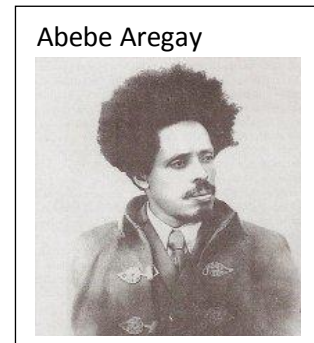


Celebrating the legacy of the Ethiopian Patriots on Yekatit 12, “Ye_Sematet day”.

By: Ewnetu Sime

Each year on Yekatit 12, “Ye_Sematet day” equivalent to 19 February in the Gregorian calander, Ethiopians pay tribute to the patriotic heroes and innocent civilian victims perished by Italian fascist armies between 1935 and 1941. This event is our enduring national history record of Ethiopian victory over Mussolini’s invasion. Participation in this type of celebration will allow us discuss our national pride, most importantly to recognized the sacrifices made by freedom fighters that kept Ethiopia as sovereign state. It is customary to remember them in the form of parade, wreath laying and patriotic speech, or prayer. These type of remembrance ceremonies or activities at very least serve us for four purposes. First, to honor and celebrate the patriotic heroes who died in defiance of occupation. Second, it is resistance stories of courage and remembering the distressing side of war that many citizens died and suffered in the hands of Italian invading armies. Third, it inspires us and teaches us the remarkable fight done against the enemy. Fourth, it helps us to pledge and to carry on their legacy to keep our country free from invaders.



Battles bring out both heroes and traitors among people. The traitors make the conditions of the battle easier for enemy and difficult for the freedom fighters. To cite one example of a traitor during the Italian invasion was Haile Selassie Gugsa. In Jeff Pearce's book entitled "Prevail" states that Haile Selassie Gugsa who was a potential governor of Tigray was bribed by Italian with a million lire to desert to enemy camp and played dirty game against his country. Gugsa aim was to be civilian chief of Tigray under Italian rule. He collaborated with Italians with handful of contingent force. He provided inside information, and he was also used by Italians as propaganda tool. On page 162 of “Prevail book” stated that “In Rome, the propaganda writers inflated this to ten thousand men when they announced Gugsa’s defection, capturing headlines around the world..... “The real coup for the Italians was that Gugusa brought along a Swiss Engineer named Fernand Bietry armed with unique plans for a road from Addis Ababa to Dessie about four hindered kilometers to the north. De Bono now had up-to-date and through survey of the region. “The traitor actions had impact on the fighter’s moral and progress.

On the contrary we had Patriot leaders such as Ras Abebe Aregay, Lt. General Jagama Kello, Lij Haile Mariam Mamo, and - many other brave citizens fought passionately against the fascist regime in Ethiopia. Ras Abebe was one of the wise patriotic leaders. He understood the effectiveness of guerrilla warfare and used it against the enemy. He frequently ambushed and raids the Italian position in close range of Addis Ababa. The Italians cannot guarantee the free flow war supplies and goods. Ras Abebe was so brave at one point he attempted to retake Addis Ababa city from fascist regime. On several occasions he lured the Italian army’s officials as he is interested to negotiate with them for possible defection in return for money and power. But his real strategy was to gain time, to regroup his fighters and to wear down the enemy in the process. As guerrilla fighter he had a “choice” to decide when and

where to strike enemy. This method of engagement frustrated the enemy. It is evident that he and his fighters had the support of the people. People provided food, information about the enemy movements, shelter, and other supplies essential to maintain the fight.

Ras Abebe with others patriot's leaders such as Dejazmatch Kebede Bizunehs, Geressu Duki other host of patriots were able to continue and to resist which will eventually and inevitably lead to victory. He is regarded the founder of guerrillas warfare in Ethiopia.

Another patriot who used hit and run against the enemy was Lij Haile Mariam Mamo. Growing up I remember a song/poem that attributed to him start like this:

ሀይለ ማርያም ማሞ የጦሩ ገበሬ

ፈረሱን እደሰው አስታተቀው ሱሬ

Another hero to be highlighted on this anniversary day is Lt. General Jagma Kello. Jagama Kello is known for his exceptional skill and courage during Italian invasion in 1935. After the war is over he joined the regular army and grew up through ranks and retired from the army with Lt. General Title. He is 93 years old man and now living in Addis Ababa. I listened the interview of Jagama with SBS Australia Amharic radio.



