J. of Modern African Studies, 40, 3 (2002), pp. 465–498.
DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X02003981 Printed in the United Kingdom

From Lash to Red Star: the pitfalls of counter-insurgency in Ethiopia, 1980–82

Gebru Tareke*

ABSTRACT

By 1980, Ethiopia was gripped in escalating civil wars. After a series of punitive expeditions had failed to suppress them, the government organised large-scale operations in the early 1980s against the insurgencies in the eastern and northern territories. The operations seemed to have been informed by what is called 'total strategy'. Although the emphasis was on the coercive component, the state also used psychological and economic incentives. The results were mixed. The eastern rebels were defeated more easily because they were factious. The northern campaign failed because of the rebels' staunchness and the terrain's unsuitability. In a cold test of wills, the Eritrean fighters not only held the offensive to a stalemate, but also went on to win total military victory. Same strategy, different outcomes: this suggests that no single counter-insurgency strategy can always have the same results as it is influenced by numerous factors that may vary from one place to another.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most intractable problems that confronted the Ethiopian military cabal that seized power in 1974 were the ethnonationalist insurgencies set off by the revolution. In addition to the war in Eritrea, which had been simmering since the early 1960s, ethnic rebellion sprouted in various regions, threatening the country's unity. The government, which had emerged enormously strengthened militarily in its war against Somalia in 1977–78, sought to suppress first one, then another revolt in a series of sweeps and campaigns. These efforts were relatively unsuccessful. Then in 1980 and 1982, respectively, it waged major offensives against the 'eastern irredentists' and 'northern secessionists'. Operation Lash, by and large, achieved its aims, but

* Professor of History, Hobart and William Smith Colleges. I wish to express my gratitude to the MacArthur Foundation and the Social Science Research Council for supporting research for this article, and to the Ethiopian government for allowing me access to the official documents cited herewith. I am thankful to my colleagues Claudette Columbus and Dunbar Moodie, to the anonymous referee for this journal and its editor for their constructive comments. I also thank the Cartography Lab, Geography Department of Syracuse University for preparing the maps for me.

Operation Red Star, which appears to have been inspired by the first, was a military disaster. This study addresses the difference between success and failure. The eastern insurgency was defeated because it was still in a state of infancy, was fragmented and was more vulnerable to external manipulation than the older, more cohesive and militarily more redoubtable Eritrean insurgency. Eritrea's terrain was also a decisive factor in the military equation.

The new counter-insurgency strategy that the state adapted to deal with its armed opponents in its eastern and northern peripheries was modelled on the 'total strategy', first enunciated by the French general André Beaufre. Beaufre (1965: 22–4) posited that since all warfare is a clash of two opposing wills, the side that causes the psychological or moral disintegration of the other would triumph. Algeria became his social laboratory, where, as a zonal commander, he succeeded in defeating the guerrilla fighters in the Constantine East area by combining ruthless military action, intensive psychological warfare, and economic and cultural reforms (Horne 1979: 166). Beaufre's theory was further elaborated by other military men who argued that, since revolutionary warfare is essentially the mobilisation of the rural masses, a counter-insurgency strategy could succeed by using the guerrillas' techniques and tactics of struggle in reverse. If the insurgents activate and rally the people by appealing to their economic and political discontent, then the counter-revolutionary strategist could win not by military might alone, but also by redressing the people's grievances and attending to their material needs. The American colonel John J. McCuen (1966: 28–9) had no problem if mass control entailed harsh action so long as it was done decisively and quickly. The former French officer, David Galula (1965), conceded that, although coercion may not be unavoidable, it ought to be minimised since it tends to alienate the populace without whose support victory is impossible.

Robert Taber (1970: 23–4, 26), on the other hand, has argued that, 'The counter-insurgent cannot win by imitating the insurgent', precisely because their tasks are diametrically opposed. 'They are dissimilar forces, fighting dissimilar wars, for disparate objectives.' The insurgent's objective is primarily political, but his adversary's main solution is military. Whereas the counter-insurgent seeks to preserve the status quo by offering palliatives for social ills, the insurgent works and fights to dismantle it forcibly. The counter-insurgent responds with even greater force that does not spare the civilian population, thereby alienating it. Still, Taber (*ibid.*: 63) admitted that the counter-

insurgent could win militarily in 'a revolutionary situation' but only by localising the suppression campaign.

Although the principles of guerrilla warfare are basically the same, their effectiveness is variable due to the immense variation in local conditions. Similarly, whether localised or sweeping, the outcomes of counter-insurgent warfare are bound to differ simply because no two social movements are alike. In fact, as our study reveals, even within the same country, two revolts occurring simultaneously may have contradictory outcomes. The divergent fortunes or misfortunes of guerrilla movements in the modern world suggest that no counter-insurgency strategy could predictably have the same results in all places and at all times. Insurgencies differ in their social and historical origins, in the extent of their social base, in their organisational and leadership capabilities, in their ideological commitment, in the elan and discipline of their armed men and women. Whether a counter-insurgency campaign succeeds or fails thus depends on a wide range of factors: the social and cultural milieu, the stage of the armed struggle, the ratio between soldiers and guerrillas, the distribution of armaments, the extent of domestic and foreign support or opposition to the respective warring parties, the demographic and topographical configuration, and whether the insurgency is against a native or foreign government (see Clapham 1998: 1–18).

It can fairly be assumed that Ethiopian strategists and tacticians were, to varying degrees, influenced by the above theoreticians. Their military response to the insurgents was buttressed by administrative and economic reforms as well as by psychological warfare (propaganda and indoctrination). The two suppression campaigns were also fairly localised. Nevertheless, the results were dissimilar, because the insurgencies were not identical. The Eritrean movement had grown into a coherent organisation with a well-trained and highly disciplined army able to marshal regular units backed by heavy weaponry, while the eastern uprising comprised many armed, quarrelsome groups with divergent goals and varying military effectiveness. Yet the government mistakenly concluded from its successful crusade in the east that its strategy could bear the same fruit elsewhere in the country. The leaders had an exaggerated vision of their own military capabilities, which often led to a devaluation of their opponents. In Eritrea, miscalculation led to failure and a staggering sacrifice of human beings and material.

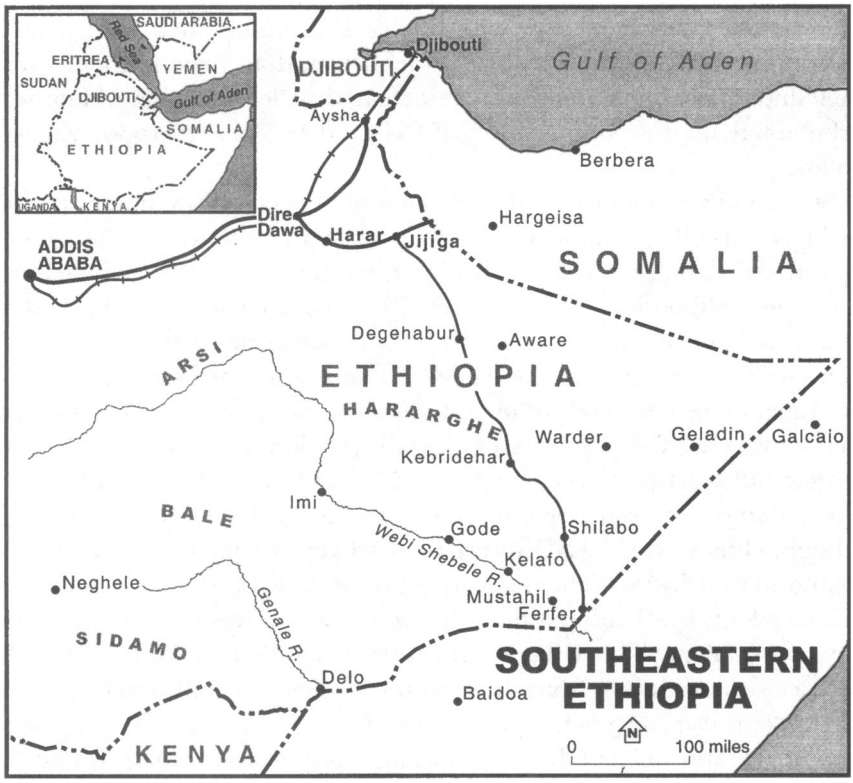
Red Star was the largest military operation carried out by the regime and marked the apogee of the Eritrean war. Its failure was a turning point in the armed conflict that would eventually determine the

physiognomy of the Ethiopian state. It was a momentous event in the country's politico-military history. Nevertheless, it has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. The intention of this essay is to eliminate that lacuna. Its focus is Operation Red Star which was larger in scope and scale, more bloody, and had a far greater impact than Lash. The encapsulated story of Lash will be sufficient to reveal the core factors that led to the dissimilar outcomes. A detailed account of the critical battle for Nakfa, the nucleus of the Eritrean resistance, is provided in order to show the scope and intensity of the conflict, the enormous sacrifices the national army made to uphold the country's political unity, and how its valiant efforts were thwarted by an equally determined and resilient foe who combined guerrilla and conventional tactics to resist and ultimately win. The narrative is heavily based on the Ethiopian military archives and therefore inevitably presents the story from that side.[1] But this is all the more needed since almost all the available accounts of the war see it from the viewpoint of the Eritrean struggle.

OPERATION LASH

Lash was a military operation executed in eastern Ethiopia near the middle of 1980. It had two intertwined goals: as the ring-worm (*lash*) eats away the hair of the human head, so would the army exterminate the insurgents operating in the southeastern parts of the country. Concomitantly, it would restore national sovereignty over the whole of the Ogaden by expelling the Somali army from the territory, both in about three months (Merid 1980). The Somalis were expelled and the insurgents defeated, though not entirely eliminated, almost right on schedule.

