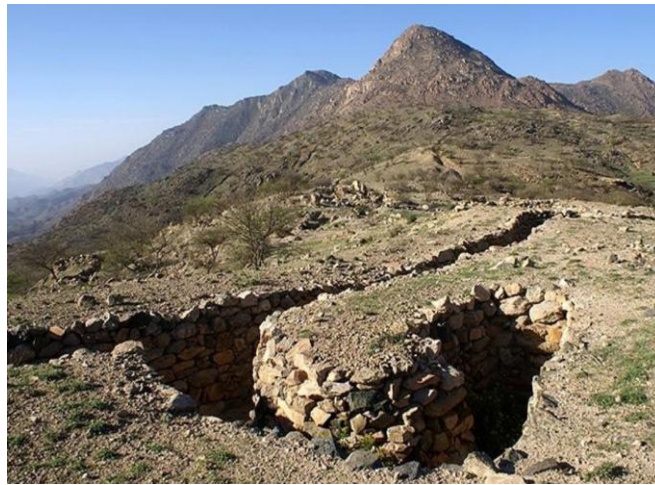


My Journey from Asmara to Nakfa



By: - Simon Weldemikael

On the eve of Independence Day, I travelled from Asmara to Nakfa. The journey was a travel through history, landscapes, and personal reflection. Nestled in Eritrea's northern highlands, Nakfa is a symbol of resilience, its mountainous terrain echoing stories of struggle and triumph. As the road winds northward, the Asmara plateau and its pleasant weather give way to rolling hills and the intense heat of the Sahel.

On this journey, I encountered not only diverse landscapes but also a celebration of identity and national pride by diverse ethnic groups. Dr. Tsegay Medin, my colleague, and I set out to do a routine job and left for Nakfa on the eve of Eritrea's Independence Day. The constant hum of the car's engine blended with the growing excitement in the air. Every town and village we passed was brimming with anticipation, preparing for the most significant day on the national calendar. The towns and villages were vibrant, with the sound of drums and patriotic songs echoing, and the streets adorned with flags fluttering in the wind. The atmosphere was charged with the unshakable spirit of Independence Day. In small roadside settlements, children waved flags and danced to traditional music, their joy reflecting the pride of a nation that had fought for its freedom.

In Keren, we took a brief rest before continuing our journey to Nakfa. As we left behind Keren's lively streets, the terrain gradually became rugged, a striking

reflection of the endurance required to reach Nakfa. The city holds the spirit of Eritrea's resistance, its mountains bearing witness to the sacrifices made during the long struggle for independence. As we approached our destination, the air carried an unspoken reverence, a reminder that the journey was not just about distance traveled, but about moving through the history, emotions, and unwavering determination and unity of the people.

Our journey to Nakfa, a city synonymous with resilience and sacrifice, took us not only through Eritrea's diverse landscapes but, more importantly, its rich cultural tapestry. Along the way, we encountered different ethnic groups, each celebrating the upcoming Independence Day in their unique way, yet all bound by the same spirit of national unity. During our journey, we came across the Bilen, Tigre, and Tigrinya ethnic groups celebrating Independence Day in the spirit of unity. Dressed in their colorful traditional attire, the Bilen community members were singing songs of freedom and unity, filling the air with vibrant energy. As we traveled deeper into the north, we met the Tigre ethnic group, whose rhythmic drumming and expressive dances reflected their strong heritage and unwavering national pride. The Independence Day celebrations reinforced the idea that Eritrea's strength is found in its diversity. Every stop brought new faces, demonstrating how Eritrea's unity is woven into its diversity.

The people's deep sense of national sentiment is unique. Independence Day is not simply an event but an affirmation of Eritrea's journey, its victories, and unwavering hope for the future. The celebrations we observed reflect the deep unity and shared national pride across Eritrea. Whether in the lively streets of Asmara, the historic town of Keren, or the rugged terrain leading to Nakfa, the emotions remained the same. The spirit of the people wasn't defined by geography but by something much greater – a profound sense of national identity. Every dance performed, every poem recited, every flag waved, and every song sung in different languages echoed the same sentiment: an expression of sincere gratitude for freedom and determination to honor those who made it possible. We only witness a different landscape, but the feeling of the people remains constant. In Afabet, we stopped for breakfast. There, we were received warmly by a unit of the Eritrean Defence Forces stationed in the town. Their hospitality was a poignant reminder of Eritrea's enduring spirit of kindness and service to others.

Over a freshly prepared breakfast, we had conversations. As we left Afabet, the terrain became harsher, the mountains more pronounced, and the history more tangible. The rocky escarpments and rugged valleys are vivid reminders of the endurance of the freedom fighters who defended these hills for years.

The mountains seemed to speak of perseverance. They are home to remnants of the Thirty-Year War of liberation. The burned-out tanks, abandoned trenches, and scattered bullet casings tell silent stories of battles that once raged, echoing the resilience and sacrifice of those who fought in these very landscapes. Driving past these sites reminds you that the spirit of Eritrea is deeply ingrained in the land itself.

By the time we arrived in Nakfa, the air felt heavier with meaning. The emotions we had felt in Asmara, Keren, Afabet, and many more settlements along the way remained unchanged. The pride and the national sentiment of Eritreans remain constant from Asmara's lively streets to Nakfa's historic mountains. The journey from Asmara to Nakfa on the eve of Independence Day has given me a clearer picture of how far Eritrea has come and how far it can go. As I arrived in Nakfa, the weight of history settled in. The mountains that once sheltered freedom fighters now stood as a testament to their victory. I witnessed on this journey that Eritrea's past, present, and future are deeply intertwined, and its people carry the unwavering spirit of a nation that will never falter.

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