Eritrea’s Courageous Heroes

Our calendar holds 12 Months that hold great memories that change us in multiple ways. Each month has a special meaning towards everybody and shares a value that we have encountered. These months share essences that have a potent power towards human beings. Each one represents something special that is mystical and beyond what we see in the surface. For Eritreans there are two months that are exceptional. May and June. May has captured glorious moments. It is the month of independence, a month that heralded the victory, the reward of our determination. In the sum and presence of May we see the pleasure that we have earned which is liberation. As we celebrate in May we are reminded how we got to the freedom of May; while full of joy, because of the fact that what we have earned was long in coming and hard to get, we remind ourselves that this victory was never free; a precious price was paid for it and with pride and sadness we bow our heads to remember all those who paid for May.

Immediately after May comes June. Another month for others, but for us Eritreans it is a special month, a month with a deeper spiritual meaning. It is a month of remembering our fallen heroes. Those selfless and unselfish daughters and sons of Eritrea. Those great heroes that made the May victory a reality and all those that passed with courage and determination to safeguard the May victory. The month of June, but particularly June 20, is a memorial day for these brave souls. Yes it is the day when, more than any other moment of silence, we remember our brave daughters and sons, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and all fellow compatriots who liberated our country and defended our country with their priceless sacrifice. It is a day we renew our pledge to keep their legacy.

Hearing the stories of these brave souls tears me up; each one of them had a unique and brave stories. To me they are all like guardian angels. First they paid their lives so we can be free and remain free, and now they are watching over us to make sure the country they paid for is secure and prosperous. They had liberated us and allowed us to nurture our treasured Eritrea and to keep it growing in order to make it a better place for all Eritreans and to make it a good example to other African countries.

On June 20 we remember the strong essence and importance of that they have given us. During the month of June in general but on June 20 in particular we should pause to thank our dear fighters for the potent love they showed us and the price they paid for us. From 1961 to 1991 in the first phase and from 1991 to this very day, many brave Eritreans have paid enormous sacrifice on our behalf. From young to seasoned adults, from “yikalo” to “warsay”,thousands have sacrificed their lives to bring freedom and to defend it. They gave their lives for the sake of future generations. Nobody could have done what these brave sons and daughters of Eritrea did. They were always short of supplies: water, food, weapons and above all they had no support from the outside world. They were always outnumbered, outgunned, and there was no one to tell of their struggle. But they had what counted the most: vision, determination, selfless courage and the unshakable confidence in what they can do. No matter what circumstance that they were in, whether tired or wounded, they still had the determination to fight to the end. And for many as they were about to breath their last breath, their final words were: “Awet nHafash” (victory to the people). There were several trying moments that would make many a fighter give up, but not our heroes, the Eritrean fighters. Quitting and giving up was not in their dictionary or psyche.

One touching and heroic stories I saw in Eri-TV took place in the mountain/hill of Emba Bluh. It was in during a daytime battle. The leader of the EPLF unit at Emba Bluh had concluded that they could not control the mountain at that time and because daylight is coming and could be an open target for the enemy, they need to withdraw to the bottom of the hill. Two of the EPLF fighters did not hear the order of the leader to withdraw and they were left behind at Emba Bluh; alone amidst many enemy soldiers. Their names were Mokonen Taddesse and Jemil Hassen. Mokonen was wounded. He moved in the dark and Jemil heard it and asked “who are you?” Mokonen identified himself and Jemil told him to come to him where there was a secure spot. Mokonen replied that Jemil should come to him because he was wounded. Jemil encouraged Mokonen to come where he was because they would be more secure there. So Mokonen came to Jemil. Jemil was a veteran while Mokonen was a new trainee. Jemil said that there would be Ethiopian soldiers coming, so they would be outnumbered, nevertheless they should put a fight. After Jemil bandaged Mokonen’s wound, they decided to go up the hill. They saw some Ethiopians soldiers coming towards them and used a tent to disguise themselves as stones so when the Ethiopian soldiers came they did not find them and went on. They found twelve soldiers sleeping and they killed them. They kept going up and killed all the soldiers that they had found. It was a heroic act. Finally they took over the area of the mountain and called their leader but only the Ethiopian soldiers heard. They thought that they had probably captured some soldiers or took over the mountain so they went to fight them. The two tried to use the automatic guns but they were not working so they through the guns and bombed the enemy’s war material. Then they managed to be reunited with them. Unfortunately the two passed later in the war and sacrificed their lives to help liberate Eritrea. They were great heroes and were astounding people. These were the type of amazing acts that the Eritrean fighters were doing every day and it astonishes me every time I think about it. These historical acts showed how the EPLF fighters gave their all in order to liberate the country and how they understood the price of an independent Eritrea. They fought like unstoppable machines and finally liberated our country in 1991. It was a thirty-year war. Next followed the 1998-2000 war to defend Eritrea’s independence and the stories I hear of the heroic deeds of the younger generation, the warsay, is equally amazing. Stories of young people who braved waves after waves of an endless enemy attack yet the warsay fought with unparalleled determination and courage and defended Eritrea with unmatched heroism.

We are happy that we have a nation that is working together and excelling every minute. We are wasting no time in order to become a strong independent country full of young people with rich knowledge. But let’s always remember we are where we are now because of the sacrifices the freedom fighters in the ELF and EPLF fighters paid from 1961 to 1991 and what the Eritrean Defense Forces (the warsay) paid from 1991-2012 but particularly during the 1998-2000 Ethiopian war of invasion. These two generations of Eritreans have worked so hard and paid so dearly and in the end have managed to do the impossible.

Let’s take the opportunity of June 20 to thank our fallen heroes for what they have done. We owe these brave Eritreans so much. The one thing we can do, besides remembering them by lighting candles, is to renew our commitment and promise to keep the country going and to keep it independent, secure and prosperous. This way our heroes will never be forgotten and their legacy will live forever.

Awet Nahafash!

Eternal glory to our Martyrs   
 Dawit Ghebremedhin

June 20th 2012

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