Southeastern Ethiopia had been in turmoil since the mid-1970s. Espousing a melange of ideas and objectives, ethnic-based armed groups fought the state from their sanctuaries, which they called 'liberated areas', in the provinces of Hararghe, Bale, Sidamo and Arsi. At one time or another, there were six political organisations whose total fighting force was estimated at between 26,000 and 30,000. The Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF) had the lion's share with about 18,000 men; two-thirds of these belonged to the older WSLF whose history antedates the revolution. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which began military operations in Hararghe in 1976, probably had 5,000–6,000 fighters (see Markakis 1987, 222–32, 262–4). Its offshoot, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), fought with



Map 1 Southeastern Ethiopia

fewer than half of that. The Sidama Liberation Front (SLF) and the Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Struggle (Echat) were the smallest, their combined force barely exceeding 1,000. These organisations operated in close proximity, four of them competing for the same turf, peoples and resources. By claiming 'Western Somalia', comprising about one third of Ethiopia and incorporating a good part of the territories claimed by SALF and the Oromo organisations, the WSLF inevitably clashed with all three. The territorial conflicts were exacerbated by the groups' divergent goals and ideals, which ranged from autonomy to independence and from socialism to Islamism.

From February 1979 the Ethiopian army executed several offensives in the four provinces, dealing a death blow to the weaker SLF and Echat. Riven with internal strife, its relationship to the Somali state ambivalent, SALF also atrophied under the military's onslaught. The bigger organisations were harder to beat. When attacked, the guerrillas

would simply slip away or merge into the populace and then return as soon as the offensives were withdrawn. Preventing their return and regrouping proved to be a more difficult task than driving them from their hideouts. They could not be defeated as long as they remained submerged in the population (MOND n.d.; Wubshet 1980; Zeleke 1980).

So, the government introduced a double-edged policy that came to be known as villagisation. Its aim was to isolate and destroy the rebels and at the same time resettle displaced peasants. Rural people helped the rebels, willingly or under duress, by providing sustenance, shelter and intelligence information. By reconcentrating widely scattered households in larger and controlled villages, the state sought to deny the rebels access to food, other supplies and manpower. The province that experienced the most extensive villagisation in 1979 was Bale, the largest but least populated region, with barely a million people. Arsi and Sidamo were right behind. The relocated villagers were promised schools, clinics, water wells and roads. Delivery varied from one village to another. Other settlements were set up in Bale and Arsi for peasants displaced by the Ethiopia-Somalia war and by the establishment of new state farms. The villages and settlements were guarded by self-defence squads drawn from the peasants themselves and indoctrinated by an enthusiastic coterie of cadres. People's mobility was closely monitored and only under extenuating circumstances could an adult person stay away overnight. As access to these fortified villages became more and more difficult, the insurgents largely limited their activities to Hararghe, which as yet had witnessed little villagisation. The army's combat zone had shrunk. It must be emphasised that villagisation, which the government pursued with such efficacy, was merely a mechanism for securing physical control over the peasantry; it offered few compensating benefits for the villagers. The government's success was primarily a military victory, even though it relied to some extent on Beaufre's strategy of psychological warfare and economic reform.

The state also used proxies to fight its domestic and external enemies. In 1979 some former officers of the Somali army formed the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), which sought to overthrow the Siyad Barre regime in Mogadishu. The Ethiopian government willingly provided them with a rear base as well as substantial arms and logistics. The SSDF, which drew its support almost exclusively from the Mijerteen, the major clan in the northeast of Somalia, began hitting at strategic installations and military posts, as it aided the Ethiopian army in hunting down the WSLF.

Operation Lash was launched against this backdrop. Under the supervision of the chief of staff, Brigadier-General Merid Negussie, the Ministry of National Defence (MOND) mapped out a four-stage strategy to achieve victory. The Operation was directed by Brigadier-General Demissie Bulto, commander of the First Revolutionary Army and an officer with a well-merited reputation for strategic vision, integrity, discipline and decisiveness. These qualities had earned him the admiration and devotion of his staff and troops, who in turn fought with high motivation and determination. Demissie allowed his field commanders sufficient freedom of action while demanding full accountability. This was a carefully calibrated response to a complicated situation which proved to be extremely effective.

The offensive began on 28 August 1980. Six divisions with about 60,000 troops were deployed against the insurgents, with the WSLF as the main target. They were supported by the two divisions of the Southern Command, the 3rd Fighter Regiment of the Air Force at Dire Dawa, thousands of peasant militia, and the Cuban mechanised brigades at Jijiga. The cornerstones of the strategy were envelopment, surprise, speed and hot pursuit. Tactically, the operation was broken down into several localised campaigns with the aim of encircling, dispersing and liquidating the rebels. After stationing troops near the border to block suspected entry and exit points, the mobilised forces combed the area by moving in multiple columns supported by armour and helicopters. The rebels relinquished ground without much resistance; the already weakened SALF disintegrated, the WSLF withdrew to northern Somalia, and the OLF abandoned the area by shifting its forces to the southwest of the country, a process it had begun in the preceding year. Some units were subsequently stationed at strategic points to guard the army's rear, protect and win the confidence of the people, and re-establish state authority through physical control, social programmes, and propaganda. Then between 20 September and 19 November, the army relentlessly attacked, pushed and pursued the rebels, moving as far as Gode, Kebridehar and Warder. Again, it met little resistance because the guerrillas vacated the area by crossing over into Somalia.

In the final phase, the army 'cleared' the remaining parts of the Ogaden, setting the stage for the assault on the Somali troops occupying Ethiopian territory. On 22 November 1980, it opened its offensive from Warder, Kebridehar and Gode with great coordination and high morale, accomplishing its mission by 3 December: the Ogaden was freed from foreign occupation; Ethiopian casualties were

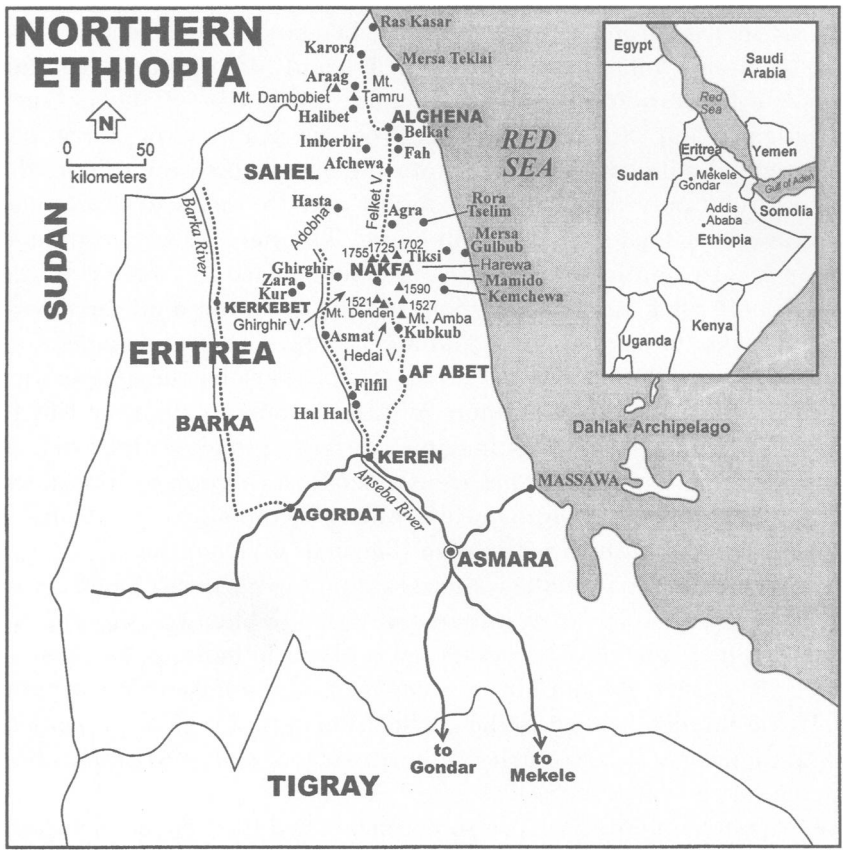
fewer than 2,000 (MOND 1981a). The chief of staff buoyantly declared, 'From now on we shall lead events, not be led by them ... We have achieved our goals at a minimal cost ... Never again will a foreign enemy or any other with ill intentions toward us set foot on Ethiopian soil ... ' (Merid 1979). Even though some work remained ahead, the government's claim of victory was justified, because the Somali invaders were expelled and the rebels were never able to reconstitute themselves. Only the IFLO outlived the regime. Its astonishing survival was mainly due to the fact that its men were 'roving rebels', much akin to ordinary bandits. Convinced of its victory, the state transferred more than 17,000 troops (later raised to 24,000) to the Northern Front to participate in the next and larger offensive. They would find the Eritrean insurgents more tenacious and the terrain of operation more strenuous.

OPERATION RED STAR

> This army is paying the ultimate sacrifice in blood and life to fight these traitorous mercenaries and the reactionary forces behind them. It does so not for material benefits but for the liberation of the Eritrean masses from the clutches of the bandits, for the defence of the revolution of the Ethiopian peoples, and for freedom, glory and history. From now on no mercy shall be shown to these pitiful dregs of history who treacherously continue to attack the army from the back directly or indirectly. (MOND 1982b)

Mengistu Haile-Mariam, Ethiopia's strongman, made this inauspicious statement on 25 January 1981, when Operation Red Star, or the Red Star Multifaceted Revolutionary Campaign, was announced.[2] The campaign had a dual purpose: to end the insurgency in Eritrea militarily, and to rehabilitate the provincial society economically, politically and culturally. It was an all-front assault on the Eritrean nationalist resistance, even though the military aspect gained primacy eventually. The motto became military victory first and then civic action. In the end neither aim was achieved.

Eritrea was the millstone around Mengistu's neck. In addition to the primary military objective of liquidating the Eritrean resistance, his government hoped to achieve a range of political and psychological objectives. First, Mengistu's prestige as a patriotic leader had risen sharply following Ethiopia's victory against Somalia. Another victory against the Eritrean insurgents would have further bolstered his nationalist credentials. Second, an end to the costly war in the north would have released valuable resources for building the Socialist



Map 2 Northern Ethiopia

Utopia that his regime envisaged. Third, it was hoped that a triumph in Eritrea would convince the rebels' supporters in the Middle East that Eritrea was as Ethiopian as Syria or Iraq was Arab. Further, it was believed that such a victory would not only have led to the rallying of the Eritrean people behind the regime in Addis Ababa, but also to the elimination of insurgents in adjacent provinces. Military failure shattered those hopes and objectives. Far from undermining the Eritrean will to resist, the failed operation reinforced it by causing the people to rally behind the insurgents in an upsurge of nationalist fervour. Red Star was a personal and political blow to Ethiopia's dictator. Both the army and the regime were also discredited.

