

## Twenty One Years Ago This Week

Written by Administrator  
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*By: Yishak Yared*

This weekend Eritreans are colorfully celebrating the victorious 21st Anniversary of Operation Fenkil. The ceremony is being held under the maxim “Apiary of Eritrean Independence” in the port city of Massawa where the miracle for liberating the city from the brutal Derg regime has been conducted twenty one years ago this week. Operation Fenkil was one of the series offensives the Eritrean Liberation Forces launched against the huge Derg regime’s army to root it out once and for all from Eritrea and thereby realize the rightful place of the country on the world map.

And indeed not long after the liberation of Massawa through the renowned Operation Fenkil, in May 1991, Eritrea was a free and sovereign country where its people start to live in freedom, harmony and dignity. That is why every Eritrean commemorates and celebrates the anniversary of Operation Fenkil. It was the beginning of the end of foreign occupation of the country and the door gate for total independence. It is also to remember and renew their pledge to the heroes and heroines who made this day come true.

Massawa is one of the ancient port cities on the Red Sea coast. It has been very important for many centuries, it has seen successive colonizers including the Ottoman Turks, Egyptians, Italians, the British, and Ethiopia until it was liberated by the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front forces in 1990 through the famous Operation Fenkil.

Massawa became prominent when it was captured by the Ottoman Empire in 1557. The Ottomans built the old town in typical Islamic Ottoman architecture. These buildings remain

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intact to this day, despite having withstood both earthquakes and wars including the brutal aerial bombardment of the Derg regime.

In 1945, following the end of the World War II the port of Massawa suffered a great deal of damage as the occupying British dismantled or destroyed much of the facilities. Some of important port facilities were dismantled by the British and were taken to British colonies in Asia. Such acts of rampaging are characteristics of the British Empire that Eritrea had to pass through.

From 1952 to 1990, when Eritrea entered into federation with Ethiopia, the regime in Ethiopia made Massawa the headquarters of its Naval Force and stayed there until February 1990, when the Eritrean People's Liberation Front forces captured it in surprise attack from both the sea and land. The success of the attack cut-short the major supply line of the Derg army and occasion heralded the beginning of the end of colonialism in Eritrea. 1991 Eritrea became an independent and sovereign county in the Horn of Africa.

Immediately after the total independence of Eritrea, the government and people of Eritrea did not spent any time celebrating their victory and contemplating on the human and material loss during those long years of struggle, but rather with no time wasting they began rehabilitating people affected by the war and reconstructing the war ravaged economy and infrastructure of the country. Massawa, a city that was particularly targeted by the enemy and put into ravel, has seen a major reconstruction activities until people who have seen it devastated were compelled to not recognize it. Today Massawa with the relentless effort of the government and people of Eritrea is becoming one of the modern cities in the country with its beautiful buildings, port facilities, the airport and the railway station.

Massawa is not only a modern port city per se it is also an ancient port city that could attract tourists with high interest in variety of architecture styles be it Ottoman, Egyptian and Italian. As-Sahaba, the ancient Mosque was built by the followers of Prophet Mohammed in 1400 AD. The Mosque is the first in Africa for the followers of Islam set their first foot in Africa (Massawa) from Saudi Arabia. The Mosque is built with Islamic architecture and is still intact to welcome visitors.

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Other ancient buildings built by the Turks like that of Derbush building and the bazaar are also some that make Massawa an ancient city port. The now destroyed by the Derg regime and standing as witness to what the regime did to Massawa is an ancient palace of Egyptian architecture. However, the palace was several times renovated and has partially lost its originality.

When we celebrate the anniversary of the famous Operation Fenkil it with remembering the heroic feats of the army of liberation had to go through to liberate Massawa and the achievements made since then to make Massawa one of the very attractive and enjoyable to visit. Massawa is for Eritrean the Pearl of the Red Sea.

*Long live Eritrea and its people! Happy Anniversary of Operation Fenkil!*