arbitration on the Eritrean question. General Aman Andom, the head of the government, makes a tour among the notables of Asmara and asks them to act as intermediaries. The ELF-RC says it is ready to negotiate. Under these conditions new armed confrontations between the two fronts near Asmara provoke general anger. Spontaneously thousands of inhabitants leave the city and March toward the combatants to insist on a reconciliation. For several days, in Waki Debah, a permanent meeting takes place between several thousand persons. "It was fantastic. People were constantly arriving and leaving. There were continual discussions. Fighters from both fronts were there. At one point we elected a committee of 77 citizens to represent the people in discussions with the combatants". This is how Tahar, who joined the EPLF at that time, tells the story with shining eyes. And civil war stopped. . . .

In the following weeks meetings between partisans of the two fronts took place almost daily.

At the grassroots level the desire for unity is strong, but under what conditions? Today, eleven months later, there is still no answer.

#### The Battle of Asmara

It was overdue. During the night of November 23-24 the junta changes its policy suddenly. General Andom is executed for "attempt on the nation's territorial integrity". The radicalization of the junta occurs simultaneously with the exacerbation of nationalist sentiment in Ethiopia itself. The Second division receives considerable reinforcements, and a major offensive to "be done with" Eritrean resistance is prepared.

The partisans preempt the attacks; the battle of Asmara (January 31 to February 11) reveals to the surprised world the strength of the partisans and the brutality of the military repression: neighboring villages bombarded with napalm, reprisals (the cutting off of water) on the inhabitants of Asmara, summary executions, raids, etc. The front line stabilizes at about ten kilometers from the capital and has barely changed since. But in a few weeks the Ethiopian air force, master of the sky, has sent between 300,000 and 350,000 new refugees onto the roads, too far from the Sudan to be able to reach that country on foot.

### The Two Fronts Today

ELF Revolutionary Command constituted in its present form at the congress of December, 1971; its leadership resides in Kassala in the Sudan.

Aside from Tedla Bairu, former chief of the Eritrean executive in 1952 and who from Stockholm no longer plays an effective role, its leadership is mainly assured by Idris Mohamed Adam, former president of the Eritrean parliament, originally from the province of Barka.

At the time of the congress in April of 1975, Idris Mohamed was left out of the front's leadership although his friends remain at its head.

The ELF-RC counts approximately 9,000 to 10,000 fighters and is strong particularly in the region to the west and around Asmara.

### EPLF

Constituted in fact in April, 1970, it has a double leadership: a central command of nine members inside the country and an "external mission" abroad (in Beirut). The two secretaries of the Central Command to whom the fighters give primacy are Issayas Afeworki, of Christian origin, and Ramadan Mohamed Nur, of Moslem origin. The titular president of the external mission is the ex-president of the Eritrean trade unions Wolde ab Wolde Mariam; his secretary General, and the effective head is Osman Saleh Sabbe.

The EPLF, also known as the PLF (Popular Liberation Forces) is particularly entrenched in the north and east, as well as around Asmara. It counts about 7,000-8,000 fighters at present.

### When the Revolution Learns To Live

"In Eritrea, on the African side of the Red Sea, a war of national Liberation is proceeding against the Ethiopians, who annexed the country in 1962".

A few minutes from the center of the camp, invisible to the eye of a stranger, were a set of seven or eight huts laying against a cliff. A goat path enabled us to reach them easily. Bereket, about 30 years old and good natured, and who was lately made Political Commissioner, was waiting for us to show us his domain: the workshops.

### Workshops in the Mountain

Inside the houses, the sunlight, like everywhere here, is the only source of illumination. The openings on the walls, which take the place of windows, are very large, but the men inside are working in a half-light that must be laborious. Each house shelters a different workshop: woodwork, mechanics, radio, armory and drawing.

At the center of a 15 square meter machine workshop, sits the most elaborate tool, a small electric motor of one horsepower to which the comrades have adopted on a rudimentary wheel. Ibrahim, who recently became a metal worker, is at this moment in charge. An electrician by profession, he was for several years locked at Senbel, the prison of Asmara, when last February 13, some commanders of the popular forces seized the prison for several hours and wrapped up the biggest mass escape in the history of the war:\* 800 prisoners all at once, which reinforced the political and technical cadres of the Front for which there was a great demand.

This particular workshop, like the others, does not manufacture very much. It's main job is to repair. Fitting of broken pieces, revision of arms, and repair of the walkie-talkies.

