

Our heroes and heroines deserve a war memorial:

Discuss

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Recently the Ethiopia National Defence Force have celebrated their colourful annual day. On that occasion, ETV broadcasted the “Documentary on PM Meles and his immense contribution as a military strategist on top of his political leadership role building the new Ethiopia!”¹ under the title of Meles Ende Wetaderawi Mehandis². From this documentary we learn so much about Meles and his exceptional ability of overall leadership.

According to the documentary and the testimony presented by his comrades, His Excellency Addisu Legese and others praised his unequivocal military skill. One of Meles’ leadership skills was to shine by postulating a new military science according to time, place and need. The best aspect of his military leadership is, unlike his predecessors, his ability to produce an original military doctrine unique to Ethiopia, arguably unique in world military history. Undoubtedly his military skill and strategy have led to unprecedented victory over the Derg, Eritrea and Somalia. If this was not the case, we would not be what we are today. Here I raise my hat to his skill, legacy and to our National Defence Force.

Having said that, my main interest is not to discuss the Ethiopian National Defence Day or Meles military leadership skill; instead as I have indicated in the title of this article I would like to state a few points on the issue of our obligation as a nation to remember and commemorate our heroes and heroines. In fact I have raised this issue at the Ethiopian Embassy in London when His Excellency Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia made his first UK visit. I hope he delivers my concerns to my government.

As most readers would agree, we have a national and moral duty to remember and commemorate those who sacrificed their irreplaceable life for the sake of our security, freedom, peace and prosperity.

Here it would not be a mistake if I said that war is part of Ethiopian history, unfortunately it is, and it has been, I hope it shall not be. When I look back at my own family history, the history confirms what I have just said earlier, my dad was born while his father was in prison by the Italians as he was suspected of hiding ammunition and supplying ammunition to the patriots. Surprise, surprise I was born just after the first Ethio-Somalia war where my father was one of the officers who fought with Somalia on the Ogaden frontline. Still now the cloud of war is never far from Ethiopia. That is why we have acquired a strong and democratic National Military Force.

In fact in Ethiopian history all our fights have been directly related to the protection of our sovereignty and freedom. Sadly most wars were conducted in our soil except for the 2006-2009 Ethiopian war with Somalia which was conducted on Somalia soil.

¹ <http://www.aigaforum.com/>

² http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Oz-2G3IHDPc

In addition, we Ethiopians contribute so much for world peace by actively participating in the UN peace keeping mission and sending our soldiers around the world. By doing this we are leading the continent and we do not do badly on the world stage either, since we are contributing the fourth largest peace keeping forces for world³. Even at a time of peace keeping mission we sacrifice our brother and sisters and hence our soldiers' blood has been spilled from Korea⁴ to Darfur.

For the last twenty years we have had at least two major wars, with Eritreans and with Somalia. Here I do not wish to glorify war; as Meles has said the less war we have the better and our war has to be with our arch enemy, poverty. However sometimes war is unavoidable when others question our free existence.

For these two wars we have sacrificed thousands and thousands of Ethiopian brothers and sisters. Without their sacrifice we would not have dreamed of existing as a nation today. However as a nation I feel we are behind when it comes to recognising and commemorating their sacrifice. As a nation we are not new to such thing. For that we do not need to go far but to see our cities.

However in recent times, despite our culture to honour our heroes and heroines, it seems that we have neglected our national duty. It is our moral obligation to remember those who have sacrificed their life for our motherland. As far as I know, there is no war memorial or monument erected to commemorate those heroes and heroines fall in recent wars. Here I urge my government to consider a war memorial in Jigjig for those war heroes and heroines who sacrificed their lives in Somalia, Mekele, for those who fell in Badme and Addis Ababa, for those who have served as UN peacekeepers from Korea to Sudan. In addition I would suggest a similar war memorial in each federal state's capital city, such as Bahir Dar, Awasa, Gambela, Assosa, Dire Dawa and so on, to show each nation and nationality's contribution to our peace, freedom and security.

As we know in modern times the main intent of war memorials is not to glorify war, but to honour those who have died for us. Apart from this, memorials help the next generation to learn and to remember what we had been through and our heroic past.

So when we celebrate the Ethiopian National Defence Day and remember the architects of this force we must not forget those who have sacrificed their life for us, in Badme, in Somalia and other parts of the world in war as well as in peace missions such as in Korea and recently in Sudan. It is time to act: let God bless the soul of those soldiers who have died for the nation.

³ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I6rTneEB7I&feature=player_embedded (Special Program with Ethiopian National Defence Force: Question and Answer)

⁴ In keeping with the principle of collective security, for which Haile Selassie was an outspoken proponent, Ethiopia sent a contingent under General Mulugeta Buli, known as the Kagnew Battalion, to take part in the Korean War. It was attached to the American 7th Infantry Division, and fought in a number of engagements including the Battle of Pork Chop Hill.^[19] 3,518 Ethiopian troops served in the war, where 121 were killed and 536 wounded during the Korean War.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_National_Defense_Force