Notes on imagination, literariness, facts and fictionality in war memoirs

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Memoirs and autobiographies are highly readable in many national literatures and also widely across cultures. The war memoir (a thematic form) is of interest in this paper. Specifically four war memoirs that attempt to convey some of the dramatic and deadly battles of the last three decades in Ethiopia’s history are examined. It is part of a broader ongoing research by the author on memoirs-autobiographies from Ethiopia. “Is a memoir / autobiography true, or is it someone's imagination of 'real' events”? This is the research question to be discussed in this paper. Select extracts (texts) are to be examined succinctly from four memoirs, though only one extract is attached to this paper. Some observations on literariness, imagination and fictionality are to be made.

Facts are always important. But so is the thoughtful retelling of a good story.

Introduction

Story-telling is one of the most benevolent social activities man has developed. The most read books are of stories; the more imaginative they are the higher the readership. Memoirs belong to this category of privileged set of books among the imaginative, in this case having the special charm of being based on facts of life as perceived and told by a person who lived those facts quite some time back. This is a brief examination of memoirs and autobiographies.

Early example of biographies goes back to Greek civilization, to Parallel Lives (individual lives) by Plutarch (44-120 A.D.), after which the form took shape. Generally Biblical accounts are also cited as early examples of biographies.

Precursors to modern day autobiographies and memoirs were recorded in history in the form of writings of lives of saints and kings – known as hagiographies and chronicles. Chronicles and hagiographies are also common in Ethiopia. Cerulli’s history of Ethiopian literature and Ricci’s history of Ethiopian literatures, both point out the great literary merits of some of the chronicles. The chronicle of Amdâ Tsiyon (1314-1344), is singled out for particular mention. Cerulli states that this work was written before the king died in 1344 and that it was written by a cleric who participated in the wars he described with so much verve. Therefore, with the king aware and most probably giving approval of or even speculatively having possibly initiated it, the work could in a way be defined as “a memoir” – up to a point!!

Cerulli writes that its prose displays simplicity but then the narration proceeds in such a way that it holds the reader in its grip. It is enriched by vivid descriptions of episodes,

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whose plots are artistically constructed. Moreover, the author makes his heroes give long speeches and sometimes soliloquies, which heighten the dramatic nature of the narrative.

Ricci also refers to the same qualities of the work even if very briefly. He states that the prose of this book is very ornate and eloquent. This achievement of the chronicle of Amdā Tsiyon is not always repeated. But in the 14th century, we see a number of hagiographies and chronicles, which try to bring the prose to a high literary level.

Some literary techniques are employed in some gādālā’s. An example in this regard is the Gädlä Täklähaymanot that is considered to manifest to some extent some literary qualities, such as characterization or portrayal, elaborate descriptions, exaggeration or hyperbole, conflicts of various shades -- mental and physical.

From the numerous chronicles and hagiographies, it can be concluded that more than any other genre probably, the forerunners of memoir -- biography and autobiography -- are part of the mainstream Ethiopian literary culture, just like they are of a Western culture also.

**Definition and theoretical framework**

To describe may mean to discover and create, as many an autobiographer has found out. The memoir is never far removed from fiction. It is difficult to be fair to a memoir, its author being both subject and object. The one who writes and the one who is written about are the same, yet they are different.

Stories are told and re-told, more often than not each time around embellished to some degree to fit the circumstances. The extent of embellishment may not be driven exclusively by the motivation of the story-teller or the excitement of the audience, listeners or consumers, nor are the modifications/variations essentially pre-meditated. Even reading a story to someone else brings along some enhancements, (not ruling out when reading to oneself). The adaptation taking place most of the time a story is delivered is due to the re-collection from memory. Hence we can say that it is in the nature of the mind’s mode of operation of attempting to put together something dispersed, some rather disjointed parts. The mind may not even be able to retrieve some parts that can no more be called upon to come forward. And the interesting part is that when the mind is able to retrieve/ to recollect, it gets it in slightly varying versions or altered copies. This process of recollecting, reminiscing, trying to summon up is essentially what is involved in memoir writing.

Naturally not all past activities or observations can be re-captured; so they have to be filled in, organized or rationalized in some ways. Recollection is in order. And this recollecting (calling to mind), this act of assembling, fails and imagination creeps in or is brought forward or put to high gear.

In essence the study draws on this supposition, and memoirs are conceptualized with imagination featuring in them or forming an important component and having a crucial bearing on the outcome.