It was the twentieth year of the Eritrean insurgency when the multifaceted campaign was inaugurated. During the two decades of its existence the nationalist movement had witnessed severe fluctuations in

its fortunes. Ignited in 1961, it contributed to the fall of the imperial regime in 1974 from which it, in turn, benefited, albeit temporarily. The Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the splinter Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) took advantage of the political turbulence and Somalia's invasion of the country to carry out coordinated military offensives, capturing most of the province. By the end of 1977 only Asmara (the capital) and the ports of Assab and Massawa remained in government hands. The victories were transient, however. In mid-1978 the government opened a three-pronged counter-offensive and in barely four months recaptured all the towns, except Nakfa in Sahel district, and much of the countryside where the bulk of the population lived. It was a grave setback for the nationalists. Militarily, the ELF suffered more in these encounters than the EPLF, which preserved its forces by making a faster 'strategic withdrawal' to the mountain redoubt of Sahel around Nakfa, a garrison town situated on a high plateau. The fronts, which otherwise remained mistrustful of each other, established a defensive line that stretched for about 400 kilometres from Barka in the western lowlands to northeast Sahel across Nakfa. The Ethiopian army initiated three major offensives in 1979. All were repelled. The next two years saw a hiatus in fighting. In 1980, as described earlier, the military was engaged on the Eastern Front; and 1981 was largely devoted to the pacification of that region, to political work and economic reconstruction in Eritrea as well as to preparation for the biggest offensive yet.

Meanwhile, fighting what is sometimes called the 'second civil war' in Eritrean nationalist historiography, the fronts had fallen apart. With the support of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), an organisation that had steadily grown in strength in the southern adjoining province of Tigray since its establishment in 1975, the EPLF routed its rival in 1981. Subsequently, most of the ELF fighters fled to the Sudan where they were disarmed, and the remainder joined the EPLF. The ELF survived in exile, but only as a fractured and ineffective political organisation, while the EPLF established itself as the sole military presence in the province under the undisputed leadership of Isaias Afewerki, who had received his training in guerrilla warfare in China.

Based on its own recent experience on the Eastern Front, the regime calculated that in order to defeat the EPLF it had to back up its military efforts with social services. In the year preceding the military operation, the government thus waged 'psychological warfare' to win the 'hearts and minds' of Eritreans, but in an essentially controlled

social environment. The whole purpose was to destroy or neutralise the EPLF's clandestine organisational networks and to replace them with state organs that would readily respond to popular concerns and needs. This would have meant placing more emphasis on persuasion than coercion, as had been the practice hitherto. Some effort was made, therefore, to placate the populace by addressing their material and security needs as well as by rehabilitating public institutions and facilities. The Eritrean economy had been seriously disrupted as most of its factories had lain idle since 1977; the few that remained in operation did so only at or near 30 per cent capacity. Consumer goods were scarce and too expensive when available. Unemployment was rampant, exceeding the national average which hovered around 20 per cent, and agricultural life was frequently disrupted. In 1981 the state may have invested about $50 million to resettle displaced peasants, resuscitate the economy and rebuild the infrastructure. By the end of the year, a dozen factories had been reopened, creating over 10,000 jobs. Industrial output is said to have increased by 40 per cent. Blown-up roads and bridges were reconstructed. Hospitals, schools and government offices were rebuilt, repaired or refurbished (see MOND 1981). Displaced peasants from war-scarred zones were resettled and provided with tools and seeds to start a new life (*Addis Zemen* 17 Ginbot 1974; *Ethiopian Herald* 3&10.9.1983). It was hoped that through these measures and incentives the state would gain voluntary consent from civil society.

Since goodies alone may not have won people's trust and loyalty, however, political tools of mass control were more stringently enforced than before and than in the rest of the country. People were no longer randomly terrorised; the arbitrary arrests, displacements, and the violence inflicted on persons were drastically curtailed. But life remained regimented. An after-dusk curfew was imposed, and people wishing to travel or change domicile had to obtain special permits from the appropriate authorities. A system of surveillance that monitored people's activities was instituted. Individuals or families were enticed to spy upon one another. The cost to the state was minimal since they were channelled through government-sponsored groups and associations. The government claimed that by the end of 1981 it had created 149 urban dwellers' associations in a dozen towns and 300 peasant associations with a total membership of only 60,000 (*ibid.*), which was about 2 per cent of the total provincial population. These measures were not peculiar to Eritrea, but they attained special potency under conditions of war. Women's and youth groups as well as the peasant

associations held periodic self-evaluations at public forums which were invariably used by the regime's tightly controlled cadres for political sermons or exhortations (see Clapham 1989: 129–41, 157–61). Using historical symbols, allegories, slogans and simple repetition, the cadres lost no opportunity to delegitimise the nationalist insurgents by presenting them as 'anti-unity, anti-people, and anti-democracy'. Worse, they condemned them as mercenaries who were out to sell Eritrea to the highest Arab bidders.

The tactics seem to have worked to some extent. Those who, either out of conviction or fear, appeared to disown the nationalists were armed by the state for their own protection from reprisals by the rebels, but also to serve as an ancillary of the security forces. Most remained on the fence, treading a knife edge. Despite its concessions, and manipulative and divisive tactics, the state was unable to eliminate the clandestine network of its opponents, who continued to intimidate, harass, kidnap or liquidate those they considered 'notorious collaborators'. The mopping up operations executed in the province between December 1981 and January 1982 were a confirmation of that failure: on 23 January, just three weeks before the much-anticipated offensive was unleashed, the rebels penetrated the heavily defended perimeters of Asmara to hit directly at the state's belly.

The principal aim of Operation Red Star was 'to destroy, once and for all, the bandits entrenched in the mountains of Sahel and Barka and to establish lasting peace in the province of Eritrea' (Tadesse 1982: 7). A 'final solution' to the Eritrean problem, the Campaign was also aimed at eliminating the armed organisations operating in Tigray and Gondar. The TPLF, in particular, had become a serious impediment to the state's war efforts in Eritrea by forging a tactical alliance with the EPLF. It was strategically located to disrupt personnel movements as well as communication and supply lines. The other groups were the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), both located in Gondar. It was believed that these organisations would wither away or be more easily quashed upon the defeat of the EPLF.

The government believed that it could eliminate the Eritrean insurgency at that particular time, because the current domestic and international conditions were deemed favourable. Internally, although by no means fully pacified, the Eastern Front had been brought under control and the government was able to transfer two of the specially trained mountain divisions. In 1980–81 the state obtained valuable intelligence information from Teklai Gabre-Mikael, a high-profile

defector from the EPLF. Before his defection, Teklai was a member of the EPLF's central committee and head of its internal security, and was thus well placed to know about the front's organisational structures. What the authorities in Addis Ababa did not know, however, was that the EPLF had taken the necessary precautions by relocating its command system and dispersing its key installations (Connell 1993: 210). Externally, those countries in northeastern Africa and the Middle East which had historically supported the Eritrean secessionists were absorbed in their own crises. Neighbouring Sudan was immersed in a civil war, and Iraq was at war with Iran. The rest of the Arab world was in a quandary following the historic accord between Egypt and Israel in 1979.[3] If conditions were convenient for the military undertaking, then the most agreeable time would have been the first and coolest (temp. 15–40 °C) quarter of the year in that part of Eritrea. Plans to start the attack in January appear to have been scuttled by the front's preemptive strike at Asmara and the Sembel air base, apparently to reduce the military's air capabilities at the source. It was delayed by three weeks.

It had taken a year to make the intensive preparations for the operation which the Eritreans call the 'sixth offensive', and Soviet military advisers took part at every stage – training, planning and execution (MOND 1982a: 7). An advance headquarters of MOND, the Directory of Planning and Operations, was set up at Asmara on 28 December 1980 to guide the campaign. The high command consisted of the president and commander-in-chief, Mengistu Haile-Mariam, the minister of defence, General Tefaye Gabre-Kidan, the chief of staff, General Haile-Giorgis Habte-Mariam, the heads of the three branches, senior experts and Soviet advisers. Between January and February, nearly all governmental departments, including the president's office, were temporarily moved from Addis Ababa to Asmara. Landing strips for helicopters were built at Agordat, Keren and Mersa Teklai. A medical team of 2,813 was assembled. The Eritrean People's Liberation Army (EPLA) positions were surveyed and studied with benefit of aerial photography taken at night with the assistance of Soviet technicians. Nothing like it had been previously attempted (*ibid.*). The photographs showed that the EPLA had established an intricate network: three rings of interlocking trenches and tunnels in the extremely rugged terrain running from Kerkebet to northeast Sahel. The first ring extended from Hal Hal in Barka to Mersa Gulbub on the Red Sea. The second cut across the mounts of Angab, Abashara and Yeras Arma. The third stretched along the ridges of the Adobha Valley

to Mount Denden, overlooking the Hedai Valley which the EPLA was expected to defend most resolutely since it was their main escape route.

