

## **“Liberated Area in the Desert” A Japanese Documentary Film in 1978**

### **1. Prologue**

After difficult negotiations for more than half a year in various parts of the Middle East, the NHK crew received an information that the contact point of the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) is located in Port Sudan. The crew visited the secret branch inside the warehouse town of Port Sudan's port where the crew was greeted by the head of the branch and obtained pass to the liberated area.

### **2. To the Desert**

The crew departs for the liberation zone with an EPLF vehicle from Port Sudan without being told about the destination. The vehicle with the crew heads south of Sudan's desert towards Eritrea, and two days later arrives at Merafit, a post town in the desert.

Sudan ended the diplomatic ties with Ethiopia in favor of EPLF, and allowed the passage of its transportation troops through their territory.

### **3. History of Struggle**

After 300km south from Port Sudan through the hilly country, the crew finally crosses the border to enter Eritrea.

#### ***File Footage : July 1977 Keren\****

World War II ended the long period of Italian rule and Eritrea was put under the rule of Ethiopia by the UN resolution. In September 1961, armed struggle broke out. The intensified fight against Ethiopia by Eritreans, who had different manners, customs, and languages, were escalated. This is described as “tribal conflict” but what the NHK crew found there is much fiercer war aiming for ethnic independence.

### **4. The Cave Base**

The crew goes through the desert area and enters into the mountain area. Climbing up the rocky mountain, the interview team heads for the secret cave base that is the heart of the liberation front. The base is considered as an important place that launched the liberation struggle, and it is called Fah as a spine of fan.

In the base there were factories that restored and repaired weapons, aluminum plants that made daily necessities from an enemy aircraft wreckage, power plants and sewing factories for military uniform, all in operation.

### **5. Frontline Coverage**

The crew joins the vehicle of Estifanos\*, the Eastern Military District Commander, to the forefront of the besieging liberation front in the vicinity of Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea. Last year, following the fall of Keren, the third city of Eritrea, EPLF launched an attack on Asmara, however, the Ethiopian government forces gained a new strong support from the Soviet and rescued the besieged Asmara and began a protracted warfare. Under a tense situation of a likely counter attack by the Ethiopian government army, the crew visits various places in the front line such as trenches around Asmara, field hospital at Fah, and POW camp.

\*Current ambassador of the State of Eritrea to Japan. It should be noted that although described as *Commander of the Eastern Military District* in Japanese narration, the correct title is *Commander of the Northern Front*.

## **6. Interview with SG of EPLF**

The crew interviews Secretary General Ramadan, the chief executive officer of the EPLF, about the aim and the prospect of ending the struggle. The Secretary General Ramadan describes that the path for peaceful resolution has been broken and that arms struggle is now necessary. However, he says that ending the struggle by military power would not be possible and that both peaceful negotiations and military struggle would be necessary.

## **7. At the Farm Village**

The crew heads to Adi Tekelezan village near the front line. Over 1,000 militiamen hold an outdoor monthly meeting and receive a battle report from Commander Estifanos of the Eastern Military District who has returned from the front line. In the village of Zagre near Asmara, the crew reports the situation of the farmers who have obtained land through the agricultural land reform by EPLF. One of the reasons to the EPLF's success in liberating two-thirds of the Eritrean population was by gaining support from the farmers who had been suffered by high rent to their landlords under Ethiopian rule.

## **8. Keren, Liberated City**

Next, the crew visits Keren which is one of the three major cities in Eritrea. After gaining control over most of the rural areas, last year EPLF recaptured Keren from the Ethiopian government army after a fierce battle. Having being recently liberated, the citizens of Keren still seems to be worried and confused.

Several scenes are introduced in the documentary such as citizens being taught how to use a gun by EPLF and the political education for the citizens, where life in the liberated city is depicted through a woman called Elfresh and her family.

## **9. Youth Training**

The crew heads to the youth training center in the cave base of Fah. About 1,000 young boys and girls between the age of 15 to 18 volunteered from all over Eritrea have gathered and receives training aiming for the day of liberation. There are scenes of training and amusement of liberation songs and dances.

## **10. Epilogue**

It is reported that the Soviet's support to Ethiopia has increased sharply this year. On the other hand, despite the situation being far from optimistic for the EPFL who are relying on scarce aid coming through the desert of Sudan, the people of Eritrea are becoming more enthusiastic about their independence. A group of young soldiers advance to the Asmara front, a critical point in the Liberation War.

Note: This synopsis is based on the script by NHK and the description and views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of the Embassy of the State of Eritrea to Japan.