

Menkae memory, Meharena Hadgu

The word Menka stirs interest in people. It has become a household word, and yet, most have no clear understanding of it. For many years the EPLF leadership of being a regionalist movement labelled it. It was a forgotten issue of a sensitive part of the Eritrean guerrilla movement. The recent repetition of this has made us want to know more of these Menka martyrs. The Menkae were not even honoured as martyrs but hushed away and their files closed, according to a video interview with the president in 1996. Many went to meda after they graduated or little time left to graduate. In the 60s and 70s it was a great honour for a family when their child graduated from the university. It was a big celebration with relatives and friends invited. The future was bright for the graduated and became respected members in their areas. When these students went to meda they knew how much they were sacrificing in their personal lives.

They preferred to live in constant fighting, no beds or good food and their lives at stake anytime to be lost. Their sole aim was the liberation of their country Eritrea, which had suffered much and most were acutely aware of the situation. Many students living abroad chose to join the struggle from Europe, USA, Arab countries and the eastern block. In fact, the students of the eastern countries made agreements that the one finishing his/her studies was to join meda directly. This is regarding both fronts ELF and EPLF.

The starting of the "Menkae" movement was not a consolidated or united movement. This was a mosaic of different grievances that was named Menkae. Meharena Hadgou is a war veteran in EPLF joining in 1974 until liberation time. The narration below is his

recollections in his early years while joining the front. I thank him for his memories and his kindly patience to answering my numerous questions. Stories like Meharena make us understand the daily lives of fighters which so far have been told very little of. It shapes the picture of the reality of those days. He has given out a video narration concerning the Menkae martyrs. Though this story was of the bad times, there were many good and worthwhile days in meda.

The book, "Destructive Movement" was written by Essaias in 1976 and it was distributed to all fighters, 3 years after the movement. We all read it. A political commissioner, or a Cadre of a haili kept it. I was a Cadre and member of the Party. Anyone opposing was taken away, as many were taken away secretly.

The movement started sept 73 went on slowly until the end of 1976. Then another incident, the "Yemeen" were accused making the previous movement as past history. It was said that these Yemeen were acting against the Menkae and that all should be careful from them. What Essaias said about the Yemeen was that they were the ones who purged and liquidated the Menkae, like Selomon Welde Mariam. He and his group were accused of pretending to be against the Menkae were fertilizing their own agenda, regionalism.

Food was scarce in the struggle time. The cheapest commodity salt was not available to us daily. Sugar was forgotten that we did not drink for many years. We ate no breakfast and usually had one meal a day. Fighters sacrificed a lot for their independence and what we are seeing today was not their payment. After liberation fighters wanted to be governed with written laws, wanted peace with neighbouring

countries, wanted their rights to be fulfilled. But Essaias soon became like a king and demanded only he knows what is best for the country. He discredited any person with knowledge and held all power. Only he wanted to dictate on land, constitution, multi-party systems etc. Those governing under him also became against us. At last even they understood this was taking the country into ruins and told him to make changes

and reform. He instead charged them of treason and losing the fight, though they were experienced leaders.

To tell you briefly again what I had said on the video, the movement started publicly in Sept 73. Essaias and Romadan though said that it had started earlier secretly. When these people started the movement, the gedli did not have a program or bylaws. It had no structure. It was controlled by guerrilla rules. There were 22 or 32 military rules in the PLF, or Hizbawi Hailetat -:-H. H.

Examples are, if one breaks a needle, or seen suspiciously, 7 days punishment. If one damages a weapon, or aims his gun on your comrade, if one leaks secret to enemy, etc have their punishment. This could not bring us close to the civilians. When those like Musie, John etc joined the front, they were university students, and they had read many books, different laws, knew of the structure of foreign guerrilla fronts. They started giving advice how the front should be. They would constantly write in daytime returning to their difaE by night. They and Essaias and others formed the programme how H:H: was ruled by. This was done when Isayas with agreement made them committee to draft the structure of the front.

