

The strong solidarity that puts Mandela forever in the hearts of Ethiopians (Part II)

Aschalew yemer aschaleyimer@gmail.com

It was on the second day of Mandela's camp life, the wife of Emperor Haileselassie, Empress Menen Asfaw, passed away after suffering a long illness. The entire nation was deeply saddened by the death of their empress that the streets of Addis Ababa filled with mourners clothed with black dresses.

Mandela accompanied Brigadier General Tadesse Biru to attend the funeral procession at the church of Holy Trinity Cathedral, located adjacent to the grand palace. Mandela was astounded by the multitude of mourners in Addis Ababa.

It was believed that no adult person in the capital unattended the funeral procession of the late Empress Menen Asfaw – one of the darkest days of the Ethiopian monarch.

As a young age Colonel Befekadu joined the cadet in 1958 among those sixty officers. In his distant memory Colonel Befekadu recalls about Mandela's behavior and friendly manner; *'Our relation got stronger.*

After 10 days or so he told us who he was and where he came from. He is really a good man. He loves people and is so friendly. We used to have a friendly fight, he had a well-built body.'

For the next twenty eight days and night Mandela had received both individual and group military trainings both in theory and practice.

The military training of Kolfe includes military techniques including accomplishing missions, bomb planting, military attacking and defense, target shooting among others.

Selected areas (Kotebe, Sendafa, and Burayu) which are located in the outskirts of the capital Addis Ababa were part of the training sites of Kolfe where Mandela and other local trainees used to practice.



Nelson Mandela at Kolfe Emergency Police Training Center, 1962

The retired officer admires Mandela's interest and curiosity to learn and know more about his short term military training. That was beyond more than Ethiopian trainees. In addition to his interest the man had extraordinary capability and fast learning behavior he had shown during those four weeks of military training season.

Col. Befekadu says *'There...we had a training center and it is still there. He was a good trainee. Because we were younger than him and he had a well-built body he could easily shot than us. After we gave him self-training to the level of major, we focused on explosions sabotage training. He was active and wanted to try everything. We used to pay the necessary cautions so as to not let Mandela to harm himself.'*

Colonel Befekadu appreciates the obeying nature of Mandela in taking assignments and missions during the training. Mandela had never refused to take commands and assignments from his bosses.

Colonel Befekadu also speaks about the decent behavior of their guest saying, *'Except the training we didn't spend leisure time together yet we had a very good time. For 28 days he was here at this center and the training was challenging.'*

When it was over we parted with brotherhood affection. His entire visit was highly confidential so we didn't ask what he would be up to.'



Retired Colonel Befekadu Wakene, Former Trainer of Nelson Mandela

'Senior military officers of the regime used to pay a visit to assess the daily performance of Mandela including his health status. Two military officers in particular Brigadier General Tadesse Biru and Brigadier General Tsige Dibu were the frequent visitors of Mandela at Kolfe training site.

In his Autobiography, Mandela expresses about his training and his trainer noting *'I was lectured on military science by Colonel Tadesse, who was also assistant commissioner of police and had been instrumental in foiling a recent coup attempt against the emperor.'*

During the end of the four weeks a mixed reaction was witnessed among those trainees and trainers knowing that the man would soon leave the training camp.

In one hand officers like colonel Befekadu felt sense of proud in discharging their responsibility diligently in training Mandela and on the other hand they felt sad

concerning Mandela's future journey since little is known about the man and where he is heading to. After a short farewell ceremony Mandela departed from their eyes but didn't leave Ethiopia rather Mandela had to stay in one of the oldest hotels in Ethiopia, Ras Hotel, which is located at the heart of Addis Ababa and 10 minute drive from Bole International Airport.

He made his accommodation at the famous Ras Hotel until he made his journey back home in the late April 1962. (*Long Walk to Freedom pp 47*).

The floor he was staying still owns his name. When someone walks along the second floor Mandela's floor will be seen, with his relatively recent picture on the wall. After receiving advice and assistance from emperor Haileselassie, Mandela became ready to return to his home country.

Being suspicious of Mandela would be arrested by the regime of apartheid, the officials in Ethiopia gave him an Ethiopian passport named him Duwal Sewaye and Bechuanaland as his place of birth and year of birth 1918 as his occupation as journalist. Brigadier General Tadesse Biru who first met Mandela accompanied him in his departure.

After conversing for a while he presented Mandela with a Bulgarian made pistol with two hundred rounds of ammunition and arranged his flight. Mandela writes *Colonel Tadesse rapidly arranged for me to take an Ethiopian flight to Khartoum.*

Before I left, he presented me with a gift: an automatic pistol and two hundred rounds of ammunition. I was grateful, both for the gun and his instruction. Despite my fatigue marches, I found it wearying to carry around all that ammunition.

