

Remembering unique Eritreans in contemporary history






A short biographical sketch
Of
General Aman Andom



Source: google.com

Compiled and edited from cyber sources
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Early life and personal data

Name meaning & history

The name Aman has its own meaning in Geez but many use it as a shortened version of the masculine-gender name Ammanuel. In Hebrew, as in biblical name, the meaning of the name **Ammanuel** is: "God is with us". This was the foretold name of the Messiah in the Old Testament. It has been used by the Christian population in Eritrea and Ethiopia though it has not been widespread.

Pastor Mussa Aron in his book 'dictionary of Eritrean names' describes the name **Aman** as meaning 'the Truth'. It gives confirmation of reality to events, situations and deeds. The name is also widely used in the Islamic world with the meaning: Protection. Fearless. Interestingly enough when I googled I found out what Soul Urge describes personalities with that name. 'People with this name tend to be creative and excellent at expressing themselves. They are drawn to the arts, and often enjoy life immensely. They are often the centre of attention, and enjoy careers that put them in the limelight. People with this name have a deep inner desire for love and companionship, and want to work with others to achieve peace and harmony. People with this name tend to be idealistic, highly imaginative, intuitive, and spiritual. They seek after spiritual truth and often find it. They tend to be visionary and may inspire others'.

Pastor Mussa Aron describes the tigrinja name **Andom** as meaning 'the Pillar'. Parents give the name to a child to express their wish that the new born child will in the future be the pillar of the family.

General Aman Mikael Andom was the first post-imperial acting Head of State of Ethiopia. He was an Eritrean originally from the village of Tsezega in Hamassien province of Eritrea. Born in Khartoum, the Sudan, on July 21, 1924, Aman Andom attended Comboni College and later St. George's Military School in Khartoum. After Mussolini and the Italians invaded Ethiopia in 1935, Andom joined the Sudanese forces of Haile Selassie to fight the Italians, becoming a second lieutenant.

At war's end, he traveled to Ethiopia and rose rapidly in the military establishment, becoming a major general in 1962. In May 1964, Andom was assigned as military attaché to the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, D.C. There, he received a bachelor's degree from Howard University. Upon his return to Ethiopia in July 1965, the general was named defense minister in Haile Selassie's cabinet.



Map of Eritrea



3d topo map of Tsezega
(source:nona.net)

A special mention is warranted for the great General Aman Michael Andom, the darling of the Ethiopian Army; also known as the Desert Lion. General Aman Andom led Ethiopian forces to the Korean war. He was the recipient of the highest honor, from the UN for his accomplishments; and thereby brought honor to Ethiopia in the process. General Aman is perhaps best remembered for his heroics in Ogadien in the early sixties; General Aman was elected by the Derg regime as its Chairman in 1974, primarily because of his immense popularity within the then Third Army Division stationed in Harar. He was well known for his fair mindedness; which was why he was opposed to the proposed wholesale executions of the detained ex-Ministers and other dignitaries, belonging to Emperor Haile Selassie's regime; fifty-nine in all. The unwarranted executions took place immediately after General Aman was killed. General Aman Andom, after a brave last stand against Mengistu's tanks, was killed on November 23, 1974 <http://www.aigaforum.com>

A rare picture available of General Aman Andom in his youth



Personal data of General Aman Andom



Chairman of the Derg (*de facto* Head of State)

Origin	Tseazega, Eritrea
Birth place	Khartoum, Sudan
Date of birth	July 21, 1924
Education	American Evangelical mission school, Khartoum Comboni College, Asmara St. George's Military School in Khartoum Bachelor's degree from Howard University in Washington DC
Occupations (1949-1974)	Commander of the Ethiopian 3 rd Division army Led Ethiopian forces to the Korean war Military attaché to the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, D.C. Led the Ethiopian army in Ogaden Member of Ethiopian Parliament Defense minister in Haile Selassie's cabinet
Family	Survived by wife and 4 children
Siblings	2 brothers and 2 sisters
Religion	Lutheran
Date of death	November 23, 1974
Place of death	At his home in Addis Abeba after a brave last stand against Mengistu's tanks.

Exceptional hero of war and peace

With **Aman Mikael Andom** (21 June 1924 – 23 November 1974) becoming Ethiopia's first acting Head of State, following the revolution that toppled Emperor Haile Selassie from his throne, the optimism among Ethiopians and Eritreans for the establishment of a democratic Ethiopia was very high. He was the most popular commander of the army in Ethiopia of all times.

General Aman Andom was appointed to this position following the coup d'état that deposed Emperor Haile Selassie on 12 September 1974, and served until his death in a shootout with his former supporters. His official title was Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (better known as the Derg), and he held the position of Head of State in an acting capacity as the military regime had officially proclaimed Crown Prince Asfaw Wossen as "King-designate" (an act that would later be rescinded by the Derg, and which was never accepted by the Prince as legitimate).

As commander of the Third Division, General Aman had been beating back the encroachments of the Somali army on the eastern border with a zeal and success that he was known as the "Desert Lion." However, in 1964 the Emperor dismissed General Aman Andom when he began to attack into Somalia in violation of an order from the Emperor, and Aman afterwards served in the Ethiopian Senate in a "political exile". There is some evidence that indicates he had contacts with the officers of the junta as early as February and March 1974, but by July he was appointed chief of staff to the military junta.

Three days after the junta removed the Emperor from his palace to imprisonment at the headquarters of the Fourth Division, this group appointed him their chairman and president of Ethiopia. At the same time, this group of soldiers assumed the name "Provisional Military Administrative Council", better known as the *Derg*.

From the first day of his presidency, the Ottaways note, "the general found himself at odds with a majority of the *Derg's* members over most major issues, including whether he was 'chairman' of the ruling military body or simply its 'spokesman.'"^[2] Aman fought the majority of the Derg over three central issues:

- The size of the Derg, which he felt was too large and unwieldy
- The policy to be taken towards the Eritrean Liberation Fronts (ELF/EPLF)
- And over the punishment of the numerous aristocrats and former government officials in the Derg's custody.

Moreover, the Derg wanted the army that was in Harer to move to Eritrea and the army that was in Eritrea to move to Harer. He said, if the army from Harer move to Eritrea, they will be too brutal to the people. The Derg said the army in Eritrea will not fight because they were too integrated with the people. At the same time, the Eritrean fighters were moving very fast. For these reasons and his refusal to sanction the execution of former high officials, including two former prime ministers and several royal family members and relatives, put his relations with the majority of the Derg on an especially bitter footing.