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3 Cerulli, E. *La letteratura etiopica*, 1968, p. 32. [I thank Shiferaw Bekele of the History Department, AAU for his support with Cerulli’s and Ricci’s works.]
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Distinction between a memoir and an autobiography becomes apparent in the context. Abrams distinguishes a memoir from autobiography in its scope or focus: “…the emphasis is not on the author’s developing self,”7 while autobiography tends to be a story of one’s life. The Center for Autobiographic Studies (CAS) also differentiates autobiography which “covers an entire life from birth to the present” from a memoir that “puts a frame onto life by limiting what is included”.8

One dimension of the definition of memoirs is that it is a form of creative non-fiction. But that seems a categorization that is fraught with paradox, in that one immediately notices a contradiction in terms. On the one hand there is the assumption of the truth or rather and preferably the actual, while creativity allows imagination and hence fictionality. But the truth, rather the actual is the basis as articulated by Barrie Jean Borich’s fitting description that a creative non-fiction / memoir begins “…not with the imaginary but with the actual, with what actually is or actually was, or what actually happened. From this point we might move in any direction, but the actual is our touchstone.”9 Hence, as a form of non-fiction, memoirs are expected to have some level of truth in their narratives. And hence,

Readers are looking to the memoirist for truthiness, if not for literal truth. A memoir is supposed to be an honest attempt to tell a story based on one's own life. The value of a literary memoir lies more in its truthiness than its historical truth. We trust that the author is trying to tell his own story. We assume that the finished product reflects a good faith struggle to convey something interesting about his life. That something may be the "feel" of an episode rather than a strictly literal chronology of events.10

Memoirs and autobiographies of the notable as well as the not-so-notable have become highly readable in many national literatures and also widely across cultures. Many types of memoirs or autobiographic writings are recognized based on their specific focuses and styles11. The war memoir, a thematic form of memoir is of interest in this paper.

Discussion

This is part of larger research project, and hence still in progress. For now I will try to raise some points about specifically four war memoirs of soldiers. The soldier-writer is no exception in the corpus of Ethiopian literature. The literate among the military are no less prominent than those coming from other professions or occupations, and making up the local literati, the demographic of which is not-so-distinct. My selected notes are on four memoirs that attempt to convey some of the dramatic but even more deadly battles of the last three decades in Ethiopia’s history. While the two are more focused and comprehensive on the battles in the northern part of the country, the third concentrates on earlier episodes, and the fourth elusively canvases broadly, or rather too nebulously for its own sake. All maintain strictly literal chronology of events, thus fulfilling one of the most fundamental requisites of a historical memoir.”12

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8 http://www.storyhelp.com/autotypes.html Center for Autobiographic Studies (CAS).
9 Barrie Jean Borich What is Creative Nonfiction Writing? http://www.barriejeanborich.net/creativeNonfiction.html
Of course allowances are given in the very categorization and definition of memoirs into non-fiction and at the same time expect creativeness to make them readable. And creative or not story telling entails improvisation, which results in varieties. William Loizeaux has what he calls “varieties of truth that memory yields” and thus spots three levels of memoirs, three levels of accuracy. “There are memories that the writer can verify empirically. There are memories for which the evidence is irrecoverable. And, moving farther from ‘objective truth,’ there are hazy memories, then conjecture, then informed imagination.” So in memoirs sometimes fact and fiction could become and do indeed become blurry.13

The research question and a central one in this enquiry is: “Is a memoir/autobiography true, or is it someone's imagination of 'real' events, moulded to tell a certain story of the self”?14 My study at this stage will only incidentally raise some observations on the contentious matter of literariness, imagination and fictionalization. Specifically, not all the four memoirs/books (texts) will be considered in totality, rather some select extracts are to be examined succinctly. To this end notes summarizing the results of the text analysis is presented.

An analysis of text apparently involves “meaning” and hence “interpretation”, which again “should be governed in shared cultural conventions of readers/critics and also the historical contexts of the texts themselves”15. As to the limits of how much interpretation we can indulge in, it is going to be as much they are “supported by the text”16 ala Eco, while at this stage of my research and discussions I will not even be considering the nuances of notions of “Interpretation and Over-interpretation” or the “limits to how much interpretation we can do with a given text” as Umberto Eco notes.