Given the balance of forces on the ground, few could have imagined that the war would have lasted that long and ended in favour of the insurgents. The odds seemed stacked against them. They were outnumbered by about four to one in what came to be a rather static war. Some 22,000 guerrilla fighters were facing over 84,000 troops, vastly superior ordnance and with the prospect of heavy reinforcements. For the campaign, which covered Eritrea, Tigray and Gondar, 14 divisions (63 brigades of which 53 were infantry, 6 mechanised, and 4 paracommandos) or a total of 136,540 troops were deployed. At their disposal was an inordinate amount of armament: 55 aircraft, 131 tanks, 162 armoured cars, one warship, 102 infantry vehicles, 499 field artillery, 48 rocket launchers, 873 mortars, 691 anti-aircraft guns, 1349 anti-tank guns and 7,714 heavy machine guns (Abebe 1982: 9–10). The bulk of the warriors and equipment were distributed among the 10 divisions (38 brigades and 40 battalions) deployed at the three battle fronts in Sahel district. The 84,537 combatants were equipped with 99 tanks, 94 armour vehicles, 283 artillery pieces, 611 mortars, 208 air defence guns, 1,220 anti-tank guns, 5,457 heavy machine guns (Tadesse 1982: 7),[4] a dozen Mig 21 and 23s, Mi-24 helicopter gunships and Antonov 12s (Tadesse 1982, tables 1, 7). The EPLA was believed to have positioned 9 or 10 infantry brigades, 3 infantry battalions, 5 heavy weapons battalions, 2 artillery battalions, 1 mechanised battalion, 2 tank battalions, 1 engineer battalion, 2 air defence companies and 3 militia battalions, known as *dejen* (shield). Of its estimated 22,184 fighters, 2,500 were reportedly from the TPLF (Siyum 1982: 18–19; 23–4).[5] It was known that the EPLA had captured the following items from the army in 1978–79: 19 tanks, 31 armoured cars,[6] 28 field artillery, 162 mortars, 45 anti-aircraft guns, 387 anti-tank guns and 384 heavy machine guns (Siyum 1982: 20–1). Never before had the insurgents faced such a menacing force and never before did they show such fine fighting qualities. By withstanding the onslaught, they demonstrated that the government's confidence was based on false assumptions and an underestimation of their capabilities. In addition to the spirit, mobility and endurance of its fighters, EPLF's strength lay in its organisational coherence, efficient leadership, ideological commitment and strategic skill (see Pool 1998).

TABLE 1
Total manpower deployed for the Red Star Campaign

Command/Location	Regulars		Militia	Total
	Officers	Other Ranks		
Nadew/Af Abet	1,793	29,006	5,287	36,086
Wuqaw/Alghena	1,126	18,918	5,630	25,674
Mebrek/Kerkebet	1,186	20,736	3,405	25,327
Mekit/Asmara	975	8,608	15,270	24,853
C. Command/Mekele	444	4,337	12,369	17,150
Addition**	157	839	6,454	7,450
Total	5,681	82,444	48,415	136,540

** As of 7 March 1982, 7,450 troops were added, raising the total to 136,540.
Source: Abebe 1982: Tables 1 & 2. Note that there is a discrepancy between the two tables.

The struggle for Nakfa

The 1982 war in Eritrea was largely limited to Sahel district, which was mostly populated by nomads. The combat zone itself was a triangle of about 26,055 square kms, roughly one-fifth of Eritrea. It stretched for nearly 270 km from Karora in the north to Kerkebet in the southwest, and from there for 193 km to Af Abet in the southeast. Nakfa, a small town located almost mid-way between Alghena and Keren on a plateau that rises to 1,750 metres above sea level, was the focal point of the bloody contest; split by the Muo river, it overlooks the Hedai Valley to the south, the Felket Valley to the north, and the Ghirghir Valley to the southwest. It was girded by numerous semi-barren and steep hills. As the main stronghold of the EPLF, it had become the symbol of the Eritrean struggle. The government was intent on destroying the resistance as well as its symbol. The insurgents were equally resolved to defend both. In the end, brought down by its own internal weaknesses and the firmness of the defenders who had positioned themselves in a mountainous area that was nearly impregnable to a conventional motorised force, the military failed to capture Nakfa. The insurgents claimed victory for holding their assailants to a standstill.

Five commands under the Second Revolutionary Army were arrayed at strategic points to prosecute the operational plan. The strike forces, advancing in converging directions from three sides, were to encircle the enemy and prevent his retreat from the combat area, and with the support of aviation strikes and artillery fire destroy him completely.

The assumption was that the guerrillas would be trapped in their main fortress as the strike forces converged inward. In the north at Alghena, an insignificant village located at the mouth of a river in the strategic Felket Valley that majestically descends onto the coastal plain, was the northern pincer called Wuqaw (trash); at Af Abet, a small town on the Keren-Nakfa road, was Nadew (destroy); at Kerkebet to the west of Nakfa and on the eastern edge of the Barka river was Mebrek (thunder); Mekit (shield) was headquartered at Asmara, and the Central Command at Mekele, Tigray's capital. Their overall mission: 'While Wuqaw, Nadew and Mebrek, backed by jet fighters, helicopters, tanks and artillery, were to envelop and pulverise the bandits massed at the Alghena, Nakfa, and Kerkebet fronts, Mekit and the Central Command were to patrol vigilantly their zones of operation and safeguard supply routes' (Tadesse 1982: 8).

Each Command was assigned a specific task that in combination would have achieved the final goal. The Central Command, embracing the 1st, 7th and 16th Infantry Divisions, was to carry out offensive manoeuvres in Tigray and Gondar, keep safe the major routes leading to Eritrea and Humera (Gondar), escort convoys and protect government and public institutions and patrol points. Mekit would mobilise the 6th, 14th and 18th Infantry Divisions to ensure that popular associations sponsored by the state, key installations and repositories in the southern highlands and lowlands of Eritrea were not sabotaged by the rebels. By advancing north–south and west–east, respectively, Wuqaw and Mebrek were to prevent the guerrillas from either breaking out of Nakfa or linking with each other there. Nadew, consisting of the famed 3rd Division, the 17th and 22nd Infantry Divisions, would prevent EPLA units at Alghena and Nakfa from linking with each other by blocking the route at Rora Tselim (Tallium) to the north of Nakfa. Nadew's mission was to capture the main fortress, Nakfa, itself. Furthermore, each of the ten divisions under the three Commands was to assault specific targets in coordination with others. The 15th Division was to capture Jebel Dambobiet and with the 23rd cut the rebel supply lines between Araag and the Sudan, destroy the EPLA's depot at the Tabih Valley, and block the Alghena–Nakfa line at Afchewa, while the 19th Division moved frontally towards Afchewa and beyond. Departing from Kerkebet, the 24th Infantry Division was to drive into Hasta by cutting the EPLA's supply line that extended to the Sudan; the 21st Mountain Infantry Division was to fight its way into Zara through Kur, and the 2nd Infantry Division would do the same by first capturing Hal Hal and Asmat. Nadew's 3rd

Division was to depart from Af Abet, and by moving along the Mabalan Valley, to first block the Alghena–Nakfa road, and then proceed to Agra to enter Nakfa from the north. The 17th Division would advance along the Kemchewa stream from Mamido to Tiksi, about 40 km to the east of Nakfa, and then pass through Harewa to seize the strategic Hill 1702, 4 kilometres from Nakfa. The 22nd Division would move along the Ghirghir Valley, on the eastern edge of the Anseba river, to storm Nakfa from the southwest. Meanwhile, the 18th Mountain Infantry Division would perform feints from the southern direction to confuse the defenders. In this manner, the forces would converge at Nakfa to suffocate and annihilate the rebels (Tadesse 1982: 8–30; Baalu 1992: 289–90; see also Beyene *et al.* 1992: 10). It was an intricate plan that almost accomplished its objectives. Its main obstacles were the size and ruggedness of the operational area, lack of coordination between the attacking forces, and the mobility and ability of the concentrated rebels to counter-attack from their interior lines.

The insurgents tried on 13 February to disrupt the offensive by opening a lightning attack against the 19th Division, causing serious damage to the 40th and 41st Mountain Infantry Brigades before they were repulsed with assistance from the 39th Mountain Infantry Brigade. That was the curtain-raiser for the ultimate showdown. On 15 February 1982, the Ethiopian military launched its offensive on three fronts. It gave every appearance of being both ready and sublimely confident (Baalu 1992: 303). The success of its operational plan depended on a high degree of coordination. Indeed, all commands advanced with apparent ease towards their targets in the first 72 hours. The assault tactics used closely resembled those of the Soviets: as Antonovs and Migs unrelentingly pounded EPLA fortifications, the mobile troops and armoured columns massed at the bases of the plateau drove up the narrow valleys to overrun them. They attacked frontally, from the flanks and from the rear at once since the mountainous terrain favoured the defenders. The guerrillas held their ground and by the fourth day the drive lost its impetus, the assailants thrown off balance.

The first major setback occurred on the western front. The three divisions of Mebrek, backed by the Sentik Mechanised Brigade and air support, had reached their initial objectives, but before they could consolidate, the counter-attack swept forward. The 21st Division seized Kur at 1020 hours on the 16th while the 24th Division captured several important heights. The 37th Brigade of the Second Division drove into Filfil as the 31st and the Second Paracommando Brigade captured Hal

Hal. The 21st Division, which had gone to the battle front without any combat experience, was smashed by the rebels who may have feigned weakness to lure it into a trap. It had camped within range of the enemy, neglecting the simplest of precautions. By failing to undertake aggressive patrolling, it exposed itself to a surprise attack (interviews, Getachew 1991, Aschenek 1994). At 1330 hours on the 18th it was caught off guard when the rebels brought down their prepared barrage from well-seated weapons on the 44th Brigade, positioned to the left of the 45th and directly in front of the 47th Brigades. After calling in artillery and air support to cover its retreat, it withdrew in considerable confusion. The rebels had snatched the initiative. Four days later, they ferociously attacked the 45th Brigade from the right flank. Again, the troops cracked; discipline broke down and retreat degenerated into a rout, but not before hundreds of their comrades had been slaughtered and injured. Not even draconian measures like aiming guns at their backs would halt the panic-stricken soldiers. The offensive in this sector had practically collapsed, and responsibility for the disaster was placed on Colonel Wubishet Mamo, the commander of the 21st Division, who was subsequently executed in front of his defeated troops. The disintegration of the 21st made the positions of the 2nd and 24th Divisions perilous. Before the rebels could seize the forward depot they were ordered to make a full-scale retreat to Keren and Kerkebet, respectively, which they did by the 25th. All three divisions were later redeployed at the Af Abet front (Tadesse 1982: 25–8; MOND 1984: 22–3). Its western flank secured, its morale surging, the EPLA rapidly transferred at least half of its fighters to the Af Abet front. It had already gained the upper hand psychologically.