That time the H:H: were three groups, the first one led by Romadan, the second one by Isayas and the third, the Obel. Totally they were less than 500, maybe 300. It was the progressives (dubbed Menka) who said since we live along civilians, should form civil relations, civil and fighters to be ruled differently, Jemahir, and the medical section. When wounded, people should not be treated abroad and medical staff should be made for civilians and military separately. To start a news department which should publicize the struggle. Better storage of weapons as water, floods and rain damaged weapons. There should be a group who oversees everything. That the enemy should not make counter offensive we need intelligence unit, who follow the enemy's positions to hit it on its weakest point and study its strong positions, and how to confront it. The army should have a leading military staff. If the Eritrean society is to change, all the civil areas we control should be given basic education, as well as all fighters. Fighters should be made politically conscious. Foreign relations should be structured.

Those abroad should have close contact with the front and be able to supply what the front need.

All the structures were drafted in Gereger, Sudan. (I had not joined the front yet). Then, the 1st and 2nd groups (PLF1 and PLF2) shimageles met and decided that their present position was favourable for the enemy that they should unite, Isayas and Romadan. And the unity came into being. But the Obel group said they wanted to stay out until what they did not understand became clear for them. The first two groups made the mixing up. They were about 6-7 Haylitat, including the Kifletat. One Hayli comprised of 50-60 fighters.

What the progressives now said was, since two of the fronts have united, the situation is progressing and we are getting larger, we should make the drafts we made into action. Anyone can make rules suitable for their situation; one does not have to be well educated to do that.

If one fighter deserts, though he joined the front knowing he would probably be killed in battles, is condemned to death and his family has to compensate the weapon. The progressives argument against this was, "my parents did not send me to the front, they expect me to be living either in Addis or Sudan, or even dead. Why should they be made to pay? I should be killed deserting; even death is mild, because I am betraying my oath. Why should my family pay for my deeds? We have worked very much to draft the rules as agreed and let us make it into use".

Isayas then said, after having exploited their minds, about their timing. He even accused them to be against the 2 groups uniting, that they wanted to split our unity, saying we are progressing well and these want the destruction, they should be

charged, they are opportunists etc, when victory is near hand. (Just like what is happening now). The new Cadres like Wuchu (uneducated) were told by Isayas that these educated ones are suppressing the uneducated wanting the power for themselves; they want to destroy us, these with Gelegif pants (word used by the rurals for city boys wearing belly bottom pants). The situation that time was not as open as now.

Many of us were new, naive and students. We suggested that confrontation should be solved democratically, if they are destructive should be charged, this is not right way for the front to condemn them without their say. Also, there were horrible battles between the Jebha (ELF) and us. The Menka suggested we are brothers killing each other prolonging the struggle and losing fighters unnecessarily. It must be stopped and with selected shimageles, come into agreements. Isayas and co answer was, "aha, the Ama (Jebha was then known as Ama) tried to wipe us out and we survived. Now shall we ask forgiveness for their guilt?" This was made a great deal of. Isayas accused them further that they told the Obel to stay away and join when the Menkae took power.

At that time, the Ethiopian EPRP fighters like Berhane Meskel were in Sahel to train, and the Menka were accused telling the EPRP to wait until the Menka came into power. And inside the front the Menka were charged of being regionalists dividing the front. This was not true, but charged by Isayas. (the same for the present situation). Those of us who suggested this be solved peacefully were imprisonment. This was making us to sit under trees. At night we were surrounded taken away separately far away and beaten badly to confess. We had to comply to stop the beatings. They then told the others that we had recanted because we did not know the whole thing. Most of us students were beaten. Some of us are lucky to have survived this long, maybe so that we will tell. Otherwise, survival was difficult, with the constant hunger, thirst etc.

As prisoners, we could not move an inch. Even if a snake came to bite us we ask the guard first and we were infested with lice. One having diarrheic has to ask permission to relieve himself and told to wait that he passed it inside his pants. Then he is accused of deliberately passing into his pants to make a bad smell and thus beaten. A dehydrated person unable to control himself is beaten badly, as I have seen it. Those not having seen this cannot believe they are so cruel to their own fighters. Prisoners are put around a tree their backs to the tree and about 3 guards to each group. The others, of Musie group were separated from us. We cannot talk to each other. If a person wants to urinate, he asks the guard for permission who answers wait.