As a leader with democratic values, the General found himself in disagreement with the majority of the Derg. He wanted to negotiate a peaceful settlement while his opponents hoped to crush the liberation fronts ELF and EPLF by military force. Aman went as far as making two personal visits to Eritrea—the first 25 August to 6 September, the second in November—giving speeches stating that the end of the Imperial regime was also the end of old practices towards Eritrea, that a government dedicated to national unity and progress would restore peace and prosperity to Eritrea, and lastly that he would begin investigations concerning crimes that the army had perpetrated on Eritreans and punish the guilty.

However, at the same time the Derg had begun the task of eliminating opponents within the military. The three significant units were the Imperial Bodyguard, the Air Force, and the Corp of Engineers; of the three, the most recalcitrant were the Engineers. So on 7 October soldiers loyal to the Derg stormed the Engineers' camp, killing five, wounding several and detaining the rest. As Bahru Zewde observes, "With that, the illusion that the revolution would remain bloodless was exploded."^[4]

General Aman responded with a personal campaign to seek support outside the Derg, amongst the rest of the army and the country where he was popular. On 15 November he sent a message to all military units that was highly critical of the Derg. During a general assembly of the Derg two days later, Mengistu Haile Mariam demanded that 5,000 men be dispatched to Eritrea and six imprisoned Imperial officials be executed; General Aman Andom refused, resigned his official posts and retired to his house where he secretly sent appeals to his supporters, especially those in the Third Division. But Mengistu managed to intercept these appeals.^[5]

General Aman died in a battle with troops sent to his home to arrest him. The actual cause of his death remains unclear, whether he was killed or committed suicide. That same night, the political prisoners that the Derg had marked for execution were taken from Menelik prison, where they had been held, to the Akaki Central Prison where they were executed and buried in a mass grave.^[6] "It appears that the general had outlived his usefulness," Bahru Zewde concludes, "and was in fact becoming an obstacle to the Derg's exercise of power."^[7]

Notes

1. Marina and David Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York: Africana, 1978), pp. 59f, and n. 29
2. Ottaway, *Empire in Revolution*, p. 60
3. Ottaway, *Empire in Revolution*, p. 155
4. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, second edition (London: James Currey, 2001), p. 238
5. Rene Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?* translated by A. M. Berrett (London: Zed Press, 1983), p. 73
6. Ottaway, *Empire in Revolution*, p. 61
7. Bahru Zewde, *History*, p. 238

A strong leader equipped with knowledge, principle and justice

It did not take long time for the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples to discover that General Aman Andom and the strong man of the Derg, Major Mengistu Hailemariam were worlds apart in their thoughts of how to lead the country. The military junta's selection of General Aman to be their chairman was solely his popularity in the army in particular and the country in general. The junta's sole interest in bringing General Aman was to exploit his popularity for their own benefit to consolidate power. With so much difference in opinion the people who were close to General Aman knew the partnership could not last long. Major Mengistu wanted to get rid of the former officials outside the court of law. Besides Major Mengistu opted to crush militarily the armed insurgency in Eritrea and his political opponents in proper Ethiopia.

General Aman was opposed to escalating the conflict against the guerilla forces in Eritrea; opting for a diplomatic solution to the problem. He was very popular among the Eritrean people to the extent that he was perceived as a threat to the goals and aims of the armed struggle.

The people of Eritrea were beginning to think of the possible alternatives to the armed struggle against Ethiopia's occupation of Eritrea. After General Aman's elevation to Chairman of the Derg it was considered that he was a uniting force among all Ethiopians *including* Eritreans.

For the record, if Mengistu Haile Mariam had not murdered General Aman Andom on November 23, 1974, after the latter's brave last stand against Mengistu's tanks, there could have been significant impact in the long and bloody "war of liberation" by the Eritreans.



Howard University in Washington DC where General Aman received his bachelors degree

As mentioned earlier when the junior military officers known as Derg asked General Aman Andom to be their chairman, it was his popularity in the army and the general public that was the key factor. But what they forgot to see was that he had absolutely different credentials from them all in the fields of diplomacy, humanity, respect of law, and above all fear of God. If the partnership was to work, the Derg should have seriously considered using not only his popularity but also his credentials and share state power with him.

General Aman believed that there is no military solution to the conflict, noting it would only add to the violence inside the country. He understood that the military solution by the Emperor's army have not achieved the desired result except bringing bloodshed, hatred and hunger. The military logic has brought the country on the verge of total destruction. Why add more fuel to the fire?" John S.C Abbott has once said that "War is the science of destruction" The one involved in war only end up in loss of lives socially and economically therefore the peaceful talks would be more beneficial to solve the disputes.

Based on these reasoning and reality the General wanted to explore all peaceful options to bring all the insurgent groups to the negotiating table, stressing there is no military solution to the crisis. He wanted to defuse crises and broker negotiated settlements to the conflict. His thoughts was to give peace a chance, give diplomacy a chance by stopping to fight and starting to talk. Time is a good teacher. The military venture, even with the massive support of superpower Russia was not a good alternative to General Aman's solution. The choice of military solution brought only more blood shedding, mass migration, suffering, hatred, hunger and multiplication of insurgency everywhere in the country. The final result of the military venture was victory awarded to the insurgents and col. Mengistu fled the country.

Another core point of disagreement the General had with the Derg was what to do with the imprisoned officials numbering about 60. General Aman wanted to take the high road of justice to settle their fate. It is only when countries submit to the jurisdiction of the Court that they enhance fairness and stability. By not doing so Ethiopia opened the road of bloodletting inside the country and irreparable loss of image internationally.

In pursuit of these objectives an Inquiry Commission was formed. The purpose of the Commission was to investigate alleged corruption and breach of responsibilities by officials in Emperor Haile Selassie's regime in the aftermath of the Ethiopian famines. At this point in time General Aman Andom surrounded himself with renowned lawyers some to serve in the newly established Inquiry Commission others prodded to be his legal advisors.

General Aman is believed to have strongly opposed the extrajudicial summary or arbitrary execution of the former officials in the Dergs custody. Any extrajudicial punishment by the authorities without the sanction of any judicial proceeding or legal process would be unacceptable to him. To that effect a commission of inquiry was already established.

A person of amazing character combinations:

- Victorious as a soldier
- Principled as a person
- Guided by respect of law and humanity

Desert Lion

General Aman Andom, who commandeered the Third Division, had been beating back the encroachments of the Somali army on the eastern border with a zeal and success that he was known as the "Desert Lion." In September 1974, following minor popular uprisings against Haile Selassie's regime, the military overthrew the emperor and named Andom as provisional head of government in addition to chief of staff and minister of defense. They did this because General Aman had respect among the soldiers as the hero of the Ethio-Somali war. There is some evidence that indicates he had contacts with the officers of the junta as early as February and March 1974, but by July he was appointed chief of staff to the military junta.