The situation on the northern front was not as disastrous but it was bleak. When the Command opened a three-pronged offensive on 15 February, its aim was to penetrate deep into enemy territory through Adobha as far south as the Ghirghir Valley where it would have connected with the other Commands. The mission turned out to be illusory because the Command could not hold on to enemy defensive positions that it captured. On the same day at 1900 hours, the 6th Brigade of the 15th Division crossed into the Sudan around Karora. Travelling by night at an impressive speed, it surprised the rebels by storming the strategic 1,785 metres high Mt. Dambobiet at dawn. Its defenders dispersed in panic and the assailants immediately fenced it in with land mines. EPLA's attempts to recapture the hill were unsuccessful. Its supply lines running to the Sudan were cut off. At the same time, the 8th and 90th Brigades surged southward but fell short

of their targets – Hills 1694 and 1294. Supported by the 32nd Zerai Deres Mechanised Brigade, the 39th and 40th Brigades of the 19th Mountain Infantry Division broke through the high ground between Katar and Mount Tamru and stormed Halibet and Imberber, but failed to seize Hills 1389 and 1128. By the 18th, in fact, their southern advance was grinding to a halt. The EPLA mounted an effective counter-attack, forcing the 39th and 40th Brigades to relinquish all the areas they had seized. Then it turned against the 23rd Division and its back-ups, the 4th Paracommando, the 32nd and 20th Nebelbal Brigades that had marched as far as Belkat and Fah. Their approach to Afchewa, where they were to close the Alghena-Nakfa route and attack the rebels from the rear, was thus stalled 10 kilometres from the destination. The 'first phase' of the offensive in the northern front had been foiled (Tadesse 1982: 8–11; MOND 1984: 16–18). Twenty soldiers who were blamed for the failure were executed by firing squad in front of their comrades, who were made to shout 'death to the cowards, a thousand times'. Intended to discourage ill-discipline, the punishment would be repeated several times in the course of the war but with little effect (interview, Gabre-Kristos 1994).

Nadew was the only Command that got close to its target. In the first week of the offensive, while the 22nd Mountain Infantry Division defended the sector's rear, the 3rd and 17th Divisions opened a two-pronged assault, gaining impressive results. The 3rd deceptively moved towards Alghena parallel to the coast and then suddenly turned left and with extraordinary speed and tactical efficiency attacked the EPLA from the left flank with mortars, artillery and Soviet Katyusha rocket launchers known as 'Stalin's Organs'; it was supported with helicopter-borne firepower and air strikes. The defenders were taken by surprise and may have suffered horrendous losses, perhaps their heaviest thus far. Terror-stricken, the rest dispersed for safety and regrouping. The division registered its first major victory by seizing the key point of Rora Tselim from where it was able to prevent the fighters in the northern zone from linking up with those in the south. From there, it advanced toward the mountain-ringed stronghold of Nakfa, fighting off counter-attacks by day and night. By 20 February, the 12th Brigade had moved on the right flank to within 6 kilometres of Nakfa, as did the 10th Brigade in the centre; to its left, the 9th had advanced to within 3 kilometres of the main target.

The 17th Division had also made remarkable progress, and the two units seemed to be outstepping each other for laurels. Departing from Mamido, the division had filtered through the Tiksi Valley to seize a

series of strongholds. On 18 and 19 February, and with air cover, the 11th and 19th Brigades dislodged the EPLA from the much-coveted heights 1521, 1527 and 1590. On the 20th, the 19th and 84th Brigades bravely fought their way to Hill 1702, then passed to 1725 and 1755, only 3 kilometres from Nakfa (Tadesse 1982: 16–21; MOND 1984: 19–22). They were on the edge of the town's airport. The town itself was reduced to rubble by rockets and air raids. The great anticipation that the two divisions would storm the town came to naught, however. They were not ruthless enough to press forward, whether because of a clumsy intervention by the chief of staff, General Haile-Giorgis, who wanted to give 'the honour of taking the town' to the 3rd Division (Mengistu's former unit), according to a well-placed official (Dawit 1989: 109),[7] or to vacillation on the part of the field commanders,[8] has not been resolved. Either way, the inaction may have deprived the army of a supreme opportunity for finishing off the campaign. The EPLA profited from the tactical blunder to bring in fresh troops from Alghena.

Within two days the reality on the ground had completely changed in favour of the guerrillas, who found a gap which made viable an outflanking operation. Using tanks, 82 and 120 mm mortars, 85 and 120 mm artillery, Zu-23 and ARPG-7 launchers, the EPLA counter-attacked in force to retake the hills and block the corridor that the assailants had opened at a heavy price. As the 9th and 10th Brigades of the 3rd Division were charging against Nakfa on 23 February, they were crippled by combined fire from the resisters and their own helicopters. They pulled back in an orderly fashion, as did the 12th Brigade in the face of fierce resistance. On the same day, while the 11th, 84th and 92nd Brigades of the 17th Division fought day and night to defend 1702, the EPLA assaulted the 19th Brigade, forcing it to abandon 1755 which then exposed the left flanks of the 84th and 92nd Brigades. This particular engagement helped stem the tide. The Division abandoned 1702 at 1645 hours and with the subsequent loss of Hill 1590, the army suffered a terrible setback.

The military tried vainly to reverse the situation. With fresh energy and massive air support, the 36th Brigade of the 18th Division moved out of Tiksi on the 26th and reached 1725, with the 3rd Division right behind it. Without giving it any breather the guerrillas counter-attacked at 1430 hours on the same day. Though the encircled brigade was rescued by two brave battalions from the 38th Brigade, the expeditionary force was defeated. The government sustained heavy losses including the death of the commanders of the 3rd Division and

the 10th Brigade. The soldiers did what an Ethiopian army has historically done at such moments – flee in disarray. Consequently, the division was thrown out of its positions and ordered to recuperate at Tiksi. Starting on 1 March and continually for three days, the 17th Division vainly tried to retake 1702 and was ordered to form a defence perimeter many miles away (Tadesse 1982: 11–15; Beyene *et al.* 1992: 11). The roads to Nakfa had been closed, at least for now. A soldier lamented (interview, Gabre-Kristos 1994):

Ayi yichi Nakfa Nakfa	Oh! This Nakfa, Nakfa
Gurereye wist tewetfa	[Is] stuck in my throat,
Waay atwat waay atitefa	I cannot swallow or throw it out

The guerrillas pressed on. At dawn on 5 March, they initiated a massive counter-attack against Wuqaw by using the open space between the right flank of the 3rd Division and the left flank of the 23rd Division. They surprised the latter from the rear, splitting it into pieces. Perhaps fearing execution, the division's commander and his deputy are said to have committed suicide. After several ineffectual counter-attacks, the troops withdrew to their pre-offensive positions.

Despite severe setbacks and enormous losses, the government persisted in its pursuit of an elusive victory. It brought three brigades from the Eastern Front to strengthen the Command. They proved inconsequential. Between 12 and 23 March the 23rd Division, reinforced by the 41st and 42nd Brigades of the 19th Division, tried without let up to reoccupy the places from which it had been ejected. It failed. Rather, in a bold move, the EPLA attacked from the Sudan along five lines and recaptured Mt. Dambobiet, striking terror in the defending troops who got out of control and hastily abandoned a treacherous terrain to the offensive force. Meanwhile, the 4th Paracommando and the 20th Nebelbal Brigades had reclaimed some heights on 25 March but lost them two days later following a fierce engagement. Shortly thereafter, the troops abandoned their insecure positions and hurriedly withdrew to the plains. With the subsequent loss of Jebel Arab and the near-destruction of the 32nd Mechanised Brigade, it was all too clear that the offensive on the Alghena front had petered out (Tadesse 1982: 11–15; interviews, Solomon 1994, Gezahegn 1994). The last and decisive phase of the offensive would be fought in the southern sector.

With the western front shattered and the northern hopelessly bogged down in a stalemate, the military high command pinned its last hope

on a decisive break-through in the south, where Nadew's success may have been aborted due to a tactical misjudgement. Consequently the longest, and some of the fiercest and bloodiest, battles were fought on the Af Abet front between April and June. Between 6 March and 6 June more reinforcements arrived from the other sectors and four more major assaults were waged after a hiatus of one month. They were courageous but fruitless efforts. The 48th and 49th Brigades of the 24th Division, which was the first to arrive, were immediately dispatched via Ras Armas to occupy and fortify Amba. This was a prelude to storming the mountain fortress of Denden, the southern obstacle to Nakfa. They were repulsed. As the EPLA poured in reinforcements, the army brought in the 2nd Division from Keren. According to a revised operational plan, this division was to seize Hill 1826 in order to close the Alghena-Nakfa road at a point 6 kilometres to the north of the town. That would have opened a corridor through which the 2nd and 18th Divisions would proceed to retake 1725 and 1755, and the 24th would recapture 1702, while the 17th would move onto 1590. The 3rd Division, which had been 'exhausted' in the first phase, was retained for rear guard action. The attackers, as always, relied on artillery and air strikes to reduce the EPLA's striking force. But, as they drew closer, the guerrillas unleashed their arsenal from their mountainside trenches and foxholes. Another charge had been beaten off.

The army would not concede defeat. It brought the 21st Division to Tiksi, raising the number of divisions to seven. Six of them were deployed in the area between Tiksi and Kubkub, to the south of Nakfa. On 16 May, as the 22nd Division moved south-northwards to attack from the base of Ghirghir Valley, the 21st manoeuvred towards Kubkub to seize Amba, and the 18th stealthily advanced from the left flank, something the army had not done before. The 2nd opened a frontal assault as dummies were parachuted behind rebel lines to confuse and surprise. At the same time, 'volunteers of death' were summoned to climb Hill 1702. By feats of exceptional bravery and sacrifice, they fought their way to the summit of the hill, using machine guns, grenades and bayonets; in the close fire and merciless hand-to-hand fight that followed, those dauntless men were decimated (Tadesse 1982: 16–22; MOND 1984: 19–22; see also Baalu 1992: 304–27). The deputy chief of operations wrote, 'Two battalions of volunteers drawn from the 3rd and the other Divisions ascended the height with extraordinary courage and high spirit. But, even though much sacrifice was paid to accomplish this extraordinary mission, it did not succeed' (Tadesse 1982: 22). With casualties escalating, enthusiasm for the war was fast fading.