Times we are tied in hands are when a fighter is in discomfort and asks another prisoner to lend him his blanket, without permission from the guard. Then he is taken out and asked what this code meant and is beaten to confess. The prisoner tells the truth and the guard says he should have asked first. The guards had all power on us and were cruel. He is tied hands and legs and after beating put in the sun all day. There is a plant called Ubel growing in riverbanks and taking its time to dry, it twists like a whip. One beaten with it is horribly hurt their backs becoming open wounds. Some have died of this beating.

Too bad those who could have told have done. If a person wails in the beating, cloth is stuffed into his mouth and only the eyes communicate. The beaten person faints and goes into shock, shaking. It happened to me and I saw it on others. Yet we continue serving the front and did not think of fleeing lest those behind me get all the punishment. When visiting the "toilet" prisoners are taken out in 2-3 lines. The first line take off their pants and kneel down, facing their guards. The next in line face to the opposite. It was a humiliating situation.

I used to see the 4 female fighters when I was new. The living way was such that by the riverside we lived, the girls used to come and visit us. Then a 5th girl joined them,

Abeba Haile who lives in Europe now, wife of Stifanos Bruno. (Dehab Tsafatsion and Aberash Melke were executed) .Werku Zerai and Maasho are still living in Asmera. She was imprisoned for a long time, and I do not know what she said to have been freed. Abeba was an airline hostess.

Though she was in training when the situation arose, she too was imprisoned. Since Maasho was from the peasant, they said she knew nothing of it and let her free. She was not educated like the others. Abeba too was not imprisoned after having been in the training and was carefully handled. In 76 she had tried to write a book about women, a handwritten diary that was negatively looked upon.

The torturers were later exterminated accused of being "Yemin" in turn. We were told they beat us and we should do the same to them, but we refused. That was the leaders of mela (strategy), to make us revenge, leaders giving them to us. This was a game, was very difficult time. We are sorry for the happenings and we cannot forget them. When I told this in the video recording, some people called me. One, called Kidane living in Canada said I told of his story.

He could not remember me. I remembered him and told him he was from Akhria area of Asmera, and thru the phone conversation slowly started remembering me. He was one of the beaten ones. I told him don't you remember we met in Amader, Tsellima when you joined the ELF and I was disappointed asking you what our oath was. He remembered that conversation but not me.

Some fighters were told they were misled by so and so, from their circles, come to your senses etc. Much was tried to make them betray their comrades. They answered that they were "acting innocently, wanted democratic solutions, nobody wants to hurt another fighter, we are not regionalists, what fabrications you make recently we have no hands in them."

Most of who beat us are already martyred. I remember one called Tekie martyred in the battle of Genfelom near Keren He was a Haili leader in Deboloch difa then. He was from the peasantry. Isayas had convinced them the educated ones were trying to take their power of the masses. But we were fighters for our country.

Our aim was to liberate our country and did not think of the future feeling we would be martyred. But these peasants were dying fast and we were compelled to recruit fighters forcefully. Isayas used all to consolidate his power, even to liberation. He had planned who to use all the times. The PLF 1 (Romadan group) were of the Red Sea area origins, of Hergigo. Some of leadership were Romadan, Ibrahim Affa, Alamin, Shihim Dankalay, and Hilal.

When Musie and others started their movement, those encouraging were Alamin, Ali Said Abdella etc. Then they betrayed the movement and Isayas put them into his grasp, told them they did not know the Menka, that their roots are long. They want to use you to the last, the struggle nearing to its aims, reversing our struggle. (The person who told you this is right).

The movement was neither non-regionalist nor religionists. The times were hard. Recruited fighters first gather in Durfo, outside Asmera. Then we travel to Ginda area, Sheeb Gidgid near Hergigo. We go down to Semhar and following the seastrand all the way, travel northwards. After 6 days we reached Karora, which is a border village between Eritrea and Sudan.