### No Private Property

Two tailors in the clothing workshop spend the day in front of the pedal sewing machines, unsewing and resewing uniforms that are too big or mending torn uniforms .

The meticulous posture of the mature aged man sitting in the last house was not deceiving, but he is the man who repairs the watches. In front of him were tens and tens of watches of all kinds. By what miracle? "These are the watches that just arrived. In the Front, there is no private property. All those who join us, all that they carry give to the EPLF: clothes, watches, transistors, etc. None of us has anything that is his private property. Everything is for the front. The watches are stored and verified here and then given to those who need them".

All through my voyage, I was able to verify that this principle is a well enforced law. How else can one be in an organization where the internal circulation of money is banned? The leaders of the EPLF consider their revolution as a "national democratic revolution", but they are inspired, for their internal rules, by the practices of Yenan.

### Very Poor Nourishment

I descended to the camp for an evening meal. There was no large collective meal. Like in the base, the practices are those of a mobile guerilla unit. Each small group of 7 or 8 militants cook its own food. There is dry wood everywhere, and most of all in this season, water is in abundance. The ordinary is invariable. Two times a day, around 10 and 19 hours, one warms in a large bowl a sort of poor soup-stew, in which there is no meat, no fresh vegetables, but a mixture of cereals and dry vegetables abundantly diluted with clear water.

The dish is cooked, and the circle formed, and each person plunges his fingers in the mixture to calm his quasi-permanent hunger. Frequently, one dips into it some bread. A piece of bread made of thick, black sorghum without yeast is cooked over a stone plate, and does not have, according to everybody's opinion, the remotest resemblance to the traditional tasty bread of the country.

More rarely, one makes some rice to which one mixes some imported dates. For the rest, the Eritrean guerrillas live on sugar. During the long journeys, he drinks many glasses of tea with a lot of sugar in it. Without this supreme provision, the men already weakened by the malaria epidemic, would not have resisted it.

## The Doctor

The "doctor" is an important person. Andom, a doctor of a company of (120 men) stationed not far from us, told me that he often participates in the discussions with the fellow members of his command, and he only joined the revolution a few months ago.

Two years of studying in a nursing school in Gondar, Ethiopia, earned him, after a short refresher course in a camp hospital, this promotion. . . . He always carried his little bag with him, which had some medications in it. "I see about twenty people a day; some are fighters and some are peasants. They have taken the habit of coming to the units of the EPLF to seek medical care".

Like the others, Andom has a gun and he likes to use it. I often met many other Andoms. There are many sick people here. Fever, tuberculosis, anemia are always present. The smallest units - squads, divisions and battalions - each have their own doctor. The EPLF is short in supplies and medications but their medical network is of an exceptional density.

## The Leader and the Commissioner

The rules of the Front are clear, and at each step the direction is assured by three men: the military chief, the political commissioner and the assistant chief. All three are named by the Central Command.

The military chief and the political commissioner are in principle on an equal footing. A principle that is not easy to apply in the middle of a combat. What is certain is that the discipline is very strict and sometimes heavy. The chiefs don't have any privileges. They do the cooking and carry the heavy arms when their turn comes. To identify them, here is one clue: they are almost always the only ones that carry a wristwatch.

## Two Women in the Revolution

On one end of a cloth hung on the wall, some strange characters proclaimed in Tigrigna, "The power is at the end of a gun". It is the only decoration on the precarious resting place in which Measho and Abeba, two young militants of the popular forces, were installed since a few weeks ago.

Abeba, a student in Asmara, joined the front only six months ago. Measho had been in the resistance since 1973. She is hardly 20 years old. While in school in Asmara, she was already aiding the militant clandestines of the EPLF to direct supplies and new recruits to the mountains. When she was threatened with arrest, she took advantage of the end of her school year to join the resistance. She did not say anything to her father, who is a construction worker in Asmara. "He is for the revolution, but he would surely have stopped me from leaving".

## Convincing the Men

"At this moment, we have very few women in the Front. Our task was mainly in propaganda and in organization, and we did not join the combat units. The men respect us. Some were very intimidated; they believed as hard as iron, that we were too feeble".

Since the start of 1975, the women came in growing numbers. There are, one told me, several hundreds in the ranks of the EPLF; and a significant proportion of them are integrated in the battalions. "This is the first thing to be done. We have to demonstrate that 'everything a man can do, a woman can do also'. We also have F.M. to carry and we march several days in the desert, etc."