Three days after the junta removed the Emperor from his palace to imprisonment at the headquarters of the Fourth Division, this group appointed him their chairman and president of Ethiopia. At the same time, this group of soldiers assumed the name "Provisional Military Administrative Council", better known as the *Derg*.

Initial reports identified Andom as the strongman who had initiated the coup, but these were soon to be violently refuted as the bloodless coup turned bloody on the night of November 23, 1974. That night, a purge of the old aristocracy resulted in the executions of 59 former government officials. The same evening, at the direction of Mengistu Mariam, later revealed as "the true moving force" of the coup, military units were sent to Andom's home and, during a two-hour gun battle, the general was killed. It was speculated that Andom, born to Eritrean parents, was killed because of his conciliatory attitude toward the continuing Eritrean struggle for independence from Ethiopia.



Harar: the location of the Third division of the Ethiopian army which was Commandeered by General Aman Andom

As commander of the Third Division, General Aman scored success after success in the war against the Somali army on the eastern border and his popularity was sky high in the 3rd division. He was known as the "Desert Lion." However, in 1964 the Emperor dismissed General Aman Andom. The speculation by many political commentators at that time was that Emperor Haile Sellassie was not very happy of the immense popularity the General gained in the army. Then he served in the Ethiopian Senate in a "political exile".



This is a photo of the Ethiopian parliament, which was commonly referred to as a place of exile from active life. As a senator, General Aman Andom stayed there from 196 – 19 . This was the time king Haile Selassie decided to make him inactive.

General Aman as a family man and a church goer

General Aman Andom was a kind and loving father and a role-model to his children. To his friends and family members, he was a man willing to extend a helping hand to anyone in need. His memory will live forever etched in the minds of those who knew him and will be carried forward through the lives he enriched.

General Aman Andom is the third child of his parents Ato Andom Michael and Weizero Ghidey Reda. He had two brothers and two sisters. Here below is a family photo and General Aman is the one standing further right.



General Aman with his parents and siblings (source:)

General Aman had also 5 children in his own family. So was his older brother the late ambassador Meles Andom. The coincidence does not end there. Both brothers had 5 children each which comprise of 4 daughters and one son in both families.

The General was a worshiper and a member of the congregation of Mekane Yesus. As member of the Mekane Yesus congregation General Aman attended Sunday services at the church located in Amst Kilo. While it was common for dignitaries to seat in the front rows near the altar General Aman preferred to take the steep stairs that lead up to the *second floor* which is usually filled by the youth of the congregation.

The Mekane Yesus church usually referred to as E.E.C.Y.M. runs schools, clinics, hospitals, appropriate technology centres, literacy campaigns, literature and radio programmes, as well as theological training centres, Bible-schools, and counselling facilities. The Mekane Yesus church had local pastors and missionary priests from USA, Sweden and Norway. In the face of persecution the congregation even expanded contrary to the expectation and wishes of the communist oriented military junta. Some prominent priests of the Mekane Yesus church were imprisoned and others left the country to avoid persecution.

Orthodox reformers, Protestants from Eritrea and Wollega moving to the capital, and European missions asked by the Imperial Government to open educational and medical institutions in town, marked the beginning of Evangelical Christianity in Addis Ababa. It is to be remembered that under the Marxist Derg regime much of the Christian churches activities were curbed and religious people in all denominations greatly suffered.

In January 1998, the new government returned Evangelical church property that was seized under the Mengistu regime (including the Mekane Yesus Church headquarters, which served as Federal Police headquarters until 1997).



Photo of the Mekane Yesus church in Addis Abeba where General Aman used to go to. It is located not far from the Kidist Mariam Coptic Orthodox church in Amst Kilo



A snap shot of a sunday service in Mekane Yesus church

Popular across borders and pride to nations

It is with a sad and broken heart that the Ethiopian and Eritrean people received the news of General Aman's death. General Aman was both a distinguished military officer and a statesman par-excellence. His death marks the end of the life of a courageous man who left an indelible mark across nations. No man, presently alive or long gone, has done more to bring pride to his country and gain enormous trust by the public. General Aman was a leader whose visionary leadership brought victory in war times and when, working for peaceful solution to the various insurgencies in the country, his life was cut short by the blood thirsty and war monger Mengistu Hailemariam.

General Aman Andom was born on July 21, 1924. The third eldest of five children, he was born and raised in Khartoum. General Aman is survived by a wife, a son and 4 daughters. (The reader can find more personal data in page 6).

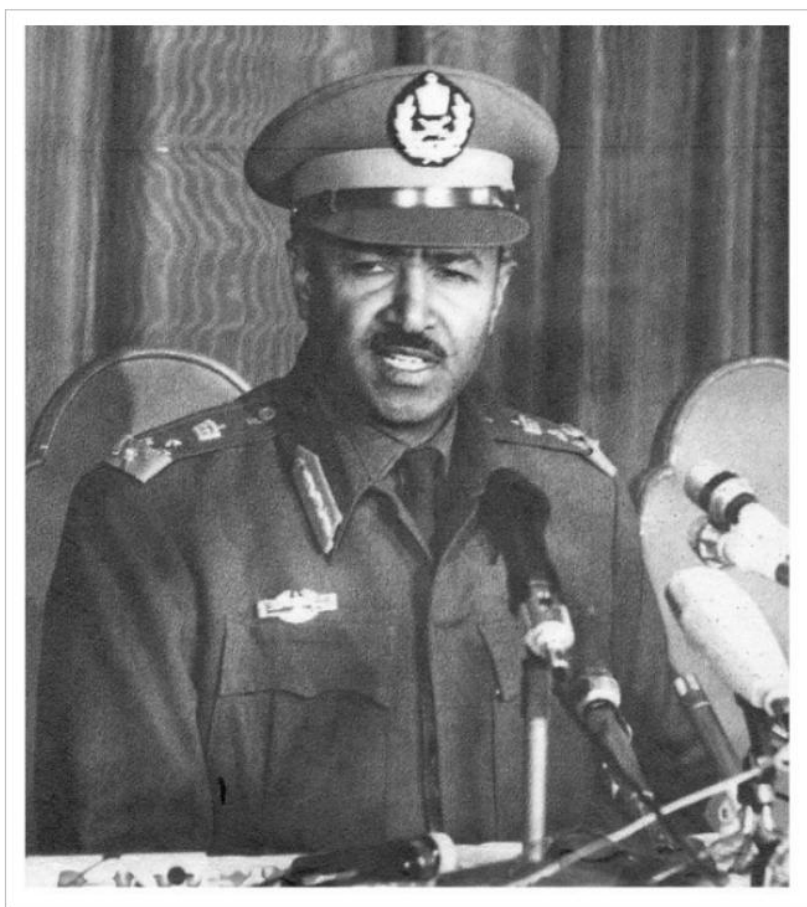


General Aman Andom making a speech to the nation as de facto head of state.