Since we do not know that land, the Reshaida are our guides, they were paid for it too. We did not trust the Tigre speakers. ELF was hunting the Reshaidas and Shabia told them they sided and respected them. They were good spies for Shabia, and knew where Ethiopians were as the Ethiopians had seaside patrols. There were also Locust prevention and malaria eradication stations by the shores and we had to evade them and the Reshaida knowing all the ways led us hiding from the stations. Fighters

to be travelled in 50-70-90 in a group. Our group was less than a hundred. A year later many joined us.

Those from city were even beaten to continue the journey, with hunger. We asked why mishandle new fighters this way? We all want to fight to bring independence, democracy should rule. If such cruelty continues, we will be exposed to the civilians who will not support us and the struggle will become weak.

Make improvements. Feed people as possible. Put stations where water is found. This will strengthen the fighters' resistance.

We complained why people are beaten when weakened, die of thirst etc. This should not continue. And there are camels to be used. We should improve the procedure situation. We were asked in Taalim, or training of our opinions. Isayas was our commissioner educating us. When we told him of our opinion, he was answering chests abreast and looking proud.

He said those of you used feeding by your mothers (mesob Adei) i.e. were spoiled. The guides are told to bring you here any means. Saying you were tired is cheating (hasad) not really the fact. Those new joining had rights to ask, though. Even inside Isayas circle was favouritism.

Some were discharged from the front like Said Idris. This was a question from the Red Sea people. Our question was why some were executed charged to have been spies without being charged, and how they were killed. These questions made Isayas uneasy. He feared that he will be charged in the future and he eliminated the challengers. It is now we understand how strong we were to have endured all this.

Why were we complacent to all the injustice and beatings on our backs? Why? Sudan was not far away to flee. We were trained in the Sudanese border. Ethiopian military station was near us in Karora. We had many reasons to flee. But the wish to struggle for our people was higher.

Weldemikel Haile has saved many with rejecting them from joining the front, like the weak and very young ones. Told them to struggle in civil areas. He was accused of returning those wanting to be fighters. He was strong willed and did not fear Isayas. Isayas was afraid of Weldemikel and Ibrahim Affa, and Mesfin Hagos, who were a brave man. Mesfin was from the leadership and the present situation makes him fear of retribution. The charging committee was under the top leadership like Mesfin, Isayas and Romadan.

Mesfin is afraid he will be asked of the injustice he participated in. He had good position and name earlier.

Musie and the others were imprisoned in Gereger Tebeh, as all of us. There are two Gereger names, one inside Eritrea and one in Sudan. Then our base was changed to Bliquat, and they were imprisoned there. It is far from Gereger, about 3 hours away by foot. Both are in Sahel. Tebeh is a chain of mountains separating it by a river from Bliqat.

We the army were later told of the death decision on the Menka, but not how. After we were released, others there told us that the prisoners were taken away one by one, when we asked them how they were killed. I have a friend residing in Atlanta now, who was prisoner after my release. He said they were taken tied with handcuffs (Ganshur, chain).

Handcuffs could be brought from Sudan or Ethiopia. The prisoners were taken tied and the handcuffs alone were returned. This means the prisoners were killed. Earlier, we thought they were taken to a "court" because we assumed we had one.

Or that they were sent to Hailitat or discharged. Then when the handcuffs alone was being returned, word spread out secretly that it means it was killing practice. Seeing the cuffs, one said, when is my turn? Knowing it meant certain death. What could this person do? Even if prisoners were together for a year, not talking or even seeing each other was allowed.

The executions of the progressives were widespread. Their killings became known because they were fighters before us, were more educated, were political commissioners etc. There are many more who were killed and not talked about because we were constantly moving and in between battles that when they are taken away with some excuses, we assumed they were just transferred from us. Some were accused to being spies and those who knew of their innocence are not living to tell. Although there could have been spies inside us, they should have been charged democratically, not beaten to death in interrogations.

I know Memhir Tesfu Zewde and what is said is true because he was a prisoner. (He stated in audio interview that the Menka were slaughtered by knives). He was taken away to be killed, saying he was being freed, but to be killed, and the Sudanese rescued him, he had lost a leg earlier. He was imprisoned, let out to fight and again imprisoned.