Q: Is there an organization for women?

A: No, not at all. We have study groups and discussions among the women in the cities. But in the interior of the front, it is better that the men and women mix.

Q: How about in the village?

A: When the women in the villages see us arrive in our uniforms carrying our guns, they think that we just came from another planet. They can't understand. But they are attracted by us and they feel like talking to us. You see, our religion says that women is inferior. She must respect the man, give him children and do everything to satisfy him. The woman cannot inherit the father's property, only the man does. Many young girls would join us if their fathers would let them go.

### The Women's Lib

There was an old issue of Newsweek Magazine, and it is hard to say how it got there, probably by land. Abeba and Measho had read an article on the women's conference in Mexico City. I asked them about it. The answer melted with a slight tone of anger: "The Women's Lib, it is too chauvinist. They are solely against the men. They are attacking the effects, not the causes. I think that they are asking some good questions, but I don't agree with them on the means. If the man oppresses the woman, it is because of the system. When the economic oppression disappears from the society, there will no longer be oppression of the woman".

### Six Political Prisoners\*

Somewhat out of the way, in the camp at Blekat, several tens of Ethiopian Prisoners await better days. They are free within a limited area. Surveillance does not seem very strict. In any case, how could one escape? All of the ridges are occupied by EPLF partisans who would make quick work of catching escapees. Apparently the prisoners have no desire to escape. I am permitted to speak freely with six of them, selected, it seems, at random. Two are peasants from Tigray, a province neighboring Eritrea, four are Shoas, from the region of Addis. Except for one policeman, all belong to the second division of the Ethiopian army.

From the start the tone of the interview is set:

An old corporal: "I was a soldier in the south for ten years. I was only sent to the north last March. I thought that the Eritreans were bandits without principles. But I can tell you that's not true. I've realized that from being here. These people are fighting for a cause and they're right".

Another adds: "For me it's worse. I was enrolled by force. I was employed in Addis and then I was out of work. In February 1975 they offered that I should go to Wollo to fight the famine there. When the plane landed we were in Asmara! We were all enrolled by force within an hour. The junta are all rotten".

A third "I was in the barracks in Addis when the Emperor was overthrown. We were all expecting a change. The junta promised a lot, but nothing came of it. The soldiers got a raise, but with the rise in prices it was all taken back again. Their slogan of "Ethiopia first" was followed by nothing.

"Do you expect to be prisoners for a long time"?

"That depends on them", the old man answered prudently, showing me the militants of the front. "But my hopes are high".

He knows that the EPLF doesn't keep its prisoners for long. After a few months, after elementary political education, they are sent back to their homes, with the hope that they will tell others what they have seen and heard.

Political education is all the better accepted by the prisoners because they see that in it lies their Liberation. Used to kissing the feet of their officers, they discover, incredulously, the egalitarian relations between the partisans.

"Does your family know you are here"?

"They think we are dead. The officers never admit that there are prisoners. We have a slogan, 'an Ethiopian soldier is never captured, he saves the last bullet for himself'".

"What will you do afterward"?

A young man who has said nothing up until now: "I will return to my village. I can't go back to the army now. They would kill me if they knew I had let myself be captured. At home I'll tell the truth they have always hidden from us about Eritrea".

\*Ethiopian Prisoners of war.

### The American Hostages

During these past few months, the EPLF had kidnapped U.S. military personnel two times in order to expose the lies of the new Ethiopian authorities, who claim that the American presence in Ethiopia has ended.

### The First Kidnapping: July 14

On July 14, Stephen Collin Campbell, electronic communications specialist, and James Harrell, employed by the transmissions service at the U.S. Kagnew base near Asmara, were kidnapped by a commando force and led under careful escort into the Bush. I found them there in good health at the end of August.

In a communique dated August 15, the superior commander of the EPLF specified the following conditions for the release of the two hostages:

1. Liberation of all Eritrean prisoners rotting in the Juntas jails;
2. Dismantling and evacuation of the American espionage base, established to crush the revolutionary struggles of the Eritrean people, and of all people throughout the world;
3. Payment of funds to alleviate the anguish of Eritreans dying from hunger and disease, caused by the fascist crimes of the Ethiopian junta, armed with American bombs, and American bullets.

If the above demands are not met before October 3, 1975 the EPLF wants it clearly understood that they will not only kill the two hostages, but continue to fight imperialism and Ethiopian colonialism more fiercely than ever before.