Il those who remember the unique characteristics of General Aman Andom need to sustain the hope that the passing of a man so dedicated to the betterment of his fellow citizens is not the mark of the end of an era that produced men of such strength, integrity, and dedication.

A self effacing man, who avoided publicity and fan fair, General Aman Andom has left a legacy that posterity will look to for an example of burning patriotism and love of country. He left his off-springs a legacy of dedication to country and fellow citizens through thick and thin. I hope our nation will continue to breed men of such integrity, dedication and good will who will sacrifice for the common good.

Lt. General Aman Andom distinguished by a brilliant military career and widely admired for his long-time defiance of the Emperor was appointed Prime Minister and chief 'spokesman' of the new military regime. But apart from being committed to the vague notion of "Ethiopia Tikdem" the Derg had little ideological cohesion when it came to power.



Another snapshot of the popular leader addressing the nation.

Source: mereja.com

Prominence of the Andom family. *Siblings prominent in their own right.*



Ambassador Melles Andom

Ambassador Melles Andom was born in the Sudan. His father Michael Andom left for the Sudan because of the fascist oppression prevalent then in Eritrea. Moreover, the father of Ambassador Melles, Ato Michael Andom was the secretary of the British governor of the Sudan. So he grew up in the belly of the powerhouse of Anglo Egyptian Sudan. This enabled him to amass knowledge that cannot be acquired through formal education.

On top of the opportunity to go to school and learning many languages, he, by virtue of being raised amongst Arabs, was able to first hand observe and understand the intricacies of the politics of the Arab World. Therefore, he was best suited to be an Ambassador of Ethiopia, in the biggest and most influential nation Egypt.

The Sudan-born bureaucrat and diplomat has served Ethiopia as ambassador in many key countries. His landmark achievement remembered by many is the containment of the threat to Ethiopia by President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt for making minimum use of the Nile river.

Melles Amdom the great diplomat

Goba wrote: As the Ethiopian and Egyptian governments begin playing diplomatic tussle over the Abay wenz Nile river, and the Ethiopians start to divert their God given river and the greedy Arab Egyptians summon the Ethiopian ambassador to Egypt, here is a lesson of a profile in courage of a brave Ethiopian ambassador to Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s.

He is a man who mastered five languages very fluently on top of his diplomatic skills and his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Middle East history and politics. This man spoke and wrote fluently Tigrinya, Amharic, English, Italian and Arabic.

At one time, the president of Egypt's chief foreign policy adviser, Muhamed Muhamed Fai'q, who later became his Foreign Minister told President Gamal Abdel Nasser to expel this brave Ethiopian and Gamal personally asked Haileselassie during the 1963 inauguration of the OAU to replace this man, the emperor decided to keep him there. This man remained in Cairo as Ethiopia's ambassador until the 1974 revolution and continued to warn Nasser not to meddle in the affairs of Ethiopia.

Here is the ambassador in his own words:

Gamal Abdel Nasser had ... asked whether a military alliance between Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia would not be in their common interest. "We drink of the same water," he said. Ethiopian Ambassador Melles Andom had replied bluntly, to the following effect: " You claim to be an Arab and to lead the Arab world but you interfere with the affairs of your Arab neighbours and have tried to cause trouble for the governments of Iraq, Libya, Lebanon and Sudan. We Ethiopians are not Arabs. We are Africans and black. We do not belong to your world although like you we drink the water of the Nile. You have tried to interfere in our affairs also and make trouble to Ethiopia. Secondly, you may have military objectives. We do not know exactly what they may be but we have no confidence in the strength of your armed forces, and we are strongly against the Communists who arm you. For these reasons your proposal is unacceptable and we are not prepared to take it.

Googling in the internet one gets the impression that the Andom family was respected and admired by many of the peoples of the countries in the region. In Eritrea where their origin is, and in the Sudan where they are born and educated and in Ethiopia where they served the country at the higher echelons of power.

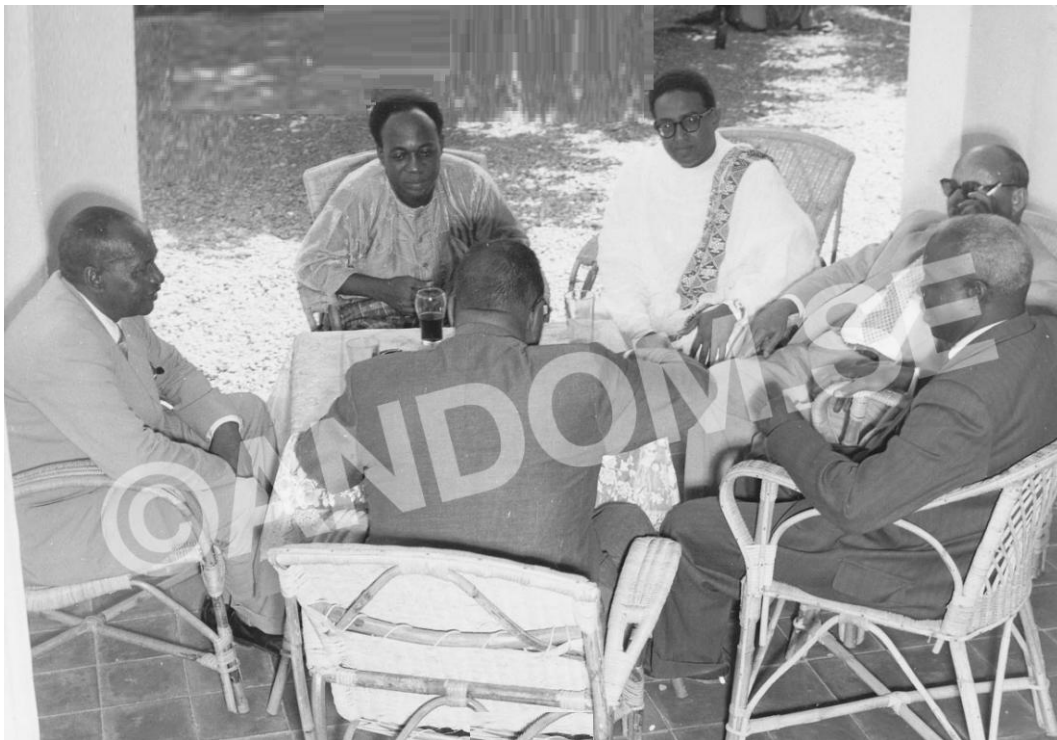
Ambassador Melles was a fascinating historical person and his life history in the world of diplomacy is well documented and preserved in the following link.

www.andom.se



(Courtesy of Andom.se)