Furthermore, for an introspective discussion of the soldier in these battle memoirs, some inspirations will be gained from the psychological approach of the works. In connection with this approach, the insight to be derived will be a look at the psychological motivations of the characters and definitely not of the authors, it should be noted that his is a legitimate line of tackling a text in the psychological approach17; and it is believed “it is necessary to know about the author and the political, economical, and sociological context of his times in order to truly understand his works,” in order to have any meaning. This involves the historical/biographical critical focus or “reflection” on an author's life and times (or of the characters' life and times”).

This study being only part of a broader ongoing research project by the author on memoirs-autobiographies of other various persuasions in Ethiopia, this segment will be examined in tandem in the context of others.

My paper for this Conference will briefly highlight only some critical notes on these memoirs of military officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned. Specifically these memoirs will be:

14 John Lye raises this question in his article. I used it as my research question and a central one for this part of my study. Theory Checklist: a working document, (http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/checklist.html)
15 http://www.brocku.ca/english/lile/meaning/html/text/text

The author of the first book is a sergeant and the second’s a brigadier-general, the third and the fourth’s major generals. Hence the discussions are limited to military memoirs. Though my research is ongoing, and at this stage nothing is conclusive, I would like to point out that based on readings done to date and based on the specific text analysis, I will offer to outline some notes that bind or tie together these texts, memoirs.

Characteristics of these four memoirs:
1. The memoirists have tried to check their facts and the narratives proximate the actual threads of stories as they occurred.
2. The memoirists present their facts quite impassively, although some of these facts may be harsh realities of defeats, failures. pp. 225, *Yä‘ëtor méda wïlo*. An example of an impassive recording of facts as they understood it as presented on pages 90-91 in *Ay mïs‘ïwa*, the memoirist writes that “Sha’biya launched a big counter-offensive. This fight has never been observed in Eritrea before… Sha’biya has proved to have become more effective in its ground offensive and in employing heavy artillery pieces.” This was in connection with Sha’biya’s offensive at Dogali February 24, 1990 that began at 7:00-8:00 P.M, and of its success in withstanding government army’s prior advances, reversing it, then re-taking control of Dogali and crushing the resistance by, initially, the 27th Mechanized Brigade and subsequently also by the Tank Brigade of the 3rd Mechanized Division. Overall the authors try to present their facts quite impassively, although some of these facts may be harsh realities of defeats or failures.
3. Unlike in typical memoirs, these authors are not left into the background but are in the middle or central to the stories.
4. Their stories in the main follow chronological sequence of events.
5. The memoirists are directly acquainted with their subjects -- the battles, the battle scenes, the men involved (the officers and the soldiers), and more often than not the military strategies, decisions and their impacts at least on the outcome of the war.
6. These memoirs focus on specific occasions, with similar themes whose undercurrent is the horrors of the war period in the north (Eritrea) and adjacent area constructed by the major participants.
7. The memoirs succeed, to a great extent, in gripping the reader (us) by evoking the war period of our time that is marked by grim, painful experiences. For example, scenes from Naqfa 1978, and Mitsiwa February 21-March 2, 1990.
8. Language use is sometimes marked by appealing language, by vividness by graphic style of description or story-telling, although it is observed to a varying degree in the memoirs.

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18 Hughes, K. J. and Peter M. Horowitz, “The Organic Biography: The Death of An Art"
9. Some memorable real-life heroes are depicted by descriptions that could only make them memorable. The graphic imagery not only immortalizes these officers and NCOs and privates as embodiments of the atypical soldier. Assorted personalities or characters abound -- patriotic, strong-willed, such as in Ay mïs’twa: the resolute General Teshome Tessema, Colonel Belay Aschenaqi, Major Rorissa Dadi, Captain Shewantayé Alemu, and also Major Hailu Ayale, Captain Addisu, Captain Wendosen, Sergeant-major Amare Naji, Sergeant Fekadu Bogale, Private Shengerefa, and similarly are mentioned the not so illustrious, who are allegedly to have surrendered or even more so deserted, including generals, Ay mïs’twa pp.190-195. In like manner, comparable gripping descriptions of gallantry of extraordinary soldiers are depicted in Yä’t’or médà wilo, e.g. pp. 121-126, 179-185, 243-253. On the other hand, the third book, Mäs’wa ‘ittinät ínas’ímat leaves much to be desired, dealing in general terms and scantily with the deadliest battle on pp.151-162.

10. The details of some battle actions are transfixing. For example, the scenes of resolute actions by officers and men-in-uniform during the trying moments of the non-stop battles around and in Mitsiwa -- February 21- March 2, 1990 when the tenacious General Teshome Tessema and others take their own lives rather than surrender to Sha’biya, Ay mïs’twa pp. 190-191.