### Who Will Negotiate?

The communique concludes: "All contacts, conversations or explanations concerning the above demands will be conducted through the EPLF interior Central Command".



That last stipulation is important. The EPLF "Foreign Mission" up until now represented the Front abroad in political and diplomatic dealings with other nations: by and large, its position was far more moderate than that of the fighting forces.

Anxious about alienating the U.S. and conservative Arab nations, the "Foreign Mission" did not at first approve of kidnapping the two Americans; it considered the three demands too extreme, and the October 3 deadline too arbitrary. Therefore, on August 16, the Foreign Mission refused to publicize the communique, drafted in the field by the Central Command. That attitude was confirmed to me, personally, in the strongest possible manner, on September 2 in Khartoum by Osman Saleh Sabbe, general secretary of the "Foreign Mission". Indicating that negotiations for liberating the American prisoners must be held directly with the Central Command, the interior leadership has, in effect, taken the foreground in tactical and political initiative.

The American government, duly informed of EPLF demands, has not reacted – either because it is indifferent to the fate of the two hostages, or more simply, because it is afraid of offending the Ethiopian government.

One French journalist, during these past few days, has questioned the military function of Campbell and Harrell, specifying that Campbell served seven years in the U.S. Marines (serial number 557-62-1720) and had been posted at the Rota base in Spain before coming to Kagnew, where he was chief supervisor of radio transmissions. Harrell (serial number 398-30-9445) served since 1954 in the American army. He came to Asmara in 1972, after two years as a radio operator in Vietnam.

Because of the American governments silence – and perhaps also to force the hand of their "foreign mission" – on September 12 the EPLF launched a wide scale attack against the Kagnew base.\* During the battle, nine were killed and eight captured, including six Ethiopian employees, and two new American military personnel.

This spectacular feat, reported by major press agencies hours after it occurred, has had a triple consequence:

- Despite all its former statements to the contrary, the Ethiopian government has been forced to admit that the American military base has always existed (it is the most important military base in Africa) and that it "would probably conclude its activity in the course of the following year".
- The "foreign mission" of the EPLF in Beirut has published the demands listed by the Central Command, which it had formerly refused to do.
- American authorities had implied that they are ready to negotiate.

This last point remains to be proven, despite repeated entreaties to the State Dept. from the families of the kidnapped Americans.

\*The operation on September 12, 1975 against the Kagnew base was not carried out by the EPLF. It was carried out by the ELF.

#### The American Base at Kagnew

A 1953 secret treaty of military cooperation between Ethiopia and the United States gave the American army a 25 year lease on a small communications center, established by the British during World War two.

For 13 million dollars a year, the U.S. acquired a strategically situated military base – on the equator, at 2,400 meters above sea level – that is now considerably well-equipped.

In 1970, 3,200 American military personnel were permanently stationed there; 1973 reports indicate an increase in the number of troops.

The base has three main activities, but only the first is officially acknowledged – the transmission of radio messages from American army and navy units in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and the tracking and piloting of American military satellites.

But besides from this, the U.S. has installed a complex espionage network monitoring the military movements throughout the Arab countries and east Africa. For example, the activities of FRELIMO are under daily surveillance at Kagnev. In short, Kagnev houses a good proportion of “military advisors” in the service of the Ethiopian army – as well as a large number of Green Beret-type anti-guerilla specialists, sent in 1964 to train certain battalions of the Ethiopian Imperial Army fighting against the Eritrean Liberation Front.

### **BETWEEN THE FAMINE AND VICTORY**

Is the national war of Liberation of the Eritrean people approaching its objective? After some historic years of torment and bloody repression, the guerillas of the two fronts, which are cooperating militarily, control most of the territory. The Ethiopian Army, which is besieged in the cities, has no longer even succeeded in controlling the principal road of the country, which runs between Asmara, the capital and Massawa, the country's main port.

Not succeeding in breaking the siege (the fronts are about 10 km. from Asmara), the Ethiopian troops have evacuated at the beginning of September, one of the most important cities of the high plateau – Decamere. There is some combat, at this time, several kilometers from Massawa. Only the aviation of the junta in Addis Ababa is presently sufficient to prevent a new advance by the Resistance. In a good military position, the Eritreans must still deal with a diplomatic isolation, which has accentuated since the “socialist” proclamation of the military which overthrew the feudal empire of Haile Selassie.