A single bullet is surprisingly heavy: hauling around two hundred is like carrying a small child on one's back. According to media reports, the Bulgarian-made handgun donated for Mandela was reportedly buried in South Africa and much effort is being made to find it. If it is found, it could be worth over \$2 million dollars.



Brigadier General Tadesse Biru and Nelson Mandela, 1962, Kolfe Emergency Police Training Center

Suspicious of being arrested by apartheid regime, the Ethiopian government issued Mandela with a passport named him Duwal Sewaye and Bechuanaland as his place of birth and year of birth 1918 and journalist as his occupation. Mandela made his accommodation at Ras Hotel until he made his journey back home in the late April 1962. (*Long Walk to Freedom pp 47*).



2		3	
ወርወር ፡ ምልክት ፡ DESCRIPTIONS		የግለሰብ ፡ Wife	የግለሰብ ፡ ስፍራ ፡ PHOTOGRAPH OF WIFE
ሥራ ፡	ጋዜጠኛ		 <p>የግለሰብ ፡ ስፍራ ፡ PHOTOGRAPH OF WIFE</p> <p><i>Wintaway</i></p>
Profession			
የተወለደበት ፡	10/9/1918		
ቀን ፡ ቀን ፡	18/7/1918		
የተወለደበት ፡ ስፍራ ፡	BECHUANALAND		
Domicile	BECHUANALAND		
ቁመት ፡	1-78-4970		
Height	1-78 in.		
የግለሰብ ፡ ቀለም ፡	BROWN		
የግለሰብ ፡ ቀለም ፡	BLACK		
ለግለሰብ ፡			
Identifying details			
የልጆች ፡ ስም ፡	Names of children		

Mandela's had stayed at different times in Ethiopia is said to be 98 days. Ethiopia was the place where he found his roots as an African, a place which shares the most significant part of his struggle to freedom.

On June 10, 1990 Mandela came to Addis Ababa to attend the 26 African leaders' summit. That was exactly after 28 years and two months since he came for the first time 1962 in Addis Ababa. With this long time interval, Mandela witnessed new political changes and experience in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

During the 26th Africa leaders summit, Mandela made a remarkable speech calling upon all African leaders to further strength the sanction passed on apartheid to disintegrate the system from the surface of the earth. (Addis Zemen Journal, June 25, 1990).

Unlike the 1962, Mandela stayed in Addis Ababa for only 24 hours since then he didn't return to Addis Ababa, the city that always aspires to see Mandela. The legacy of Mandela continues to this day in Ethiopia.

Today several institutions are named after him among others Mandela distance Education College and several buildings both in and outside of Addis Ababa. It was noted that during the second annual International Nelson Mandela Day in 2011 that 2,300 trees were planted around Addis Ababa in Mandela's honor.

Indeed Mandela paid so much for the freedom of his people. Given he had got all the support he needed from Ethiopians during the hardest time; no wonder this legend man had consistently mentioned Ethiopia and its people.

Nelson Mandela was also quoted associating the significance of Ethiopia and Ethiopianism as the inspiration for the formation for his political party the African National Congress(ANC) in December 1992 at the Free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa, where he was quoted saying "Fundamental tenets of the Ethiopian Movement were self-worth, self-reliance and freedom.

These tenets drew the advocates of Ethiopianism, like a magnet, to the growing political movement. That political movement was to culminate in the formation of the ANC in 1912. It is in this sense that the ANC we trace the seeds of the formation of our organization to the Ethiopian Movement of the 1890s."

The retired Colonel Befekadu is currently struggling to death suffering from cardiac problem and spinal cord diseases. He feels proud witnessing the legacy of Mandela. Despite his plummeting health conditions, he enjoys to talk about the legacy of Mandela and proud of being a onetime acquaintance with the man at Kolfe emergency police training center just half a century ago.

Couching at his favorite place in his home, Col. Befekadu received with profound sorrow the news of the passing away of Madiba and expresses his deep condolences to his family and country men and women.

Col. Befekadu and the entire people of Ethiopia express their sincere sympathy to the legendary that did not only lead his country's struggle against Apartheid but as expressed by the People and Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has also been the torch bearer in the quest for Africa's freedom.

Flags are flying at half-mast for three days in Ethiopia where he has an everlasting place in the hearts of all Ethiopians. In his condolence message, Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn stressed the special place President Mandela has in the hearts of all Ethiopians who received with profound sorrow the news of the passing away of former South African President Nelson Mandela - a visionary leader, who dedicated his life for the achievement of freedom and justice for his people. His legacy will live on for generations to come.