Between the end of May and the first week of June, the army launched its fourth and last offensive from two directions, but once again failed to meet its aims. The 15th Division, consisting of the 6th, 8th, 39th, 41st and 42nd Brigades and with helicopter support, pushed southward to connect with the force moving from the south at Nakfa. It was repeatedly beaten off. The Directory rather sardonically concluded, 'Since all offensive attempts failed, the Command [Wuqaw] was ordered to defend its sector vigilantly and to continue with its training' (Tadesse 1982: 15). The outcome in the southern zone was no different. The unit had advanced in three columns, none reaching its destination. The 21st tried to get to Denden through Amba and Angoba; the 22nd moved along the Elagher Valley to seize Beshera, and the 24th headed toward 1527 and 1590. They were all fiercely resisted and thrown back. By then, one-eighth of the Ethiopian warriors were dead, nearly half wounded. Proportionately, the rebels had lost even more. There are indications that they were also suffering from insufficient nutrition and may well have depleted their ammunitions to worrisome levels. The continual fighting and dying, the mounting disfigured bodies of comrades, the sleeplessness and fatigue, the emotional stress, all had taken their toll on the combatants. Surprisingly, the rebels would not bend. On the other hand, as the fervour for war dissipated, gloom set in the Ethiopian camp. Yet the Operations Department was for the continuation of the offensive, warning that 'defeat at Nakfa would have grave political and military consequences' (MOND 1982a: 4). It was an unrealistic proposition. The army caved in, and the Commands moved from offence to 'active defence' (*ibid.*). That was the end of the Red Star Campaign.

The army had failed to break the equilibrium. Despite relentless air strikes, sustained fire from helicopters and armour, and heroic effort by the troops, the guerrillas refused to be driven from their mountain hideouts in what turned out to be a conventional war. In the end, and in contrast to the great hullabaloo with which he arrived, Mengistu left for Addis Ababa without any public announcement. A disappointed soldier described the president: he 'came roaring, like a lion, but returned mute, like a mouse' (Anon 1993). Colonel Sereke Berhan (interview, 1994), another participant who later became a distinguished commander of the 3rd or Anbassa (lion) Division, succinctly captured the agony of defeat: 'The Red Star Campaign was a turning point in the war in Eritrea. It bled and broke the morale of the army. It never regained fully its fighting spirit' (interview, Sereke 1994). No question, it was a costly enterprise militarily, psychologically, politically, economically and in human life as well.

TABLE 2
Government casualties, 15 February to 2 July 1982

Command	Killed	Executed	Wounded	Missing	Deserted	Total
Nadew	4,234	57	11,843	405	62	16,601
Wuqaw	5,115	123	9,485	1,996	207	16,926
Mebrek	580	13	1,400	537	19	2,549
Mekit	85	3	176	5	79	348
Central	101	17	308	216	110	752
Total	10,115	213	23,212	3,159	477	37,176

Source: Abebe 1982: Tables 3, 9; Tadesse (1982: 34) gives a total of 36,932 for the period running from 15 February to 7 July.

The killing fields of Sahel imposed a high level of attrition on both parties – a combined total of 43,000 killed and maimed. Government casualties were 37,176 (27 per cent) and the insurgents may have been as high as 15,000 (58 per cent). The military suffered nearly 4,000 more deaths at Sahel than during the war against Somalia which lasted from July 1977 to March 1978. Of the government casualties, 1,074 were officers, 22,247 other ranks and 9,858 militia (Tadesse 1982: 23–4). The insurgents claimed to have captured 939 men (Beyene *et al.* 1992: 12).[9] The government claimed that 11,536 insurgents were wounded, 220 captured and another 567 had voluntarily surrendered. That it had killed 11,516 was pure fabrication, since that would have meant the decimation and defeat of the EPLA (Tadesse 1982: 35). The Eritreans have acknowledged that they sustained about 4,000 dead and three times as many wounded (Connell 1992: 218).

The campaigns were of course a heavy drain on the national economy. We have no exact figures for Lash, but the commander reported a surplus of 4 million birr or about $1.5 million, indicating that the total expenditure must have been many millions more (Getachew 1981a). MOND's inventory for the Red Star Campaign showed that a total of birr 1, 291, 745, 233 (US$516, 698,000) was spent for the period starting 27 December 1981 and ending 1 July 1982. Of this sum, birr 871, 435, 465 was spent on armaments (Antonov 12s, Mig 23s, Mi-17 and 24 helicopters, T-55 tanks, BTR-60s and 152s, BM 21 rockets, artillery, radar, vehicles, etc.), almost all from the Soviet Union, and birr 420, 309, 768 on logistics (Abebe 1982: 7–8, 11, 14; MOND 1984b: 37–40).[10] Despite the propaganda, the amount devoted

to social and economic reconstruction in Eritrea was niggardly, scarcely $100 million or less than one-sixth of the military expenditure. Red Star was not really so much multifaceted as it was preeminently military in purpose.

LASH AND RED STAR IN PERSPECTIVE

Although the military strategy used to suppress the insurgents in the east and north was, more or less, the same, the outcomes were divergent. Evidently, there were more insurgents in the eastern periphery but they were atomised. Representing diverse ethnic groups, they lacked common goals or visions and were thus plagued by internal rivalry and squabbles. These were infant political bodies still struggling to define themselves, and except for the WSLF, none of them had a secure base. In contrast, the EPLF had a safe base in a woefully difficult terrain, solid mass support, longer combat experience, and its fighters were unified by nationalist and socialist goals for which they fought with strong commitment, high motivation and organisational discipline.

Thus, the eastern insurgency was defeated because it had many weaknesses, more than those of its northern counterpart. In fact, there was not one but several insurgencies in the same locale, all competing with and subverting one another. Not only were they in a state of infancy, but rivalries and rifts also plagued them. Claiming to be the only legitimate representative of the Oromo people and their aspirations, the OLF and IFLO clashed with one another. SALF challenged both, even as it competed with the WSLF for territory, popular allegiance and support of the Somali state. The WSLF and SALF were ambivalent about their relationship to the Somali state, under whose aegis they fought for ill-defined goals. Whereas the SALF suffered from identity crisis, the WSLF wavered between independence for the Ogaden and unity with Somalia. Somali authorities kept them at bay by playing on these differences. Moreover, except for the WSLF, the groups were too young, barely five years old. Hence, they lacked organisational and ideological coherence as well as military discipline. The Oromo groups were less sophisticated in guerrilla warfare. Popular support was contested and often unreliable. Although the unpopular villagisation (and resettlement) policy had began to erode it, popular support for the Addis Ababa regime was still strong among the Oromo peasantry, primarily because of the radical land reform it instituted in early 1975. The mass base of the WSLF had significantly diminished

after the 1977–78 Ethiopia-Somalia war. Nearly half of the Ogadenis had temporarily migrated to Somalia, while a significant portion of those who remained behind were confined to 'shelters', not easily accessible to the fighters. And operating in the non-Somali highland areas, the WSLF imposed itself on the Oromo which naturally caused conflict with the OLF and IFLO. Further, whereas the SALF disintegrated due to government pressure, factionalism, and Somali meddling, WSLF's loss of its rear base in northern Somalia to the SSDF was a fatal blow. Outside support also dwindled; faced with post-war political and economic problems, the Somali regime could not sustain its support for the proxy rebels. The Ethiopian military took advantage of these weaknesses to deal effectively with the insurgents.

The Eritrean insurgents had all the strengths of the above groups but almost none of their weaknesses. Despite the great dissimilarities, the government embarked on a disastrous campaign. Two factors seem to have influenced that eventful decision. First, in spite of a forewarning by one of its intelligence officers that it was 'wrong to compare the fighting spirit of the Somali bandits with that of the Eritrean secessionists' (Merid 1979), the government was convinced that its victory in the east was repeatable in the north. Second, notwithstanding the army's setbacks in 1979, it was believed that a large offensive could crush the Eritrean rebels; after all, did not the army push them back to the Sahel mountains in 1978? To its dismay, however, the northern insurgents proved to be much more creative and unswerving than their eastern counterparts, and the topography of north-central Eritrea turned out to be more formidable than that of the eastern periphery.

Although outnumbered and outgunned, the Eritrean insurgents fought the government troops to a deadlock in four months of ferocious fighting. What they lacked in armaments and numbers, the insurgents made up for with competent leadership, skill, mobility, motivation, courage, determination and perseverance. In these they were a solid match to their foe who nonetheless would not give them the same respect. Although they grudgingly conceded that the EPLF's 'organisation [had] astonishing efficiency and creative ability' (Baalu 1992: 61), the general tendency on the part of the military establishment was to underestimate, even denigrate the fighting capabilities of its men. One officer, Colonel Tariku Woldai, expressed that widely-held sentiment: 'The EPLF rank and file have no experience of ever coming out of their fortifications and fighting. They are scamperers' (*ibid.*). Whenever the foe has been underestimated and disparaged, disaster has often struck, as indeed it did in Eritrea. The

military refused to accept that the EPLA had become a formidable army of regular brigades equipped with tanks, armoured cars, heavy mortars and artillery; that it could creatively, skilfully, and effectively combine guerrilla and conventional tactics, and that its fighters were utterly committed to their cause. Contrary to the false images painted by their superiors, the rank and file immediately found out that the rebels were skilful fighters. One young lieutenant who took part in the eastern and northern campaigns later confessed, echoing the intelligence officer's caution, that the Eritreans were tough and dexterous. The first engagement 'with the EPLF convinced the soldiers not to equate the war in Eritrea with that [in] the Ogaden. In the Ogaden the soldiers fought mostly on plains ... Moreover, the Eritrean rebels were far more brave and skilful than the Somalis in military tactics. The rebels had accumulated a combat experience of twenty years' (Tedla 1993: 28). Almost eight years after the Red Star Campaign but drawing from it, MOND's chief of military intelligence listed the EPLF's major qualities which were well demonstrated in Sahel: its quick and efficient tactical manoeuvres, its ability to coordinate attacks and rotate units in the midst of combat, its skilful use of trenches and mines, as well as its superb intelligence and dexterity at handling modern weapons (Tadesse 1990: 6–9).