Ambassador Melles presenting his credentials to the former President of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser



(Courtesy of Andom.se)

A snapshot of Ambassador Melles Andom with the former Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah



(Courtesy of Andom.se) A snap shot of Ambassador Melles Andom with some religious leaders



(Courtesy of Andom.se)
On the background is photo of Marshal Tito of the former Yugoslavia

Tsion Michael Andom: second eldest in the family



Wro. Tsion Andom has made a series of extensive interviews (4 parts) with DireTube.com and much of the information is obtained from there. I would recommend interested readers to listen the interviews.



source: www.DireTube.com

Personal data

Birth place: Khartoum, Sudan

Birth date: 1922

Current home: Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

Current position: Retired

Primary School: Coptic School, Khartoum; Evangelical School, Khartoum

Secondary school: Unity High School for Girls, Sudan, Khartoum

Primary work area: Ethiopian High Fashion Design and Business



Key Achievements:

First acclaimed designer, creator and merchant of modern Ethiopian fashion based on traditional hand-woven fabrics and styles, a business she maintained until her late 80's; fundraiser ('unlicensed beggar') for many charities from the 1940's through the 1960's, including the Red Cross, the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association, the Ethiopian National Association of the Blind, and Cheshire Homes

Life Story

Tsion Michael Andom, known to many as Mama Tsion, has been designing clothing, first for her dolls and then for herself, from the age of about 10, ultimately opening Tsion Tibeb, the first modern high Ethiopian fashion design firm at the age of 43, in 1965. She continued to run her business, using the beautiful Ethiopian hand-spun, hand-woven fabrics and hand-embroidery to create more modern clothing she sewed herself, until she was in her late 80's.



Courtesy of Diredube.com

The beauty of her creations was widely acclaimed, both in Ethiopia and abroad. Before opening her business, she spent nearly three decades raising money for charities in Ethiopia benefiting women, the disabled, and her beloved church. Though she grew up in Khartoum, Sudan, she returned to Ethiopia at her father's behest, along with her brothers, to help build and modernize her country and continued to do so under three successive regimes – Emperor Haile Selassie I's rule, the Mengistu Derg regime (when she survived a seven-year prison term), and now the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. She has seen enormous changes in Ethiopia in the 70 years she has lived here, in its people, its customs, and its built environment, for better and for worse, and hopes to see its people, especially its women, regain some of their fabled devotion to family life for the future of the country and its culture.

Born in 1922 in Sudan, Khartoum, Tsion was the second child of Michael Andom and Gidey Kidanemariam; both her mother, who had been born in Tigrai, and her father had been educated through the fourth grade (the highest grade offered at the time) in the Swedish Lutheran Missionary School in Asmara, Eritrea. Tsion's father had fled to Sudan from Eritrea in his teens to further his education. Once his schooling was complete, by then an accomplished linguist fluent in five languages, her father found employment first in the British Intelligence Service and then as Chief Clerk of the Palace for the British Governor of Sudan, Sir John Maffey. Her father was a strong, strict and honest man, referred to as the Black Lion, and his children never dared to question him. Tsion's mother, a devout woman who taught Bible studies, well-educated for her time, was an accomplished housewife. She raised her five children, three boys and two girls, with a firm and devoutly religious hand, with prayers and singing of hymns morning and evening. Her mother was herself

a tailor, making all of the clothes for the family, and Tsion began early to draw designs for clothes and embroidery on the tablecloth at home and then work on them; she made clothes first for her dolls and then for herself. Even then, she used to dream about the designs she would make while she slept. She still has the first Singer sewing machine her father gave her when she was 12 years old.

The children went to private schools in Khartoum, along with other international children from Egyptian, Armenian, Italian and British families; Tsion began her schooling at the Egyptian Coptic School and moved to the new Evangelical School in the third grade, progressing to the only high school for girls, Unity High School for Girls, run by British headmistresses. Her first language was Arabic and her second English. After she finished high school at the age of 16, she went to a private training program in home economics, taught in Arabic. Tsion remembers the Sudanese people with great fondness; though her family was foreign, her father's position was high and she and her siblings went to private schools, they never felt resentment from the Sudanese people, who treated them with kindness and love.

Tsion was married at the age of 16 in a marriage arranged by her parents, to a man who was a refugee from Ethiopia, who had been taken in by Tsion's father and sent to school (like many other Ethiopian refugees at the time). Though Tsion was not enthusiastic about marrying so young, her father, moved by grief over the death of her elder sister at age 16 from sunstroke while on a Girl Guide outing, was afraid he might lose her too and wanted her to have a family.



A snapshot of Wro. Tsion with her daughter. (source: Dire-tube)

A remarkable occurrence started the sequence of events that would eventually lead to Tsion and her brothers moving to Ethiopia to help build their country. When Sir John Maffey, the British Governor of Sudan, was invited to Ethiopia to attend the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930, he decided to ask Tsion's father, then the Chief Clerk at the Palace, to join him on the journey to Addis Ababa, probably to serve as an interpreter. Tsion appreciates the British Governor for this historic decision, since she would never have come to live in Ethiopia had he not made it. When Michael Andom was introduced to the emperor, the emperor asked him to come live in Ethiopia to help build the country; her father replied that he had an important job and a family of children to raise back in Sudan, but that when their schooling was complete, he would bring them to Ethiopia to serve their country. In 1940, when the emperor came to

Sudan on the way to leading his army to retake Ethiopia from the

Italians, her father fulfilled his promise and each of his children returned over the course of the next year to Ethiopia: her elder brothers Meles and Johannes fighting in the liberation forces (Meles entering through Eritrea and Johannes through Somalia), her youngest brother Aman accompanying the emperor by mule through Gojjam, and Tsion travelling to Addis with other refugee women.

In 1941, at the age of 19, Tsion had her first son and lived with her parents, her brothers and her son in Addis, happy to be in the midst of her family again; her husband had been posted to London as counsellor, but she stayed behind because of her young child and the outbreak of World War II; they were divorced a few years later, when she was pregnant with her second son. She says that the family lived simply, on the salaries the men in the family were earning, having come to Ethiopia with very little. She can remember giving away some of the dresses she had received in her wedding trousseau to others who had even less. She says that in the 1940's Ethiopia was very poor, unsophisticated, and relatively uncivilized. There were few significant buildings - neighbourhood children practiced their letters under a tree - and practices like regular bathing were unusual. More modern life came slowly to Ethiopia.