11. Some of the memoirists personalize some of the stories (Book 3 and 4) that could only have been the common stories of many contemporaries, colleagues of the memoirists or authors. This is not uncommon in memoirs for a memoir is said to be “subjective, personal.” That's where its authority and power come from.

12. Yägäsìt diilìnà fätänawoču is a good example of graphic description of long and arduous journey in a rainy season to another war front, details that make the stories very extraordinary and the narrative lively to read. Pp. 50-69. Engaging narrative is observed in these memoirs, as Loizeaux aptly depicts the prose of memoirs “At its best, a memoir combines hard research, an engaging narrative, the intimacy of lyric poetry, and the thoughtfulness of an essay.”

13. In his rather short memoir general Hussein Ahmed, a general who should be in a position to be aware of more details, seems to stick his gun in attempting to tell us only “how he interpreted/registered particular events”.

14. In Yä’t’or médà wilo and Ay mïs’twa extraordinary instances of human relations is observed under very testing front line battlefield circumstances. Here also heroic* selflessness is told by General Tesfaye Habtemariam. Courageously giving cover to a comrade under heavy enemy fire is not an exception here.

15. Friendship of a high level, camaraderie between soldiers in trying moments is depicted in these stories of the lives of these soldier-authors. One example is in Ay mïs’twa (pp. 208-213) where a soldier who is a prisoner-of-war not only guides another soldier who has been blinded by enemy fires, but also protects him against the victor fighter of Sha’biya, who is more than eager to execute all handicapped POWs, all the more blind ones. The protective friend tells the fighter or lies to save his comrade by saying that “He will be able to see, one of his eyes is covered with blood and that the problem with his vision is only temporary”. He goes quite a distance caring for this fellow

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19  Loizeaux, William. “In memoirs, varieties of truth…”

20  A reviewer has commented about the famous political personality the memoirs by his former US President of Bill (William Jefferson) Clinton that he “doesn’t tell enough stories and prefers to focus on his internal mental processes and how he interpreted/registered particular events” can be in a way said also about the general.
POW who is actually blind. In the story we are told that they went as far as 25 kms in this manner until we no more can pursue this story because our narrator (a fellow POW) is transferred to some other place.

Moreover, very tentative reflections on the questions that follow are to be shared with conferees if time allows based on illustrative sample extracts from the books that will be displayed during the presentation.
1. The soldier’s psychology as represented by these memoirists.
2. The other most similar characteristics of the memoirs.
3. The motive of each writer in writing the memoir, i.e., the motive as stated by each writer.
4. Readability of memoirs and convincingness to the readers?
5. The extent the authors give away their personality – their psychological makeup, their relationship with their colleagues, women, family, bosses, etc.
6. The circumstantial and other descriptions employed to ascertain the plausibility of some the heroic human feats described are rather unusual, extraordinary, if not miraculous especially for the non-soldier.

2. Book One: Translation of Amharic language TEXT21


Fighter jets are approaching the take off area in pairs. The first two fighter jets were ready facing east approaching from the west and ready for take off on the eastern end of the runway, while another pair is ready behind them to take turn for take off. Other fighter aircrafts were consecutively also taxing on narrower adjacent tarmac heading towards take off. Our aircraft followed towards the runway for take off after the preceding ones. The two fighters took off. The next turn was for our aircraft. Facing east it was soon ready to take off. As it accelerated, the airborne commander stood facing us and began shouting “airborne!”

Usually the jump coordinators get restless as the aircrafts begin to sail; they start fretting. “Do you want to jump?” one of the jump commanders asks in raised voice. “Yes!” the airborne troops respond in unison.

“When?” is the next question.

“Now!” the excited response of the troops resonated.

“How?” enquires the commander.

“Like a leopard!” they roar in response.

“What are you?” a question for the squad.

“Flying Leopards!” they answer in resonant voice.

“Get Up!” shouts the commander as the near the target area for jumping.

The soldiers first to jump stand in a row by folding up the aircraft seats so that they won’t block the next group of jumpers. There are pairs of wires stretching from the tail to the door of the cockpit, extending along the jumping side doors. A jumper releases a lock on a ring and hooks it onto the wire. Commanders go around checking to see if each and every jumper has done it correctly, that no strap ends stray, that hanging strap ends are firmly held together by each soldier, and that hooks are not tangled with someone else’s, that nothing is out of order and causes accident is carefully checked.