The U.S., always present, is examine favorably a new order of arms from the junta. Strengthened by this international support, the junta is trying to impose by force on all of its opponents at once: feudal reaction, the uprising of the oppressed nationalities, the popular movements of the cities, the Eritreans, the Somalis, etc.

Last Thursday evening, following the arrest of a union member who was distributing tracts on the “leftist” resolution of the recent congress of the Ethiopian Union, a demonstration by the workers of the Ethiopian Air Lines was dispersed by the Army. The official communique published yesterday speaks of seven deaths, but an employee of the company claimed that there were many more. In any case, flights on Air France, British Airways and E.A.L. leaving a Addis Ababa are canceled. During this time, in the mountains of Eritrea behind the combat lines, hundreds of thousands of refugees desperately seek the means to survive.

For them (the Eritrean refugees), without a doubt, “Ethiopian Socialism” is raw fascism.

### **A Hospital Without Beds**

The joining of the two little valleys, a stock of medicine haphazardly piled under a canvas, beneath a neighboring tree, five or six guerillas crouched around a little fire where a little tea pot is always heating. Next to that, a large plastic vat which is refilled with water every hour to keep it cool.

This is the heart of the “hospital”, it’s pharmacy, it’s guard service, it’s cold room.

One sees neither houses, nor tents, nor beds; several blankets.

The 250 patients in treatment here are scattered in little groups, the length of the two valleys, by type of illness.

On the right is the valley for malaria. Spaced about 80 meters from one another, three groups: the very sick, the almost cured and the children. Sitting on the ground overhanging rocks which protect them from the sun, they wait. Perhaps a couple of them play a game of checkers. From time to time, as the sun moves, they change their places.

The valley of malaria particularly entrenched is very well protected from airplanes. A stream of clear water runs continuously where the feverish patients can wash themselves.

On the left in the main valley are spread out the infectious, the anemic, the wounded by gunfire, and the tubercular. There, the shade is provided by the trees that border the river, which at this time is dry. The sick, less bedridden by fever than in the other valley, form circles where discussion is active.

Just on the edge of the main valley, a new hut has since recently housed a microscope which is used for blood analysis.

Since the hospital moved 17 days ago because of the bombardments, the tents set up in the night are dismantled at dawn to avoid furnishing too visible targets.

Just one, camouflaged more or less we'll, permanently shelters three patients badly wounded by bullets, for whom they have built beds. There are few patients wounded by gunfire or by exploding bullets, about 30 in the whole hospital. Unsupplied with surgical equipment, the front evacuates them to the Sudanese hospitals at a distance of several days walk. In all, combat deaths are few compared with the ravages brought on by the malaria and tuberculosis endemic in all the region.

The food? It is a little better than that of the combatants. The children have powdered milk. The others eat beans, and every four or five days, a little goat or camel meat. No fruits, no green vegetables, no fish.

The caretakers? Besides the three doctors and six or seven nurses, about ten people joined the group. It is not men or experience which is lacking here, it is the material, the medications, the instruments.

"What matters sleeping on the ground?" Zacchie, the doctor said to me. "Just realize that we have practically no antibiotics, or vitamins or sulfonamides. Barely some quinine. And there are more than a thousand sick people every year here, about half of them left without care for generations. When I receive \$100 worth of medications, I can save fifty lives. In your hospitals, it (\$100) is not even the price of a bed for one day.

#### A Report from the Eritrean Relief

The Eritrean Relief has made public a report by Dr. Bereket, who recently came back from the war zone, on the dramatic situation of the Eritrean refugees, which notably declared:

"After it's rout last February, the Ethiopian Army responded by massacring still more unarmed civilians in reprisals, and at the same time mounted a senseless campaign of hatred against the Eritrean people. Thousands of Eritreans fled from Addis Ababa as well as other Ethiopian towns toward Tigray and Eritrea, while others crossed the Somali frontier. The former inhabitants of the now-burnt towns and villages and the refugees that came from Ethiopia which all totaled some 400,000 people, now find themselves without shelter,

without food, and without medical assistance. Another 50,000 refugees have crossed the Sudanese border.

“We have to face a crucial problem of refugees and of people fleeing from the genocide. All their belongings have been pillaged or reduced to ashes, those without any shelter are now behind the Eritrean combat lines. Before burning the villages, the Ethiopian mercenaries, humiliated by the numerous defeats inflicted upon them by the Eritrean guerillas, indulged into all sorts of extortion. In Asmara alone, more than 2,000 civilians were either shot down or slaughtered.