Not long after she arrived in Addis, Lady Barton, the wife of the last British ambassador to Ethiopia before the Italian occupation, arrived from England bringing presents from Tsion's husband for her and the baby and came to visit for dinner. The next morning, she appeared outside Tsion's home asking her to come out and help her raise

funds to start the Red Cross and a women's association. She brought two tins, one of which she wore around her own neck and one of which she hung around Tsion's neck so that she could beg. Completely at a loss as to what to do, Tsion went to the office of her brother Aman, then a captain in the army, and told him her predicament. He gave her a little money and took her to a few of his friends, launching her career for the next thirty years as "the unlicensed beggar". She became very well-known as the beggar girl, going to men's offices and to shops, asking for funds to help various worthy causes. She muses that it must have been very hard for her to learn to do this, since she was entirely unused to talking with men or going out with them at all. But she found that she was in fact very good at it, since she wasn't asking for herself but for a cause that needed attention. Tsion laughs that one makes many mistakes trying to change things for the better. At one point, she began teaching home-making as the directress of the Princess Tenagnework School for Women, because she felt it was important for women to learn to take care of their homes and children, believing that home and family were the foundation for the country's future. But the girls coming to the school really wanted to learn secretarial skills and hoped that she, as a well-dressed English-speaking person, would be teaching them typing and shorthand; but what she knew was home-making. Finally she announced on Ethiopian Radio that she was teaching only home-making and not secretarial skills – and the next day the number of girls who showed up for her class had fallen to 100 from the 400 – 500 that had been coming before.

In 1950, Tsion remarried and went to London with her husband who was a counsellor there, and later an ambassador. It was during this period that she was confronted by the Indian Commissioner's wife

while attending a function at Buckingham Palace in 1954. She had dressed for the occasion in a dress she had made herself, in a satin and lace Victorian style; the Indian woman complimented her but then asked if she didn't have a national dress. She and all of the Indian women were wearing saris. It was that comment that started Tsion thinking about how to make clothing that really celebrated Ethiopian traditional fabrics and design.

Returning to Ethiopia, she began working on a new kind of design, starting quietly in her home since she had been brought up to believe that engaging in business was not shameful. But encouraged by friends and clients, she officially opened her business, Tsion Tibeb, in 1965. By 1965, her children were all older: her two sons had finished college abroad, her daughter was in high school.

She loved her work. She hired fifty weavers who wove the fabrics for her dresses by hand and lived in the large compound she rented; every week they would slaughter a lamb and have lunch together. She designed each item of clothing herself, dreaming of the designs as she slept; the fabrics were custom-woven, the embroidery created by men she hired to work her designs, and she herself sewed each piece. She worked long hours and was a perfectionist about everything she made – a quality she thinks she inherited from her father.

Her trademark was beautiful colourful tibeb, (embroidered borders), matched on the dresses and the accompanying shawls (shamma). She pioneered cultural wedding gowns with the traditional capes (kabas) made in colours, rather than the traditional black, and

beautifully decorated. Her designs, shown in fashion shows at the

Hilton Hotel, Africa Hall, the university, the municipality and several clubs, became very popular. Many of the well-to-do women of the time, royalty included, came to her for their special dresses; because she was constantly working, they would come to her shop to see her. She is deeply proud that she was able to preserve and build appreciation for the national dress and design traditions.

She ran her business from 1965 to 1976, when she was imprisoned by the Derg. Her younger brother, General Aman Andom, had been President of Ethiopia for the first three months after the overthrow of the emperor (against her wish and advice); he was like a father to many of the soldiers who had supported the revolution because he had taught them and he felt he owed it to them to help lead them. But, refusing to go along with some of the policies advocated by the eventual dictator Colonel Mengistu, he was killed in a shootout at his home by Mengistu's supporters. He had been popular in Ethiopia, in the public and with the army, and very close to Tsion, who tried fiercely to protect him during his three months as President, making him take all his meals at her home. Following his death, many people came to Tsion's house to talk with her, saying that she was not afraid of anyone or anything; but the regime feared that she would attract a following or would go abroad and condemn the Derg regime. She had no such intention – still committed to building her country, and more importantly, a strong Christian with an unshakable belief in God's will, she felt that what was happening was what God wanted for Ethiopia for His own reasons and she should accept it. Nevertheless, the Derg regime imprisoned her in 1976, more than a year after her brother's death.

In prison, she was told she should work, but she refused to do

anything she didn't want to on someone else's order. She occupied herself making clothes for the children that were born and grew up in prison, using whatever pieces of cloth could be found to cut and sew clothes for them. She worked with the prisoners who were weaving baskets; though they were experienced basket-makers, she helped them add color and design to their work. They continued to use her designs after she left and she maintains a collection of basketry created by prison inmates, some donated by friends from the royal family who remained in prison after she was released.

Upon her release in 1982, she was invited to celebratory dinners at embassies in Addis; but after she had attended the first two, she was informed by the Derg regime that they didn't want her to go to any embassies; she stopped going out, throwing herself again into her work which, as always, gave her enormous satisfaction. She reopened her business and continued to work on her creations until well into her 80's, completing her last commissioned dresses in 2011, when she was 88.



Today, now 90 years old in 2013, she continues to lead an active life

- still driving her own car and doing much of her own household work - cleaning her house, polishing her pots and pans, washing her clothing, recycling fabrics and embroideries from up to 80 years ago because they're still wonderful - the same perfectionist she always was. She has a lot to say to today's Ethiopians - about the kind of life Ethiopians lived 70 years ago; about how some of the changes since then have been good and some bad; about how meaningful it is to work for free for your country; about the changes good and bad in the positions of men and women; about the dangers of falsifying history; and about all of our responsibility for the future of the country, its people and its culture.

Reflecting on her life thus far, Mama Tsion is proud that she gave so much of her time and energy working as a volunteer for her people, fundraising and teaching. And she is truly gratified that she has been able to help make sure that the Ethiopian national dress is still loved and treasured - updated, to be sure, but its loveliness preserved and celebrated. Mama Tsion has loved her work and feels blessed by God to have been able to do it, even without formal design training.

She very much hopes that today's girls rediscover the beauty of traditional Ethiopian dress. In part, she is dismayed that many wear immodest clothing that reveals too much of their bodies, even in church; and in part she wants young Ethiopian women to be proud of their own clean, pure, traditional clothing, rather than aping western fashion trends.

Her current dream is to create a home for elders on land she hopes to receive from the government, to be named after her family, the

Andom's. In her vision, she and her friends would live in this community; she'd have a big house and her friends would pay to live there, while she managed the premises. Small rooms would be included for about 20 poor elders, who could live rent-free but make coffee, kollo and other products to sell to the paying renters. She hesitates to go back to her old calling - "unlicensed beggar" - to raise the money, because this time it would be partly for herself, though she knows people would support her. These days she feels blessed many times over, because wherever she goes, people offer her love and help; it feels as if the whole town is Mama Tsion's family. She feels that she loves God and in turn people love her; for that she thanks God.