21 Other translations could not be attached here, for lack of space. Scanned copies of the original Amharic language texts and other translations were provided to audience at the time of presentation.
Being the first to jump from among the first round jumpers, I was ready with my group. It was over thirty minutes since we took off from Asmara. Our flight was taking more time because we were had to take the south route in the Barentu and Tesseney direction, to avoid being noticed by the enemy. After about forty minutes of flight, the pilot dipped the aircraft’s right wing to turn the aircraft north from our westerly direction. There were red, yellow and green lights on the entrance door of the cockpit. As we approach the jump target site, the pilot rings a bell and turns on a red light. To indicate to the first jumper to go nearer to the jumping exit door, the pilot rings once more, turn off the red light and outs on yellow. Then a ring is followed by green light to signal begin jumping.

Sergeant Nigatu Tegene was the jumping commander on my side. As the first round ring went and the light turned red, he instructed me: “Sir, come near the door. Come on.” I went near the door. “Don’t leave the aircraft until I tell you to do so. I give you the signal to go,” Sergeant Nigatu instructed. “Okay” I confirmed and placed my left foot on the door sill, and took my right foot a step back. I adjusted my position by holding the holding with my hands the left and right sides of the jump exit door and waited for the go signal by the Sergeant.

The hot air pushed back from the aircraft’s motors was about to throw me out. I couldn’t look outside, and whenever I tried, my face was contorted, and tears were formed on my eyes. I somehow was able to see outside below our aircraft and could see mountainous terrain and dry river beds. The town could not be seen. On the ground I saw what looked like embroidered white sheet of cloth. The white could be a house, I guessed. Then Sergeant Nigatu shouted, “Sir, Can you see a white house?” I confirmed, “Yes.” Then a yellow light went up and the Sergeant immediately said “Get ready, Sir”. “Alright,” I responded expressed my readiness. Green light followed, and the “Go!” instruction immediately followed. I turned my face towards my fellow airborne troops and shouted “Follow me!” at the top of my voice, turned towards the exit door and jumped out. First round jumpers with me followed my lead and consecutively jumped. In one aircraft are twenty five jumpers, and all together from the two aircrafts, fifty airborne were expected to jump.

We jumped from a very high elevation, and because of the distance the hills looked level flat with the ground, the houses and trees seemed on the same level with the ground and the whole expanse gave a semblance of a picturesque flower-patterned bed sheet. No ups and downs of the terrain could be markedly observed. All was flat.

I looked to the left and right. I could figure out jumpers from my aircraft silhouetted in the general south-northerly direction each seemingly struggling to direct the parachute, which has been complicated by the elevation and the wind force.

All were trying to manage the parachute cord, to be able land near the white buildings or at a nearest location. My communication operator jumped immediately after me; but when I looked for him now on the sky he was some distance from me. But we could both tell, from the way we were manoeuvring the parachute cords that we were trying to get closer, or even better to land close to one another. While I was pulling the cords to get closer to him, he was doing the same. In the meantime, I was able to notice that the jumpers on the sky were less than the number I expected. When tried to look for the two aircrafts on the air, they were nowhere to nr seen. The only aircrafts that were heard and seen roaring and sweeping the sky, diving and bombing enemy targets were F-5 fighter jets. May be the two aircrafts were behind the chain of mountains to the west, I conjectured. My gaze was in that direction. But I couldn’t trace transporter plane in the area. Suddenly my attention was drawn to something else. I could hear some sound like that of water falls.
There is any river in the area, I knew. But some sound like water falls, I couldn’t figure out.

A person of medium weight descends in a parachute at a speed of 5 meters in a second, and hence 300 meters in a minute. As I was nearing the ground, I could tell the change in the sound I was hearing earlier. What sounded like water falls now distinctly turned into the sound of gunfire, and all of a sudden bullets were wheezing past my ears. I could now tell that enemy guns were aimed at me. I was being targeted. As I was approaching the ground, the smooth, agreeable sound, pleasant to the ears earlier has gradually been replaced by a hollow, rather piercing clink clank of gunfire, a shift from nature’s delightful sound to a harsh, menacing eerie noise that is ominously fatal.

I hear gun fires from rifles and mortars and rocket launchers. I try to listen to this disquieting array of noises and on the other hand I wrestle with the cords of the parachute for safe landing. All the time I was looking for the two airplanes that would carry other jumpers. I also worried at the time: “How far were the airborne soldiers from the white coloured buildings?”, “How many would land in enemy territory?” Then also I mull over “Where I would land?” And go back to my look out for the white building.