In the DM 73, Isayas wrote the progressive ones were spoiled and had class problems. They were not at all spoiled in the meda, they suffered much on the contrary. The female fighters had shed away their city upbringing habits. Even sanity pads were not available for them. They were beaten like the men, killing was not denied them. All prisoners were beaten almost on monthly basis; to make them tell whatever secrets they were supposed to have. How many brave fighters were crying in pain.

Those like Sebhat and Petros were with the movement, but passed all info to the leadership and were put into the leadership circle. Sebhat has even forgotten his 30 years comrades, let alone of that time.

Those who were beating were under Selomon Weldemariam who himself did the beatings and ordered beatings. Naizgi Kiflu was a beater. The leadership, Isayas etc, did not like Selomon the scoundrel. There was disagreement inside the leadership and the Menka debacle was used to solve it. They accused him of being a regionalist and isolated him. Musie and the others defended him why this was done.

He was told the Menkae were using him to take power that he became their adversary. He was made chief of Halewa Sewra and did the ordering and killing of the Menka. At last he himself was eliminated, and died badly. Isayas gave him free reign to kill anyone, even though they disliked each other. Isayas wanted Selomon to do crime and later told that Selomon was the head beater and killer, who spilled much innocent blood.

Because of that people are beginning to dislike the revolution and that he was placing selected people in positions. Selomon does not show easily his personality, seeming like a te-waz-aye, but was rough. We used to dislike him he killed many people. He was a bad regionalist. What Isayas starts Selomon followed. It became as if they did not dislike each other.

Teklai Aden was brought later. He was then brought to the Central Committee, and scared others. He started beating Selomon. This all was like a drama. Anyone following the truth ended up dead. He joined with us and knew of the Menka, but was afraid to join. He came from Aden, several years there, and spoke Arabic unlike us who came from Asmera. He was a university student and read books. From Haili leader he came to the CC after the guba-e, but with little vote. He had not matured well.

There were others brought to the CC quickly. He then was made head of Halewa Sewra and used his power. He was a drinker and womanizer living in Dekemhare and was recalled to Sahel to lead the Halewa Sewra. He was in contradiction with some leadership members like Ali Said Abdella and Duru, with confrontations and arguments. We do not know what his disagreement with Isayas was. His personality became obvious and was accused of corruption. It was then mizlak time.

It was said that Isayas (megnahti), rebuked him, only they know the case. We knew their arguments. Suddenly we heard he had deserted and spilled many secrets. I do not have his writings or radio interview. We in the meda did not see it, and if the leadership got it we saw nothing, not spread to the lower cadres. It must have reached abroad. We were discouraged from listening to his words.

Duru was not in the Menka situation. The Ethiopians imprisoned him. Haile Menkerious was not in the leadership then. I forgot who the charging committee were, but it was said that Adhanom boycotted the committee. And in vengeance for that, Shabia was against him always.

Selomon was against Tewelde Eyob and Asmerom. Isayas criticized Selomon that he had said negative words against these two. Mussie and others were there in the meeting and said old critics are not valid now.

Musie said Selomon was a democratic person why are you isolating him and because of that the meeting became dispersed. Said the front should advance democratically not bring old feuds here, showing his opposition against Isayas and you others should observe this situation.

Another day others were added to quell the conflict. Musie criticized Tsegai Keshi why one leaves a meeting, it is not a handkerchief, mendil to sit and leave as one wishes. Then Tsegai hits Musie and the meeting is dispersed. Musie was sent to clinic and Tsegai in temporary prison, military rule. I was new then in training centre and the clinic was there that after 3 days Musie was with us.

We were all in one riverbank. The fighters used to come and talk with us there. Musie had come to our centre to talk those he knew, and his head was bandaged. We did not know each other, it was the first time I saw him. Fighters are made to dig told it was for planting trees or latrine. When enough dug, they themselves are killed and buried there.

Some fighters were killed by gun in riverbanks. When being killed, we are told an investigation was made but we have no proof. Since we all did not know each other, one may say so and so was taken away from us. We did not know all who were taken away from us.