Using the latest Soviet technology and tactics, the Ethiopian military bombarded, pounded and shelled rebel positions, turning the Sahel into a veritable hell, but could destroy neither the organisation nor the indomitable spirit of the insurgents. Not even the vast resources of modern technology at its disposal would break the deadlock. The army tried a whole series of diversionary probes, stretching the battle lines, outflanking and attacking now from the rear and now frontally; but after some remarkable and thrilling gains that almost broke through the natural obstacles and barricades, it failed. Shielded by an interlocking network of trenches, tunnels and fortifications that snaked around hills and impenetrable mountainsides, the insurgents rolled back every assault with unflinching determination. In so doing, they seem to have defied one of the essential characteristics of guerrilla warfare. 'The strategy of conventional warfare prescribes the conquest of the enemy's territory, the destruction of his forces. The trouble here is that the enemy holds no territory and refuses to fight for it' (Galula 1965: 71–2). Well, the EPLF held its territory and fought for it against an overwhelming adversary. They suffered high casualties – about 15 per cent killed – but it seemed that no price was too high for the defence of their 'sacred' cause. The government troops fought with equal

bravery and determination, but they were finally outmanoeuvred and outlasted by the insurgents' resiliency and doggedness. The Eritreans were able to deter the offensive by flexibly combining guerrilla and conventional tactics in a forbidding but favourable environment.

Almost ideal for the guerrilla, the Sahel is a killer for a conventional army (see Baalu 1992: 291). It was familiar territory for the insurgents but an extremely hostile environment for the government troops. The latter fought in a terrain of which most had little or no experience, facing men and women who had lived and fought there for many years. To the officer who derided its men as scamperers, the EPLF's main strength lay in the combat area it had chosen. Inarguably, 'Nakfa is a natural fortress. The mountains of Nakfa are invincible' (Kane 1994: 741). Northern Sahel, where most of the fighting took place, is a labyrinth of hills and mountains that rise to 2,500 metres and descend southward from Karora parallel to the coastal and western lowlands. These chains of mountains are broken by numerous and steep canyons, narrow ravines and streams, the water beds of which are dry most of the year. Traffic is restricted, except for short stretches, to existing motor roads. Movement on foot or by pack animals along the riverbeds is possible especially in the dry season. The broken topography offered good cover for the defenders, but for the attackers it was fearsome country. Under the blistering heat, the long marches could be exhausting and water was a scarce commodity. Although food and supplies were airdropped on occupied heights, soldiers often had to carry jerricans containing 20 litres of water to keep themselves from dehydrating while traversing the ridges and deep valleys. The distribution of water was at times a difficult task as each soldier tried to quench his thirst ahead of his comrades (MOND 1982b: 7).

It took herculean efforts to survive the ordeal of fighting in such inhospitable space. Only those who were physically fit, high spirited, 'travelled light, and moved fast could hope to match [an] enemy' who nimbly moved around the maze of hills on his sandaled feet.[11] While the hilly terrain permitted quick dispersal and regrouping for the guerrillas, it made pursuit by the heavily equipped government forces too cumbersome. It slowed the foot soldier, hampered the effectiveness of the tank, artillery, armour and aircraft, and made communication, coordination and resupply more difficult (Siyum 1982: 3). A good part of the area was impassable by armoured personnel carriers. The tank could not easily manoeuvre through the craggy landscape, and was thus restricted in its usefulness in many of the most hotly contested battles, and the aircraft rarely scored direct hits on the guerrillas'

burrows and embankments, though it was terrifying and the noise deafening. The EPLA, of course, avoided the plains, where it would have become an easier target to its enemy's field artillery, tanks and aircraft. Indisputably, natural obstacles helped blunt the effectiveness of the military's offensive operations (MOND 1982a: 12; 1982b: 8).

But that was not all. The military itself had organisational and tactical deficiencies that undercut its operational efficiency. From a conventional military standpoint everything appeared perfectly in place: tens of thousands of zealous men with an imposing arsenal of weaponry, and battle-hardened units led by dedicated and self-assured professionals with combat experience in Korea, the Ogaden or Eritrea itself ready to deliver a knock-out blow to a stubborn adversary that had eluded them for two decades. The objective was not achieved, however, in part because the army lost the decisive advantage of surprise, numbers and technology. By launching the campaign with great publicity and fanfare, the government alerted the opponent who was able to store supplies and ammunition that would sustain him for months. In fact, the military was generally derelict about its own operational intentions and the strength and dispositions of its enemy (Tedla 1993: 37).[12] On the other hand, the EPLF had an excellent intelligence system that earned the envy and respect of the military's intelligence branch; at least this was the case in the late 1980s (Tadesse 1990: 9). No wonder it struck at the enemy's weakest spot and put the campaign off balance, forcing the high command to operate by improvisation for over three months.

Second, the high degree of coordination and mutual support that were required for the success of the operation were not there at all times, due to physical distance, technical problems and possibly competition among officers. The commands were unable to provide support for each other's operations, nor were they able to communicate directly at some critical junctures of the campaign. They were separated by long distances – 105 to 225 km – within the immense triangle, and radio communication was frequently poor because some of the Soviet-made equipment was ill-suited to local conditions (MOND 1982a: 12). 'To act upon lines far removed from each other, and without communications, is to commit a fault which always gives birth to a second', says a military maxim (D'Aguilar 1995: 59). As the Commands plunged deep into the enemy's heartland, the spearheads became separated from their rear guards, and rapidly outstripped their communications systems' ability to keep pace. Moreover, there were petty jealousies and rivalries among the local commanders for

recognition, accolades and fame. Such rivalries may have denied the army victory in the first week of the campaign.

Unclassified reports by the MOND's sections of Operations and Security have catalogued additional tactical weaknesses that contributed to the campaign's failure. Incompetence among the officers was rife. Low level officers, in particular – from captain down – were reluctant to make decisions whenever circumstances demanded them, or made decisions that did not always correspond to the demands of the situation. They had good reasons not specified in the reports. The military put emphasis on vertical, not horizontal ties. Such a complex operation of course could have been directed only by centralised leadership; however, the Ethiopian command system was too rigid and did not lend itself to independent action. The junior officers, mostly young and inexperienced, were fearful of retribution, for the price of failure was too often execution. The choice between acting and erring and not acting at all was a very delicate one, a 'Catch 22'. On the other hand, the EPLA's operational tactics were based on a decentralisation of initiative to local forces who acted creatively in accordance with changing circumstances on the ground, mostly employing flanking rather than frontal fire with their machine-guns.

Insubordination plagued the army. Field officers were frequently unable to exercise their authority and maintain discipline. There was often a complete breakdown in the chain of command and erosion in the esprit de corps. Unexpected attacks from the rear or flanks gave way to panic and disorderly retreats, soldiers running off and throwing away rifles that fell into enemy hands. The army was ineffective in the use of its offensive weapons. There was a lack of synchronisation and concentration of air and artillery fire at selected targets. The infantry was hesitant to advance under air cover, instead preferring to move in after the bombardment had expired. That gave the enemy a respite to regroup and counter-attack, the result of which was panic and confusion (Tadesse 1982: 39–40; MOND 1982b: 7–9).

The reports were silent on alleged miscalculations by the higher command. Nothing so starkly demonstrates this as the alleged intervention by the chief of staff when one of the units was within sight of complete success. If true, it was a tactical mistake of historic proportion, and extraordinary good fortune for the insurgents who lost no time in exploiting it adeptly.

The reports did acknowledge the rebels' crafty ability to infiltrate and create confusion by spreading false rumours about weaknesses of the army as opposed to their own strengths. But they did not give

enough credit to the stamina of the insurgents who, though outmatched in men and fire power, fought with a determination and deftness that few of their senior opponents had expected. It is undeniable that the government troops were well prepared and had gone into battle in the treacherous hills and valleys of Sahel vowing to win another victory. On the other hand, the insurgents, whose survival was at stake, were even more determined not to lose. Additionally, Mengistu's uncompromising bellicosity was perfectly matched by Isaias' unyielding stubbornness. The duel was not merely a clash of ideologies, doctrines, or hardware. Even though several factors contributed to it, the astounding achievement of the insurgents was ultimately the triumph of will power, and Nakfa was transformed from a symbol of resistance into the symbol of invincibility, ever embedded in the Eritrean psyche and enshrined in a national currency with the same name. One wonders whether that sense of invincibility might have contributed to the intransigence and war with Ethiopia in 1998–2000. What is more apparent is that the disastrous defeat in that war has shattered what might be called the Nakfa syndrome.

As if to erase the humiliation it had suffered at the hands of a despised enemy, the government embarked on another offensive in the first half of 1983 by deploying some 123,697 troops. This time the offensive was launched quietly (hence the 'stealth offensive' to the Eritreans). Its initial gains evaporated at the end of four months of fighting and the loss of 17,648 (14%) of the soldiers.[13] It would be the last major offensive by an ever-expanding but decreasingly effectual war machine. On the other hand, the EPLF's stature was elevated, its mass support solidified, and its military arm bolstered with the cache of arms captured from the army. It was thus able to move from defence to offence, winning a major battle in 1988 which was the prelude to total military victory and political independence three years later.