When I noticed that I was descending quite a distance to the east of the white building, I was about 300-400 meters from the earth below.

Not to land in enemy territory, I pulled with all the force I could muster the right side cord of the parachute, I folded to my front side the parachute’s looping loose fabric on its west-facing side, I tried to raise up the east-facing side of the parachute cloth so that more air would gush into the side and give it a push to the west.

Now two pulls are in effect being applied. The earth’s gravity pulling down to earth, the second pull is towards the west resulting from the air in parachute. I try to watch out for my communication assistant all the time. He’s still floating far away from me. I will have difficulty coordinating the airborne soldiers mission unless I have radio communication available.

The noise from gunfire was now becoming even more menacing, and some bullets were going through the cloth of the parachute and leaving holes. Bullets were over me like hailstones.

I guessed my parachute became the target for the gunfire because the enemy should have been aware that the first to jump in an airborne mission is the commander. My parachute has become riddled with bullet holes coming from different directions and looked like a strainer. The number of bullets being raining in my parachute was enormous.

Tried to see down to where I would be landing if I don’t get killed up in the air. According to my recollection of the description of the area, I should be over enemy territory at this stage. I used all my energy to pull the cords of the parachute so that I would be able to glide nearer towards the white building.

Below me I could hear some men running in every direction. I took them to be the enemy, because I wouldn’t have assumed them to be my fellow soldiers because none of my soldiers could have landed before me. They weren’t airborne soldiers. I couldn’t assume that they were soldiers from the 15th battalion, because I had been informed well ahead before I left Asmara that the soldiers of the 15th battalion were not in a position to venture out of their fortification in order to save us. The men I see down don’t seem to care about the fighter jets roaring overhead and the jets don’t seem to target them as well.

They seemed to rush in the east and western directions whenever the fighter Jets come closer to them. Two persons were running towards my direction; I had about 50 meters left to for touch down.
The ground below me seemed rugged and covered with bushes. I ensured that my heels and toe-end of my feet were coordinated and solidly level; I bended my knees and pulled the left and right side cords of my parachute and held them close to towards my ears. While I was trying to avoid landing in the bushes, I could hear men calling, shouting to me. I can’t figure out what they were saying to me. I assumed that enemy soldiers were running towards me and telling me to surrender.

I landed. I thanked God and quickly started untangling myself from the parachute, and took out my gun, unlocked the safety clutch of the gun and I took shelter ready for an encounter.

“Sir, we are soldiers of the 15th battalion. We wanted to give you cover as you land. Our soldiers are out of our fortification and are all over to save you or die with you here you’re here to die with us,” they told me. “How do I know that you belong to the 15th battalion?; stay where you are and prove to me!” I demanded.

“You company, who jumped alone, Sergeant Geremew, who earlier today couldn’t put in place (mark) landing spot due to Sha’biya’s fire wouldn’t let him come out, is now with our Battalion commander. He was guiding fighter jets, feeding information about enemy targets to be bombed.” When they told this bit of information, I was able to get explanation why the also observe that fighter planes were not targeting them and I understood that they were our Ethiopian Government soldiers. And we saluted one another.

“Where are the two big transporter airplanes?” I asked them. One of them responded: “They have been hit by enemy anti-aircraft gun and have returned to Asmara.” The other immediately pointed out “No, they went back after they have all they brought have jumpers.”

“Okay, now go and bring the soldier who has landed a little north of me,” I asked them showing them by pointing my fingers in the direction. “We were instructed to help you; we can’t leave you here alone. We may take you with us to the direction of the soldier to be rescued. As they were escorting me marching by my side on my left and right, we came across, I saw my communication assistant running towards me accompanied by other members of the 15th battalion. As we saw them, we stopped and waited for him.

My communication assistant arrived and saluted me. He told me that he landed safely and had no trouble whatsoever. I congratulated him, we shook hands, and I instructed him to “To start radio communication with company commanders and the Battalion commander.” He immediately told me that he has established a link with Battalion Commander and communication with the company commander for company one. He then handed to me the hand set of the radio he was carrying strapped on his back.

Naming of commanders is usually after fierce, fast, aggressive, and clever wild animals; after trees that are hard and very large, and also after great rivers and lakes.

Accordingly, my name was “Leopard”, and the commander of the first company was “Gissila One”, and the commander of the second company was code-named as “Gissila Two”. The Commander of the 15th Battalion was code-named “Anbessa”.

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