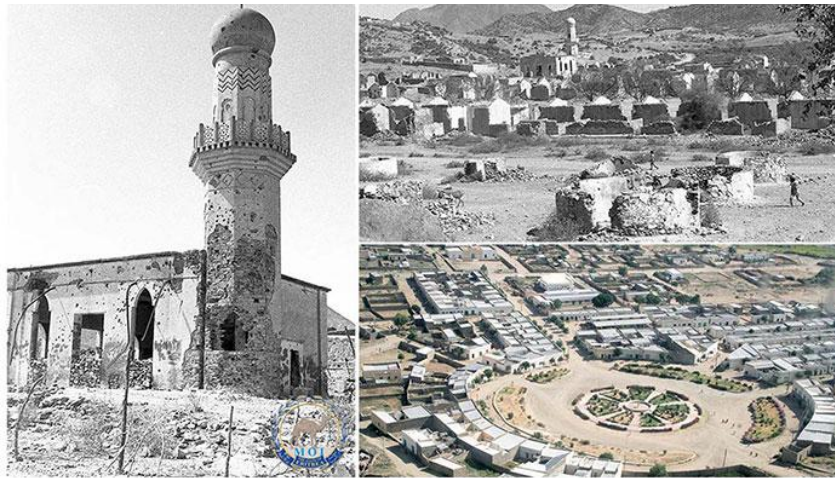


Nakfa: a symbol of resilience



By Simon Weldemichael

Liberated on 22nd March 1977 by the EPLF, Nakfa is the national symbol of Eritrea and a foundation for Eritrean nationalism. Eritreans commemorate the liberation of Nakfa with great pride and enthusiasm.

Nakfa was the center of gravity of the Eritrean revolution. There are few places and words that gained popularity during the thirty-year war of liberation. Nakfa, Sahel, Denden, perseverance, resilience, sacrifice, freedom fighters and EPLF are some of the words and places that had popularity in the struggle for the independence of Eritrea. One cannot visualize the profundity of the revolution that brought about radical transformation in the Eritrean society without referring to these places and concepts.

In the national narrative of Eritrea, Nakfa is a symbol of resilience and perseverance. During the long and bitter armed struggle, Nakfa proved to be the reliable sanctuary of Eritrean fighters. When the EPLF decided to liberate the land and people step by step, Nakfa became the first place to be liberated on 22nd March 1977, following a long siege and an all-out offensive by the freedom fighters. The initial attempt to liberate the town was undertaken in September 1976. At that battle,

the EPLF experienced positional warfare for the first time since its formation. The first surgical unit of the EPLF was also formed during the siege of Nakfa. Once Nakfa was liberated by the EPLF it was never relinquished, serving as a rear base of the front until Eritrea's liberation in 1991. Many attempts by the Ethiopian army to regain Nakfa were foiled.

The strategy of liberating the land and people, which began in Nakfa, saw the majority of the Eritrean towns and villages liberated, reaching the gates of Asmara in 1977. This was reversed following the EPLF's strategic withdrawal to systematically thwart the heavily armed Ethiopian army.

The EPLF forces that once launched their strategy of liberating Eritrea step by step by first liberating Nakfa in 1977 and reached the outskirts of Asmara had to return to Nakfa in 1979. The EPLF's resilience was demonstrated in its ability to attack while retreating. The battle of Elabered, battle of Ma'emide and the battle of Bogo are only a few examples among the major battles fought during the strategic withdrawal. In February 1979, the Nakfa front was created, marking the end of the strategic withdrawal. In the mountains of Nakfa, the fighters faced the new reality with courage and determination. Through their immense sacrifice and endurance they taught succeeding generations that it is the way you react to adversity, not the magnitude of the adversity that determines your destiny.

Eritrean freedom fighters never gave up. They fell a hundred times and stood up a hundred one times. Their greatest quality was not in never falling, but in rising every time they fell. Like a tiny seed with potent power to push through tough ground and become a mighty tree, the EPLF stationed at the mountains of Nakfa bred unimaginable strength to push back the largest army in Sub-Saharan Africa at the time. The tough conditions made the EPLF stronger and more resilient. Resilience and commitment helped the fighters to persevere and defend Nakfa all the way until Eritrea's liberation.

During the armed struggle, various types of bombs, including the cluster and napalm bombs, rained over Nakfa and the freedom fighters. But Nakfa and the freedom fighters developed a secret to resist and stand against the incredible suffering. They learned to bear the pain to gain and regain the liberation and dignity of Eritrea. The immense grief made Eritrean freedom fighters more resilient and empowered. In the face of global aggression, they did not become bitter; instead they became better. They discovered humility, dignity, and discipline within the mountains of Nakfa.

The freedom fighters fought for six months straight to liberate Nakfa in 1976, and after the strategic withdrawal in 1978 they fought for ten years to defend it. It was here in Nakfa that the fighters explored and expanded their fullest potential to become the David that defeated the Goliath. The fighters persevered with bravery, resilience, tenacity and endurance. Nakfa is a symbol of resilience, and to honor its significance for the success of the struggle for the liberation of Eritrea, Eritrea's currency is named after it.

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