“In the interior of Eritrea, a tragic situation will lead to a limitless disaster unless some immediate measures are taken.

“The refugees are exposed to famine. If they return to their villages, they risk being massacred by the Ethiopian army, which has been ordered to shoot on sight. They don't have any houses to which to return, and no more supplies since everything has been burnt.

“At the same time, it is impossible for all these families to flee towards the Sudan which is too far away. They are therefore caught in a trap without food, without shelter, without care and without knowing what will happen to their fates. A swift and effective international mobilization must be organized urgently. . . .”

District	Inhabitants remaining alive	Civilian deaths	Houses destroyed	Sum total of pillages
Anseba (8 villages)	12,549	27	1,520	1,342,000
Karneshim (7 villages)	44,822	74	6,255	8,835,000
Dekiteshim (7 villages)	38,724	73	3,152	12,010,000
Dekiteshim (6 other villages)	46,600	102	102	15,207,000

The inquiry conducted in the 28 villages of 3 important districts establishes the extent of the destruction and pillage by the units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> division of the Ethiopian army. The results in the table above are regrouped by district.

The figures made available by Dr. Bereket were confirmed by an inquiry conducted at the end of March (1975] in the most densely populated of Eritrea's eight provinces - the province of Hamassien - where a quarter of the country's population lives.

### **POSTSCRIPT**

In Eritrea, war has now been raging for more than fourteen years. A militant, popularly organized struggle has forced the colonial army to hide inside a few fortified cities in Eritrea. A united people are enduring the conjoint barbarism of the Derg and U.S. -Israel imperialism. With two-thirds of its armed power in Eritrea and a clear war-related technological advantage, the Ethiopian government is still no match to the collective capacity of the people of Eritrea. It is this historic movement, this unyielding popular and armed spirit of the Eritrean masses that brought people like J.L. Peninou to the liberated zones of Eritrea and witness first hand the unshakable consolidation of the Eritrean revolution.

The heroic sacrifice of the Eritrean people for the just cause of Liberation and independence has won worldwide admiration and respect has attracted and gained many friends. Peninou has shared for a month and more the excitement generated by the hopes and dreams of the Eritrean people. His essays speak for itself. Here we will only attempt to underscore some points while updating and supplementing others.

As Peninou reports, EPLF is a people's army, fighting a people's war. It's political and military components are very much integrated. Though the pressing problem is the military annihilation of the enemy's power and stopping the Dergue's genocidal war of aggression this should go hand in hand with and must not transcend the political goals. This is why the EPLF has as a slogan "NO IDEOLOGY, NO GUNS" "POLITICS MUST COMMAND THE GUN." EPLF is a front that brings into the forefront the interest of the oppressed classes. It's political soundness and military might are based on the active armed participation of the people. In theory, as well as in practice, self-reliance is translated in the very revolutionary awakening of all the democratic and patriotic classes, coming to the grips with the reality of shaping their Liberation.

If the masses are to fulfill their indispensable role in the revolution and fully utilize their creativity and revolutionary zeal, the EPLF believes that they must be solidly organized. Therefore, in the cities and the villages, in the liberated areas as well as those still under occupation, the EPLF is organizing the masses and forming mass organizations for the different social classes and strata in the society: workers, peasants, women, youth, students.

Peninou reports that there are a few women in the EPLF. Since his visit, their number has swollen tremendously as young women from the cities as well as the villages, from worker, peasant and student background have poured in large numbers to the EPLF. To give an example, on one afternoon in a small town in Eastern Eritrea, 13 young girls (all under 18) told their parents they were going to fetch firewood and left to join the Front. After rigorous political and military training, women militants are serving the revolution in all fields - combat, health, education, information, culture, etc. There are many heroines who have fallen in the battlefield while dealing heavy blows to the Ethiopian aggressor.

Another section of the society which is playing a very important role in the Liberation struggle is the "Vanguards", youth between the ages of 8 and 16. Commensurate with their age, the vanguard train rigorously in military activities, engage in production, participate in

camp work and have defined responsibilities. Numerous eyewitnesses have been impressed by these youth who have "matured before their time" and are particularly keen on political and organizational training. For the youth "the revolution has become the father, the mother, the home and the future." And for the revolution the youth are the fresh reservoirs, the future pillars of the "new Eritrean nation."

