

A forgotten hero Hamid Idris Awate



Sept.1,1961 Day of 1st Shot That Led to Eritrean's Independence

A small number of Eritrean students living in exile (in Cairo) first founded the **ELF** (Eritrean Liberation Front). The main architects of this movement were Woldeab Woldemariam, Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan and Mohamed Adem.

1960

In July 1960, in the city of Cairo, a group of young Eritrean students and intellectuals held a meeting and formed the ELF. The group consisted of the following names:

1. Idris Mohammed Adem (the president of the National Assembly of Eritrea.
2. Idris Osman Galaydos (a graduate of law school of Cairo University)
3. Mohammed Saleh Hummed (a graduate of law school of Cairo

University)

4. Said Hussian (a student of Al-Az'har University in Cairo)
5. Adem Mohammed Akte (a graduate from University of Cairo)
6. Taha Mohammed Noor (a graduate from Italy)

Hamid Idris Awate:

Awate fired the first shot against Ethiopian government forces in **1 September 1961 at Mount Adal** (Adal mountain is located in the northwest Barka region in Eritrea).

He went on to create the ELA (Eritrean Liberation Army- the armed wing of the Eritrean Liberation Front /**Jebha**/). At the beginning was **only seven**, then shortly the number had grown to be „**13 fighters.**” **Awate** shot the **first bullet** that was followed by freedom fighters from across the country. The Ethiopian authorities were suspicious of Awate's movements and activities, and were watching him closely.

Hamid Idris Awate was born at **Gerset**, located between Tessenei and Omhajer in southwestern Eritrea in the year 1910. His father was a peasant and known to own a rifle. Awate was trained by his father how to use that gun. At early age, he was a very skillful fighter who achieved great superiority in the usage of arms and developed a high knighthood skill that gained him the respect of his generation.

Grown up in a place that values and ethical principles based on honesty and loyalty, Awate was known to be a man of moral values and a good example for them to follow, to have confidence and a great leader to obey. Beside his language skills in Tigre, Tigrina, Nara, Hedareb, Kunama, Awate also spoke Arabic and Italian fluently.

1952

1952 the British mandate is lifted and later, in a draft resolution by UN, the immediate **federation Eritrea- Ethiopia**, with the cession of the territory around the port cities Massawa & Assab, so that Ethiopia has free access to the Red Sea. However, the United Nations decided that Eritrea should enter into a federation with Ethiopia. The Federation came into force in **1952**.

Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia, with **internal autonomy** with its own **Eritrean National Flag**, own parliament, own parties (more party system), own cultural development and common foreign policy, transnational trade and economic relations. A joint commission will be sent up for this purpose, but

Ethiopia will very quickly Undermine it. Contracts remain theory. It was also decided that after **10 years** in an Eritrean referendum the final future of Eritrea would be decided.

United Nations Resolution **No.390 AV** has united two countries that have developed at very different political and economic levels. Eritrea was in **1952** in the beginning of most modern Industrialization. Within the rural population, a new group working class was created.



The Eritrean flag “Awli'e / Khedra” had an olive wreath in the centre, symbolising peace. The wreath encircled a six-leafed plant which represented the six administrative divisions of Eritrea. November 14,1958 - The Eritrean flag was dehoisted and replaced by that of Ethiopia. It continued in use as a “Flag of liberation“ until **1993** when independence was attained.

The industrial workers and the agricultural workers (approximately 20% of the total population). There were also Independent repair shops (for repairing cars,etc.) and a well-developed transport network in Eritrea.

A joint commission will be set up for this, but it will quickly be subverted by Ethiopia. Contracts remain theorized. It was also decided that after **10 years** Eritrea would decide in an **Eritrean Popular vote** (referendum) on the final future of Eritrea.

1962

The referendum of Eritrea is prevented, the Eritrean parliament in Asmara is dissolved under armed force by the Ethiopian army. Parties and Labour unions are banned.

Eritrea becomes the **14th Province of Ethiopia**, slowly an “**Amharisation**” of the country begins.