<http://ecadforum.com/ethiopianvideo/2014/05/12/interview-with-ethiopian-patriot-lt-general-jagama-kello/>

He explained how he became a patriot at age 15. Jagama was inspired by his cousin husband Wodago Goshu's advice and decided to join the patriotic effort. His cousin husband Wodago said to him that I always hear about you that you travel with your brother- in- law to Wollega to kill lions and elephants. Now our country is at great risk we are facing an enemy bigger than those animals. He further explained to him the Italians are here not only to take our land but also they are going to eat us like animals. If you kill them, it will be above all noble things to do. He started his armed struggle against the fascist regime at his birth place area called Ginichi. Ginichi is located close to the west of Addis Ababa. He continued to tell his adventure during his fight at Addis Alem city where the Italian's fortified military garrison and prison located. He explained that he got insider assistance from very brave lady Wezro Shoareged Gadle resident of Addis Alem and Ato Zewdu Tilhuan. Zewdu was one of traitor serving the Italian interest but was unhappy by what was going on around him. Consequently, he killed his Italian master and became a fugitive. He was one of the most wanted man by Italians and the search for him was intensified. With some local help Zewdu joined Jagma's patriotic group. With these two brave informants assistance (Shoareged Gadle known as "Yewist Arbegna") Jagama get closer to Addis Alem where the fortified Italian position located. Jagama led the attack on the garrison and wiped out the enemies and freed the prisoners. At that battle, Jagama was able to acquire superior weapons. This successful attack helped him to be in better position to continue his patriotic duties. Jagama explained why the Italian was not successful to instigate Oromo against Amhara resident in his area. He said that his uncle convinced the locals Oromo not to listen the enemy propaganda by telling them with very

interesting example. The uncle told the people: here is grain of white Teff and black Teff and mix up. Once it is mixed up we cannot separate them back to white and black teff. Oromo and Amhara people lived together for generations. As we are not able to separate the “sergegh” grain, we cannot separate Amhara from Oromo. He told them we are one untied Ethiopian. His explanations were very effective, and prevented the killings. Jagma is an Oromo origin but understood the true meaning of Ethiopianess. He served Ethiopia’s best interest as an Ethiopian hero. He gave unquestionable sacrifice for freedom, national unity and integrity of Ethiopia. This gracious man has demonstrated a true nationalist stand. He believed that Ethiopianet is first and other things such as birth or buried places or languages are all a coincidence for him.

The modern guerrilla warfare has surfaced in Ethiopia in 1960 and 1970s by several fronts such as EPLF, TPLF, EPRA etc. This time through so called " liberation front" insurgency against the regime in power. They were guided by Marxist Leninist Socialist theory . This marked the beginning of civil war in Ethiopia. As most readers are aware, since TPLF come to power, they formed a totalitarian government and created a breeding ground for ethnic intolerance to disunite Ethiopia. They implemented the divide and rule strategy under disguise of ethnic rights ideology. They became the worst ethnocentric regime of the 21th century. They eroded what passed to us by forefathers.

Yekatit 12, 1929 (Ethiopian Calendar) is the day the Graziani armies went on rampage of murder and arson throughout Addis Ababa. As we commemorate this horrific massacre, we are recognizing all Patriotic leaders who fought for five years against fascist Italian army. We owe them to continue to hold the Patriots deeds high, and at the same time to maintain the freedom handed down to us. We also owe to the future generation to retell the history of the past. We are morally obligated to respect and commemorate our patriots on this date. This 78th year anniversary of Mussolini invasion and Yekatit 12 are more than celebration. It is our own history and it tells us who we are and where we came from.

We Ethiopians also had fought with Italians on March 1, 1896 at Adwa (The Battle of Adwa), in which the aggressor was resoundingly crushed. In both battles the patriots were ill equipped and have very limited means. Nevertheless, they had the will to fight and resist protecting our beloved country. We are not forgetting the freedom that has been given to us by forefathers and ancestors, so we could not let the 78th anniversary of “Ye_Sematet day” pass by not celebrating. We must continue to commemorate this day and should not be squandered by the enemy cheap and ignorant analogies.

Long live Ethiopia!!