When she thinks about the next generation, Mama Tsion is happy that women's lives are not as tough as they used to be, dominated by men who were often harsh to the women around them. But she feels that the balance may have gone too far - that men are becoming weak and women losing the benefit of the strength that men have to offer. Most important, she worries that in the struggle for equality between men and women, with both men and women in the office, families and children will lose the attention and care that is necessary for building a strong culture, a strong race, a strong country. That, she feels, would be sad. In trying to win, we would lose the most important thing.

Source: <http://www.ethiopianwomenunleashed.org>

Words of appreciation from admirers of Wro. Tsion Andom

Do not destroy the sanctified nation that our holy fathers and sacred mothers like Adey

<p>Tsion preserved for us through much sacrifice, love, wisdom, pride, integrity and grace!</p> <p>ZERUBABEL NEGASH</p>
<p>Long life to beloved Etye Tsion, Star of art, grace and beauty. Lady of freedom, dignity, tolerance and generosity. Angel of endless devotion to God. May your biggest dream come true.</p> <p>Margherita Wolde</p>
<p><i>Emama Tsion Andom is our Role Model!</i></p> <p>As young woman and a mother of two girls I admire Emama Tsion Andom for her role model to me and many Ethiopian women. I give thanks to god for giving her the talent and excellent fruitful age I and many Ethiopians wishing her good health and wisdom for many years to come. We love you Emama Tsion for your artistic accomplishment.</p> <p>I am also giving my thanks to Dire Tube.com for posting her interview to the world. Please continue your excellent work to bring our role model to our attention. God bless</p> <p>.Yours, Almaz M. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia</p>
<p>Tsion Andom wow, what a great women, she makes sense in all aspects.</p> <p>birhan2006</p>
<p>Tsion Tekle She is really an amazing woman, she is great and what a life lesson from her, let God bless her in the rest of her years too.</p>
<p>Diana</p> <p>Lady Tsion Andom You are one in a million very much talented dedicated to improve customs. I learn so much from your experience. You are right we have a unique tradition should be proud.</p>
<p>Frehiwot Kidane · Semaetat Secondary School Asmara My sweet lady ever lovely mama Tsion edme ystsh.</p>
<p>Farida Deglel amazing lady I love her</p>

Source: <http://ethiopianunitydiasporaforum.com>

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End of life: Tragic but with pride

The Decisive Meeting of Hidar 14, 1967 EC

On this fateful day, an urgent meeting was called. The compound was teeming with activity. Soldiers with heavy and light weapons were everywhere. Officers and soldiers hitherto unseen were on location and crowding into the meeting hall. Seating positions were filled with delegates and soldiers standing against the wall. The meeting hall was over-crowded and all the delegates were apprehensive of what the agenda might be. In a little while, Shalekas Mengistu and Atnafu walked into the meeting and assumed their honorable positions on the podium. Mengistu was seated on the right side and Atnafu on the left. The usual middle chair of General Aman was absent this time, testifying to the end of the general's political life, the author tells us. Mengistu informed the invited delegates that today "we will be discussing some heavy issues" and this is why we have invited all members and "neus" dignitaries from the provinces to give us their voices. Saddened and angered at the same time and gesturing passionately with his hands, Mengistu said "gobez" matters are taking a turn for the worst. The man we had trusted and decided should lead us, has stopped coming to his office claiming sickness. Soon we discovered that, rather than sickness, his position was borne of anger at us. Despite the various emissaries of peace we have sent to him, he adamantly refused to work with us. In fact, he started agitating against us (the Derg) with certain officers in the army. The details of his conspiracy have fallen onto our hands. Today's urgent meeting is about how we are going to deal with this troublesome matter and solve it once and for all.

Most of the Derg members in the hall had limited knowledge that the contradiction between the general and Mengistu had reached to this point and decided to keep quite. Others decided that a peaceful solution must be sought to avoid the impending danger. Yet others thought that the general must be imprisoned and his conspiratorial activities exposed to the public. Still, a lot of the "neus Derg" members did not accept Mengistu's allegations about the general's treachery and proposed to go to the general's house and talk to him once again. At this point Mengistu's was infuriated, his lips and cheeks started quivering in fury. I do not know why you doubt and fail to believe what we just reported? He wanted to know. "Everything is backed up by concrete evidence and we can present to you the detailed information if necessary." Mengistu was confident in his demeanor and utterances. Now, Colonel Tesfaye Wolde-Selassie has something to present to you, so listen carefully and form your own opinions on the issue. Tesfaye moved to the podium carrying his tape recorder and the incriminating information. What you are going to listen to is the phone conversation between generals Aman and Gizaw Belayneh. Since we have other incriminating communications like this, with other generals and military commanders, we will present them in due course if necessary.

On tape, general Gizaw makes a call to general Aman and after the necessary greetings, Gizaw pleads with him to change his mind and return to duty. Who am I going to work with? Inquired Aman. How can we lead a country with ordinary soldiers and sergeants? He continued. Since there is an idea I have proposed, unless they accept it (a 14 man junta led by Aman) I am not willing to work with them, Aman thought. When asked more about this idea, the general elaborates on the idea of dismissing the Derg and creating a military Council (junta) of more educated and capable military leaders under his command. General Gizaw explains the impossibility of Aman's ideas for the wellbeing of movement according to Mengistu. Anyway,

General Gizaw advises him to return to duty and to try improving the current situation under his leadership. The angered general Aman rejoins "you guys have failed to listen to what I am telling you. Henceforth I am no longer able to work with these rabbles that have "not wiped their asses!" yet. At this point Colonel Tesfaye stopped the tape and returned to his seat. The silence in the hall erupted into angry murmurs and the members were visibly livid at the general's insulting remarks, writes the author. Shaleka Atnafu was biting his lips in anger and Mengistu was surveying the members' reaction. He had successfully stalked their violent instincts now self-evident throughout the hall. The notion of "not wiping their asses" exemplifies the level of contempt he held for Derg members. This language had infuriated all present in the hall. In Caesar's language, "the die was cast" henceforth.

The Final Solution

Major Mengistu appeared both saddened and angered by the feelings stirred in the hall and preceded to building his case against the general. "The general's plan is rather far-reaching and dangerous." Mengistu told the soldiers about the 14 man "junta" the general had shared with him. He underscored his refusal to accept this notion. Failing to convince him, the general had begun conspiring to hatch a coup d'état with other high-ranking officers. His seditious plan was to release the emperor's ministers and bring them back to power. All this after our people had suffered and sacrificed for centuries to get rid of them. We have the evidence in our hands and we can present it to you, bellowed the outraged Mengistu. Again the somberness in the hall erupted in rage and surprise at what they had just heard. Fear, anxiety and alarm began to invade everybody's mind. Feeling the fuming



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Handwritten signature and stamp

The signed order by Mengistu Hailemariam to kill
Source: <http://www.yatewid.com/hselasse%20hida ... 201967.htm>

mood of the soldiers, Mengistu made his pitch “we are in a treacherous state of affairs in any case; the soldiers are forever complaining that we are merely feeding the jailed emperor’s ministers...”