1957

Mahber Shewate/ Hareka: Party of Seven, because it proliferated in groups of seven. The Eritreans strengthened their underground movement: The **ELM** (Eritrean Liberation Movement) was born. Popularly known as “**Hareka/ Mahber- Shewate**” Movement

1959

In **1959** all symbols of Eritrea, such as the **National Flag**, were abolished and replaced by Ethiopian flag. Eritrea's two main languages, Tigrinya and Arabic, could no longer be spoken at School. Books written in these languages were burned. Amharic, the language of the new Black colonial masters, became the official language in which all lessons in the School had to take place.

The Eritrean population is peacefully defending itself against continued de-democratization. The workers organized strikes, and demonstrations took place in the cities again and again. Haile selassie, he wanted to break the unarmed resistance. He had his army fire on the demonstrations. Hundreds were killed.

1962

In **1962**, the Emperor Haile Selassie, finally declared “**The Federation**” null and void. Eritrea has been annexed to Ethiopia violently and in complete disregard of the United Nations decision.

Awate and his comrades so they decided to use weapons as well and fight against further deprivation of rights and for the independence of our country Eritrea. In **1961** the ELF started the armed struggle under **the leadership of Awate**.

Togoruba:

March 15, 1964 a leap to a new phase. **The ELA** (Eritrean Liberation Army) for the first time confronts regulars of the Ethiopian occupation army at „Togoruba“. In a fierce engagement, the ELF inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Ethiopian army.

The war intensified and the enemy started losing ground in many of its outpost strongholds. Communication lines were severed and the enemy

supplemented its regular ground forces with a new Israeli- Trained counter-insurgency commandos! To confront the new force, the ELF introduced a new strategy. The field was divided into 5 military zones.

By applying this model the liberation army was divided initially into four military zones and later into **five** to weaken Ethiopian forces by stretching its military capacity all over Eritrea.

Zone One: Operated in the Western Province Barka, comprising the Gash and Barka area bordering Sudan.

Zone Two: Represented the former provinces of Sahel and Senhit.

Zone Three: The Central Plateau, namely the former provinces of Akele Guzai and Serae;

Zone Four: Active in the central and southern parts of the coastal plains, largely known as Semhar and Dankalia provinces.

Zone Five: Active in the central highlands Hamasen.

The cold- blooded massacres in Eritrea by the Ethiopian army (occupying forces) were either shot alive or burnt in buildings, and others were buried alive in self- digging graves, tens of thousands of victims of poisoned wells and springs and others starved to death after losing everything.

1970

EPLF- Eritrean People' Liberation Front

(Akronym in Tigrinya & Arabic): Hizbawi ginbar harenet ertra /Sha'abiya.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Eritrean liberation Front (**Jebha**) conducted a systematic guerrilla campaign against the Ethiopian government. An ELF faction broke out in **1970** and founded the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (**Sha'abiya**), a rather **Left- wing revolutionary** movement. After Eritrean gained independence in **1991**, it was transformed into the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (**PFDJ**), Eritrea's only legal and political organization.

In **1970** members of the group had a falling out, and several different groups broke away from the ELF. During this time, the ELF and the groups that later joined together to form the EPLF fought a bitter civil war. The two- **ELF/ EPLF** organizations were forced by popular will to reconcile in **1974** and participated in joint operations against Ethiopia.

1991

The price of Eritrean independence was heavy and expensive, and we paid dearly for the lives of our best and bravest people, where tens of thousands of **Eritrean heroes** were martyred for Eritrea as a free and independent country.

After independence, the expectation was that a „**Democratic Government**“ would be formed, but although a new constitution was drawn up in **1997**, it was never put into force!!

2001

In September 2001, the **PFDJ- Regime** closed all independent newspapers and arrested their editors and leading journalists. No one was brought to justice. They remain in solitary detention. There are reliable reports that about half of them have died.

Dictators are almost all the same. They use various instruments of suppression and survival. „**Divide and rule**“, however, is one of the oldest, most widespread and effective strategies. It is about creating, maintaining and even enforcing divisions, distrust and hostility between ethnic, religious, regional and socio- political groups. This contributes to the fact that no unified movement can overthrow a dictatorial PFDJ- Regime.

These are the foundations for building a united, strong and progressive Eritrea and protecting its sovereignty. **If we love and respect our martyrs**, we should go their way to a strong Eritrea, to peace, stability, respect and reconciliation. Every eritrean is proud of them and the young generation will remain so.

Respect and gratitude to all our heroic martyrs!
Awate and all our martyrs will be remembered forever!

(Ismail Mohamed|Germany)