The situation of the Menka became talked of because they were known fighters, in position and cadres, were visible by the military for their movement. One marks seeing them being taken and others say so and so was taken from our group, taken to Halewa Sewra. And with no news from them it becomes known they were killed.

They did not need to make music to silence the killing. Because we lived in an isolated area, one can shoot to kill apes, snakes, birds, or try a new weapon, that a shot heard was not concerning.

We had a fierce battle with Ethiopia then, for 2 weeks, end of December to mid January. It was just then the military revolted against Haile Selassie. The Ethiopians started the fighting coming to Sahel. 5 fighters were martyred then, one called Amr and one Alem Negassie who joined 3 months earlier and trained, Haile, Osman Drei, others I remember. We were told of the outcome that 5 were martyred, the numbers of

wounded and that it was a difficult fight amidst our lack of food, that Ethiopia has lost morale. A little note was brought and read to us.

The Menka were killed in Bliquat. We had moved from Gereger to Bliquat, unpopulated area near Alghen, which was military base of Ethiopian army later taken by us led by Adhanom Gebre Mariam.

After over a year we heard rumours that the Menka were killed. Some had escaped from the prison. ELF said that those known as Menka were killed naming them that those who escaped from Shabia told of this.

ELF gathered people and told this and we heard from the people. The ELF in their seminars told secrets of us. On the 23 January 1977 conference, their execution was told then. We were not told before that. Since we were fighting the enemy, many things were kept secret from us. In different times we heard so and so was taken prisoner because he was Menka, and those allegedly caught deserting that we did not notice the happenings.

It was after the Menka happening that Halewa Sewra was put to use. I read the writing of Isayas "Destructive Movement" in 1976, I do not know when it first came out, we knew publicly of it then as we cadres were taught of it, after the 5th round, zuria. We were in rounds, 150 to 200 fighters getting cadre education, gathered from all hailetat and kifletat of the front.

Mesfin Hagos was one of the top leadership and nothing is done without their signing. Isayas was the chairman, others being Mesfin, Selomon, Tewelde Eyob who was later killed being part of Menka, and Asmerom Gerezghier. From the PLF 1 leadership were Ali Said Abdella, Romadan Hamed Nur and others unknown who were added. So in the killings of the Menkae, Alamin and others were selected as committee. If this comes out publicly there will be tewatet, sahabo guteto. 6-7 committee members were elected, and those like Mesfin were top leaders.

A brave member of the leadership, Tewelde Eyob was killed, he did not even sign for the killing. He said let us democratically solve the situation. When it was said this movement was destructive, Tewelde said no, this is a conflict only not a destructive one and we can lead them to the right way, it is not a criminal charge, but was said he too was against Shabia and eliminated.

The Menka movement started in September and Isayas talked of it in January. A paper is lost written by Tewelde Eyob "at Adobha meeting we claimed our youth were killed and we condemned the ELF. This will be our everlasting condemnation, the case must be democratically changed." He was charged to becoming Menka and secretly taken down from top leadership post. He was imprisoned in June or July of 1974 and killed like the Menka. We all knew he was killed. Nothing is kept secret forever. Some secrets are known from leaders.

Goitom Bisay was made shimagelle in first committee to study the conflict and said the proceeding was wrong that Menka were correct. He was called Menka and put down from responsibility and followed upon. Was said he was writing a book for the front, translating, and made to disappear.

Wedi Fenkil was a known warrior. Dr Bemnet was charged to being Menka. He was from Addis, was in cadre school. He asked about the Menka, though I never saw him. It was said that he bombed himself. He was of same school as Yohannes and Musie. He wanted clarification, which was regarded suspiciously. A person is followed upon and disappears. It was common saying one killed himself even if he was a liked person that they killed him while trying to desert, what was not said. Deserting was crime to be killed. The life was difficult and one may want out. Someone plans escape and was caught.

After the 1973 experience, we were demoralized not to inquire about our comrades or ourselves. When a comrade is taken away we did nothing. New comers were told about the Menkae as a lesson. Anyone seen reading Marx, Lenin or Mao etc was seen suspiciously believing he will be a Menkae, that many stopped reading in fear. It was the ELF who held a weapon in one hand and a book in the other, unlike us. Many pretended to be uneducated because they were demoralized to what happened to those who read.