Now assured, certain Derg members started making speeches about eliminating those who have forever oppressed the Ethiopian people. Another voice added that if we don’t strike now, they will finish us off. We need to take decisive action to curtail this dangerous movement against us. The decision was leaning towards needing to take decisive action against the imprisoned ministers. The author thinks that Mengistu could have told the anxious soldiers that this issue is not in our agenda today, and that we will certainly discuss it at an appropriate time in the near future. Instead, he moved towards soliciting opinions in favor of the final solution, as it were. He suggested that we (the Derg) can end this rising and imminent danger against us only by taking fast and decisive action against the culprits. Therefore we must unleash the final solution against some of these imprisoned officials by a simple majority vote opined Mengistu. Fearful, nobody objected this deadly motion, except for Shaleka Berhanu Bayeh who counseled that that the matter should better be resolved by legal means. No one supported Major Bayeh (head of the Derg’s legal committee)! The soldiers were ordered not to leave the compound to go home, and the meeting was adjourned for lunch. All members were immersed in fear and foreboding. The Derg’s membership had surrendered to Mengistu’s will and the gates of hell were opened wide open.

Now, it was time to take stock. Those of you supporting the death of certain members of the old order, raise your hands, demanded Mengistu. Noticing that the “punishable by death” sentiment was in the majority, Mengistu ordered Shaleka Getachew Shibeshi to bring the list of the prisoners. At this

moment, he announced that general Aman had failed to surrender and that his house is surrounded. He quickly ordered Colonel Daniel Asfaw to see to his surrender or dismissal-elimination. It was decided that each prisoner's fate would be decided after lunch.

After lunch, Mengistu came to the hall with his thick file of the prisoners. He said, continuing on the pre-lunch decision, we will now go through their names and known crimes and decide by a simple majority. First was the name of former PM Aklilu Habte Wold, and the endless number of "crimes" he had allegedly committed. Those who want him dead raise your hands and Mengistu placed a mark of death beside his name. 17 of those sentenced to death in this way were generals in rank. In this mode, over 250 names were read and out of these 53 were sentenced to die, including some members of the rebellious "neus Dergs."

Before the death sentences were handed down, Colonel Daniel walked in to announce the suicide of Aman to a smiling Mengistu. The latter announced that the general had started resisting arrest and that his house was crushed by a tank and the general had committed suicide. On this note, the soldiers were dismissed for a break until 10:00 PM. Upon return to the hall four commanders were called in to bear witness the Derg's decisive actions. They were generals Jagamma Kello, Gizaw Belayneh, Tadesse Gabre, Worku Mekonnen. They leave the meeting.



A bunch of soldiers were ordered by Mengistu to arrest General Aman

At midnight, Shaleka Getachew Shibeshi came into the meeting hall to explain how effectively the summary executions of former officials had been carried out. With this diabolical execution, the old order was disintegrating. The meeting of this long night lasted until 1:00 AM. A statement of the execution was prepared to be read the following day, accompanied by

“Yefiyel Wotette!” The confused, exhausted and morally bloodied soldiers were ordered to monitor public opinion the following day and dismissed for the night. That fateful decision reverberates into post Derg times.

The author further alleges that even though there might have been some Derg officials that may have wanted the execution of former officials, 80% of

the Derg would not have voted in favor of this dreadful decision, especially had it been presented formally and debated soberly, as it were. In other words, all these men were controlled by irrational circumstances and acted in a climate of fear, haste and anxiety. The "60" were executed by a simple majority vote given by, for the most part, outraged and anxious soldiers. It is clear to the author that all Derg members are legally and morally liable for this criminal summary execution of imprisoned officials; they all partook in it, as grand jury and judge. To some extent, they were all participants in this atrocious act and must accept common accountability for the consequences their decisions have wrought. For one, this criminal action cemented the violent power base of Mengistu, both within and outside the Derg, and initiated the process of mendacity, barbarity and arbitrariness in the use and abuse of state power in modern Ethiopia. The arbitrary use of repressive/deadly state power in resolving troublesome affairs of the state had become normalized, so to speak. This deliberate and ideologically buttressed extrajudicial bloodletting was the inauguration of the Derg 17 year dictatorship and many more crimes to follow.



General Aman resisted arrest and Mengistu used tank to destroy his home

General Aman died in a battle with troops sent to his home to arrest him. The actual cause of his death remains unclear, whether he was killed or committed suicide. That same night, the political prisoners that the Derg had marked for execution were taken from Menelik prison, where they had been held, to the Akaki Central Prison where they were executed and buried in a mass grave. "It appears that the general had outlived his usefulness," Bahru Zewde concludes, "and was in fact becoming an obstacle to the Derg's exercise of power."

The great Hero of all times



“ Rest in peace “

A wakeup call

Many countries in the world honor their heroes and commemorate them eternally by erecting statues, naming streets, parks, schools, universities and all sorts of institutions in their names. Eritrea has failed to remember its heroes in all spheres of life and fields including statesmanship, military, scholarships, arts, literature, religion, music and sports. It would be too long to list all the great Eritrean personalities from antiquity to the present. Even the heroes of the last 50 years who have not been recognized and honored are very many.

I believe many will agree with me that Eritrea has many amazing individuals in history who have done something unique to their country in the field of politics, culture, education, sport etc, which we need to remember them for what they have done. It is disheartening though not to see biography books of Eritreans in the library shelves. Lately I have decided to open a section in my website that will be dedicated to the biography of individual Eritreans from all walks of life in history (www.emnetu.com).

To start with I have randomly established a list of possible candidates. I therefore ask you all to put additional names to the list and return it to me. The list has to accommodate only individuals who have passed away. In other words we will concentrate only on post mortem biographies. I will update the list when I hear from you. The list will remain open all the time for additional names.

If you are positive about this idea and you have the time I would challenge you all to write biographical sketch or find individuals who can be interested to write a biography on any in the list. If you come across anyone who has access to information but not ready to write, you can ask him/her to supply the information to me in any format (paper, diskette, gramophone dish, cassette, videos, photographs etc) so that I can send it to the one who is interested to write.

The size of the file is not important at all. What is important is remembering them and trying to document their history before it disappears all together. The size will be determined only by the amount of information available on these individuals. Of course the individuals in the list must have done something positive to the cause of our country or to the well being of our people and our culture.

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