❋ ❋ ❋

The principal point that can be gleaned from the preceding discussion is that wars are not decided by hardware and numbers only. Organisational coherence, leadership, commitment, determination and morale are evidently crucial, especially in revolutionary warfare in which state forces have the advantage of superior material resources including equipment. And judging by the Nakfa experience, Beaufre was right that war is a clash of opposing wills. Operation Red Star failed because the military could not impose its will on the EPLF, as it

did on the ideologically and militarily weaker organisations in its eastern periphery. Driven by a passionate mix of nationalism and social revolution as well as by fear of extinction, the Eritrean insurgents fought with considerable skill and savage energy not to 'kneel down' in their own forbidding but advantageous territory. Through sheer will power and unflagging determination, the EPLF preserved itself and the Eritrean resistance, eventually winning political independence.

The battle for Nakfa was a milepost in Ethiopian history. It is idle to speculate what might have happened to the Eritrean and Tigrayan insurgencies had the EPLA lost. The nationalist resistance may not have been extinguished, but the EPLF could not have easily recovered from a severe military and psychological defeat. With victory at Nakfa, the military might have also shortened the conflict in neighbouring Tigray; because its fate was so strongly tied to that of the EPLF, it is hard to imagine that the TPLF could have survived without its ally. Hence, had Operation Red Star succeeded, Ethiopia's political and military history of more recent years would have been altogether different. But history is about events that happened, not imagined.

NOTES

1. We have little reason to doubt the general accuracy and reliability of these documents, which were consulted in the Ministry of National Defence (MOND) in Addis Ababa, where they are deposited.

2. According to Dawit (1989: 107), one of the organisers of the campaign, Mengistu coined 'Red Star' in reaction to 'Bright Star', the code name of a military exercise the Americans were conducting in the Red Sea. It was also called the Red Star Multifaceted Revolutionary Campaign because it combined the military with civic action. I have used the two names alternately.

3. These 'favourable' conditions were pointed out by Mengistu himself (Baalu 1992: 57). Though fictional, the events and characters in the drama closely correspond to those of the campaign for which the author (deputy minister of information) was chief of propaganda.

4. According to the colonel, only 74,671 were deployed at the battle fronts. I have taken the median figure.

5. See also 'Ya 1975–76 ya mereja gimit', 1976 (An intelligence review of 1982–83, 1983), Addis Ababa, 95–96. TPLF sources put the figure at nearly 5,000. If true, the front's contribution to the Eritrean struggle at Nakfa must have been very substantial.

6. Connell (1992: 174) reported that the number of tanks and armoured cars seized by the EPLA was 80.

7. Dawit may have had an axe to grind. See 'Shalleqa Bitarfs' ('Major, why don't you keep quiet'), Addis Zemen, 24 Tir 1984 (1 February 1991). It is hard to believe that the general could have made such a historic decision without Mengistu's assent.

8. Gezahegn (interview, 1994) puts the blame on the commander of the 17th Division.

9. They also claimed to have captured 7,517 light weapons and destroyed 19 tanks and 3 aircraft. MOND admitted that it lost two Migs.

10. For weapons destroyed see Tadesse 1982, Tables 4 and 5, 36–8. It appears that some 26,230,549 bullets were shot, i.e. about 1,008 bullets per insurgent. *Ibid.*

11. A phrase borrowed from Simpson 1994: xxiii. The discussion of terrain was also inspired by this important work as it was by Baalu 1992. See also Siyum 1982: 3.

12. Captain Asfaw Zewde (interview, 1994) and Sergeant Haile Yitagesu (interview, 1994) claimed that leaflets containing battle plans and information about the strong and weak sides of their opponent were actually dropped in the midst of fighting.

13. Of the total casualties 4,383 were killed, 11,725 wounded and 1,540 unaccounted for. MOND 1988, vol. 1, Table 3, 117.

REFERENCES

Baalu Girma. 1992. *Oromay*. Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press (reprint). For translation, see Kane 1994.

Beaufre, A. 1965. *Introduction to Strategy*. New York: Praeger.

Beyene Haile Mariam, Araya Yihdego & Abdel Hakim Mahmud. 1992. *Ginbar Nakfa* [The Nakfa Front]. (Prepared for Festival Eritrea 92) Asmara: Adulis Printing Press (in Tigrinya).

Clapham, C. 1989. *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*. Cambridge University Press.

Clapham, C. ed. 1998. *African Guerrillas*. Oxford: James Currey.

Connell, D. 1992. *Against All Odds*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

D'Aguilar, G. C. 1995. *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*. New York: Da Capo Press.

Dawit Wolde Giorgis. 1989. *Red Tears: war, famine and revolution in Ethiopia*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Galula, D. 1965. *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: theory and practice*. New York: Praeger.

Horne, A. 1979. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962*. New York: Penguin Books.

Kane, T. L. 1994. 'The Red Star Campaign: the military milieu', in Bahru Zewde, R. Pankhurst & Taddese Beyene, eds., *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, vol. II.

Markakis, J. 1987. *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

McCuen, J. J. 1966. *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Company.

Pool, D. 'The Eritrean People's Liberation Front', in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*, 19–35.

Simpson, H. R. 1994. *Dien Bien Phu*. Washington, DC: Brassey's.

Taber, R. 1965. *The War of the Flea: a study of guerrilla warfare*. New York: Citadel Press.

Tedla Bekele. 1993. 'Some internal causes for the defeat of the 39th Mountain Infantry Brigade in the Northern Front', BA thesis, Addis Ababa University.

Newspapers

Addis Zemen, Addis Ababa.

The Ethiopian Herald, Addis Ababa.

Ministry of National Defence archives, Addis Ababa.

Files were unnumbered at the time of consultation. However, each document – letters, reports – had its own number, the numerals interspersed with Ethiopian letters. The translations of the Amharic references are provided in parenthesis; all translations are by the author. Original dates are in the Ethiopian calendar, which runs from 11 September to 10 September, seven or eight years behind the Gregorian calendar.

Abebe Wolde-Mariam, Brigadier-General, to Minister, 30.10.74 [7.7.1982], enclosure *Ya Wotaderawi Zemecha ena Ikid Memria ya sidist wer report* [A sixth-month report by the Planning and Operations Directory], Asmara.

Getachew Adamu. 1981a. Report to the Ministry of Interior, 17 Yekatit 1973 [24.2.1981].

Getachew Adamu. 1981b. Report to the Ministry of National Defence, 17 Yekatit 1973 [24.1.1981], enclosing MOND 1981a.

Merid Negussie, Brigadier-General. 1979. Report to Tesfaye Gabre-Kidan, 10 Meskerem 1972 [17.9.1979].

Merid Negussie, Brigadier-General. 1980. Report to the Commander of the Eastern Command, *Ya wigia "Zemecha Lash", le Misrak Iz* Azaj [The fighting in Operation Lash], 4 Nehassie 1972 [11.8.1980].

MOND. n.d. *Teklala weqtawi huneta* [The general situation]. This is a sketchy report on the military conditions in the country.

MOND. 1981a. *Ka Misrak Iz Memria le Hager Mekelakega Minister ya karabe ya "Project Lash" 1 ikid kutir 2 zemecha teklala report* [General report on 'Project Lash', Plan 1, No. 2], 20 Tir 1973 [27.1.1981]. This is the most detailed report on the campaign.

MOND. 1981b. *Hulegeb Abiotawi Zemecha ya transport ya megenagna ena ya nedaj gibre hayl ya 1974 ya arategnaw rub amet report* [Quarterly report of the Multifaceted Campaign regarding transport, gas, and manpower, 1981]. Asmara.

MOND. 1982a. *Ya meglecha mastawesha*, 6.8.74 [Explanatory notes, 13.4.1982), Addis Ababa.

MOND. 1982b. *Atekalay ya sera zegeba* [A general report on work performance], Ginbot 1974 [May 1982], Asmara. This document, prepared by the Security section of the Directory, provides a critical appraisal of the Campaign.

MOND. 1984a. *Atekalay ya aser amet zemecha report* [Ten year general report on campaigns], Meskerem 1977 [September 1984], Addis Ababa.

MOND. 1984b. *Ya dirgit huneta meglecha* [Description of work performance], Meskerem 1977 [September 1984].

MOND. 1988. *Ya dehnenet chigrochachin atekalay getseta* [A profile of our security problems], Meskerem 1981 [September 1988]).

Siyum Makonnen, Brigadier-General. 1982. *Le Key Kokeb limimid ya wigia tizaz ya mereja abari* [An intelligence supplement to the war preparations for Red Star], 4 Yekatit 1974 [11.2.1982].

Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, Lt. Colonel. appendix B, 2, Merid Negussie to Tesfaye Gebre-Kidan, 17.10.1981.

Tadesse Tekle Haimanot, Brigadier-General. 1990. *Shaabia* [EPLF], 30 Yekatit 1982 [8.4.1990], Addis Ababa.

Tadesse Tessema, Colonel. 1982. *Ya Semien Tor Ginbar ya 1974 zemecha zegeba-"Key Kokeb Zemecha", 1974* [A report of the 1982 operation of the Northern Front-"the Red Star Campaign", 1982], Asmara. This is the most detailed account of the campaign I have seen. It was prepared by the Operations Department of the Directory.

Wubshet Mamo, Lt. Col. 1980. *Ya Misrak Iz ya zemecha report* [Operational report of the Eastern Command], to the Operations Directorate of the Armed Forces, 19 Nehassie 1972 [26.8.1980], Addis Ababa.

Zeleke Beyene, Col. *le Ager Astedader Minister* [report to the Ministry of Interior], Harar, 4 Yekatit 1972 (11.2.1980).

Interviews

Anonymous, 29.12.1993, Addis Ababa.

Aschenek Akalemariam, Corporal, 2.3.1994, Mehalmeda, Menz (Shewa).

Asfaw Zewde, Captain, 24.4.1994, Addis Ababa.

Gabre-Kristos Abadi, Lt. 15.3. 1994, Addis Ababa.

Getachew Melkie, Major, interviewed by Getachew Wonde, *Addis Zemen*, 12 Hidar 1984 [19.11.1991].

Gezahegn Neknekie, Captain, 2.3.1994, Addis Ababa.

Haile Yitagesu, Sergeant, 11.1.1994, Addis Ababa.

Sereke Berhan, Colonel, 17.7.1994, Mekele.

Solomon Shawl Kassaye, Colonel, 1994, Addis Ababa.