It was not time to write against Shabia in struggle times, and many secrets untold. ELF as the adversary wrote much against Shabia. As ELF was condemned by Shabia as a lords group, and unable to liberate Eritrea we belittled them. Some deliberate lies were found out that everything else was unbelievable.

Haile Selassie Gebremedhin was one of the top Menka. He was educated. He was in Ala in 70 and taken prisoner by Ethiopia. He was not imprisoned long; his family worked hard to have him freed bribing the authorities saying he had planned to give himself up. He had asked why the movement was seen negatively, but he studied, telling this to Isayas. Many who were with the movement changed sides when fighters were imprisoned. He, John, Afwerki, Tareke, Rusom Amma, Dehab Aberash, Werku, Debesai G Mikel (friend of Musie, taken later than the others he was taken from the front line).

Some succeeded escaping from prison. I know one called Wedi Blatta (mayila Tsenadegle) of Menka movement. He joined ELF and was martyred fighting. It is said he told of many secrets. Maybe the security members of ELF have the documents. Abraham Tewelde died 3 years before Derg came. I heard about him, as a brave man. Haile Jebha was one of the Menkae beaters and then himself killed for being a torturer. Tekle Aden came after the Menkae time.

As prisoners we did not sit together like in a house. Prisoners were ordered by their guards to build a fence, like animals fence, and imprisoned them. I cannot remember all the names. Many names are forgotten except the leadership or familiar ones.

Fighters were taken away from front lines and disappeared. Some fighters came from Addis and abroad hearing of the Menkae killings and asked about it. They were met suspiciously and made to disappear.

Petros Yohannes had started inquiring already from the US. Why the fighters were imprisoned because the educated ones asked for democracy, and what more have the ELF done? So what was the reason Shabia split from ELF then?

Though I did not meet him, he was said to be a brilliant person. We heard that a man called Petros Yohannes had entered meda from the US and was killed. We heard that Petros was made to stay behind since they were called to meda for work. One wanted in meda was told to represent and go to meda and held there. Meriam Hagos is an example. She was invited to meda to see progress and forced to stay and she was in meda until the end. Nobody knows about them.

Though we did not see them we heard rumours. The secret comes out somehow some saying so and so was taken away from us and killed, like the US ones too. So and so was killed yesterday, etc. But nobody dared asked openly, all the lost ones were made to disappear. Even now it is the same situation.

In 1986 there was a big fighters movement. Those living standards were bad and differences between fighters and leadership. I have heard that some of those who started this movement were taken away and killed, or made to disappear. And some who just when it started knew they would be killed and fled to Sudan. There are prisoner fighters who are still in prison now.

Bitwedded after liberation was made administrator of Assab at first. Then he was

imprisoned. Nobody has officially inquired about him though all knew about him. Some say he stole, some say he refused Isayas to send goods to Ethiopia that it belonged to Eritrea, telling Isayas to order him in writing. That he dared Isayas, and some say he was trying to sell the goods contraband to Ethiopia and the fighters doing that were caught. When imprisoned and asked, they said it was Bitweded's order and they got free and he taken in. Nobody knows the exact reason why Bitweded has been imprisoned for 13 long years.

We can understand those inside Eritrea are afraid to ask. What about those abroad? They were systematically made to ask nothing. "You cannot enter home (Eritrea), Shabia's stick is long it will reach you". When I first came here and started telling against the Shabia, people began to evade me, even those I knew for many years. I was told I was already a convicted man by the government and they were afraid to be implicated with me.

They are afraid from being imprisoned in Eritrea saying they were together with Meharena. It is obvious when going in gatherings like a funeral, they stare at me and when I stare back, they bow their heads, even the higdef ones. Because they send false reports and rumours against us, especially in a democratic country of USA. What is the meaning of democracy if one cannot ask? What is the meaning of having served meda for many years, martyred, even become handicapped?

The reason I fought for my country was to see a free and democratic government, free to live in. That is why I decided to come open. Who should be the free man, all the people should have equal rights. Those who fought for their country should not be regarded as enemies.

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