The young, old, men and women are all engaged in different capacities in furthering the cause of the revolution. The front has made available different reading manuals and illiteracy in the liberated areas is being eliminated. Barren land is being reclaimed and made productive. The roads which Peninou left under construction have been completed while new ones are being built. So far 300 kilometers long road, extending from the Sudanese border to within a few kilometers of the capital city, Asmara, have been built by the EPLF fighters, working with no machinery whatsoever. Traveling by camel is fast becoming a thing of the past, as trucks and landrovers captured from the enemy go back and forth in liberated Eritrea. Although the fight against malaria has proved to be difficult the Front is showing marked progress. 'Barefoot doctors' are graduating in numbers. Eritreans in occupied cities who have been deprived of any medical services are visiting the 'doctors' in the liberated areas. The 'doctors' in the Front are winning the trust and respect of the Eritrean people.

The individual has become subject to the community, the village to a bigger locality . . . such that in matters of organizational and political discipline the minority submits to the will of the masses. Villagers solve their problems communally. In times of difficulty they may pass problems to the Front. The Front, in light of the overall national interest, sends back its recommendations or suggested solutions. Land disputes which took years to solve are solved in a very short time in a democratic and fraternal way. The Front firmly upholds this democratic system because, in the final analysis only a people's solution is a lasting one.

This is sufficient to highlight how the Front operates in the liberated zones. Here we must emphasize that this advance is made under harsh and difficult conditions. The Eritrean people have endured untold suffering. The Dergue has lost all inkling of basic morality and human decency. The Dergue's war of aggression in Eritrea has become the work of madmen, with deranged souls and twisted spirits. The Ethiopian soldiers have wiped out entire households, eviscerated pregnant women, raped girls under the age of ten. Untold numbers of villages have been napalmed, farms set ablaze and many Eritreans displaced and made homeless. Basic necessities are hard to get or too expensive for Eritreans, especially in the occupied cities. For example, in Asmara a year and a half ago, a chicken cost \$0.80. At present the prices has jumped to \$12.00. The recent mobilization of peasant "volunteers" to invade Eritrea is a graphic illustration of the Hitlerite nature of the Dergue.

In a last-ditch desperate effort to avert a crushing defeat, the fascist junta has mobilized, in most cases by force, close to 200,000 peasants to "crush" and "end once and for all" the fifteen-year-old armed struggle of the Eritrean people. This fascistic design of the junta has been foiled once again by the gallant fighters of the Eritrean Liberation Forces together with the heroic struggling masses of Ethiopia.

Faced with mounting opposition of the Ethiopian masses, crumbling economy, and humiliating defeats at the hands of the Eritrean freedom fighters, the Dergue has once again resorted to its double tactic of fascistic repression and "peaceful negotiations". It has now launched a diplomatic campaign declaring its "willingness to hold peaceful negotiations to solve the Eritrean problem." This new diplomatic offensive is a fraud. It is aimed at isolating the Eritrean revolution from its natural allies, dividing the Eritrean revolution, confusing the Ethiopian and Eritrean masses, and buying time for the hard-pressed junta. However, this futile attempt cannot dupe the Eritrean people; nor can it isolate their revolution from its

natural allies. This imperialist backed machination of the Dergue will come to no good end; it will certainly meet with an ignominious defeat.

Within the EPLF, a new and major development of great significance had taken place. On March 23, 1976, the Foreign Mission of the EPLF, led by the notorious opportunist Osman Saleh Sabbeh, tendered its resignation. The ex-Foreign Mission was composed of a group of reactionary clique who misrepresented the political line of the EPLF and the objective and nature of the revolution and falsified the history of the country and its people.

The resignation of the ex-Foreign Mission is "an inestimably valuable gain" to the Eritrean revolution in general and the EPLF in particular. It signifies that the revolutionary line, the line that represent the interest of the masses, has not only gained the upper hand in the revolution, but also has been consolidated. It will now make it possible for the EPLF to correctly publicize in the progressive world its line and the nature and aim of the Eritrean revolution.

The Eritrean people are conscious of their enemies, Ethiopian colonialism, U.S. imperialism, Israeli Zionism, and internal reaction. The enemies of the Eritrean people are the same enemies of all oppressed and exploited peoples of the world. The Eritrean struggle is part and parcel of the world anti-imperialist struggles and it is the duty of all progressive and democratic organizations and individuals to give active support for the struggle of the Eritrean people for self-determination and independence.