

On the Passing of a Great Ethiopian Patriot: Commander Zeleke Bogale



It is with a sad and broken heart that we announce the passing away of Commander Zeleke Bogale who had served his country both as a distinguished naval officer and civilian Administrator par-excellence. For those who know Cmdr. Zeleke Bogale, his passing away marks the end of the life of a courageous Ethiopian who left an indelible mark in the development of his beloved country. No man, presently alive or long gone, has done more to modernize the former sea-ports of Ethiopia and its marine related infrastructure. Although now under the control of Eritrea, Cmdr. Zeleke's years of hard work and the foundation he laid

will undoubtedly benefit both the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea in the future. Cmdr. Zeleke was credited by many for his visionary leadership and management of the staff and thousands of employees of The Ethiopian Marine Transport Authority and in transforming the cities and ports of Assab and Massawa.

Cmdr. Zeleke was a leader whose imagination created two of the most efficiently run ports in Africa. Well before private institutions found the concept of community development and service as a way of building partnership with local communities, Cmdr. Zeleke had integrated this concept within the Marine Authority he led. Through his work, the residents of the city of Assab were able to drink clean water from the city's modern water system installed by the Marine Authority and many found natural shelter from the burning sun under the green trees that the Authority planted all over Assab and Massawa. Only those who endured the sweltering sun of those cities can truly appreciate the meaning of such refuges to the local inhabitants. The Afar people and those who live in Assab and midway transit port of Tiho benefited from Comdr. Zeleke's visionary leadership of the Marine Transport Authority.



Cmdr. Zeleke was born on September 22, 1934. The youngest of five children, he was raised in the city of Harar. His father, Ato Bogale Jato, was a businessman and a patriot who fought during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, who instilled a strong sense of citizenship, honor, and duty in his children. Cmdr. Zeleke attended Ras Mekonen High School in Harar before joining the Imperial Ethiopian Naval Academy's first class of cadets. Cmdr. Zeleke once recalled a speech by a Bishop at his high school as a catalyst for his interest in joining the then

newly established Ethiopian Navy. The Bishop recounted his experience in the war of Italian aggression against Ethiopia. The Bishop explained to the young students how the gross disparity in the equipment and training of the two armies led to the massacre of many of his friends. He impressed upon them of the need to build a modern army, one that can defend its nation from invasion by a technologically advanced nation. By the end of his speech, the Bishop had succeeded in convincing at least one among his audience to join the cause.

Cmdr. Zeleke joined the Imperial Ethiopian Naval Academy as a cadet and graduated first in his class as a Valedictorian, earning special awards from the Emperor Haileselassie. Many of his classmates soon became leaders of the Ethiopian Navy and contributed to the growth of the Ethiopian Navy and Maritime Institutions of Ethiopia over the following decades. After graduating from the Naval Academy and completing various assignments as a young officer, Cmdr. Zeleke received further Naval education and military training at the San Diego United States Naval Academy, and at the British Naval Academy in Dartmouth, England, where he completed advanced naval warfare and Executive/Leadership training. Later, he attended University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, and received a post graduate diploma in the Social Sciences and Arts.

Since its inception, the Ethiopian navy was led and trained by retired British, and later Norwegian, Naval Officers. In 1958 the Navy became an independent branch of the Ethiopian armed forces. It also operated as a Coast Guard operating in the Red Sea waters off of Assab and Massawa. The first group of naval officers was tasked with the responsibility of eventually taking over the naval operations from the foreign officers. Among those to assume this responsibility was Cmdr. Zeleke. He became the first Ethiopian Naval officer to command the

flag ship of the Navy, HMS Ethiopia, when he earned the title of vice commander of the warship. Cmdr. Zeleke also held various other posts including Chief of Naval Operations of the Ethiopian Navy.

After the fall of the Emperor Haileselassie, Cmdr. Zeleke began his career as a civilian administrator of Ethiopian ports at Assab and Massawa. He was appointed as the administrator-in-chief of the Ethiopian Marine Department in 1967 by Lt. Gen. Aman Andom, who was then Head of State. The Department later became an independent authority and became known as The Ethiopian Marine Transport Authority. Cmdr. Zeleke led the organization as a general manager for the following seventeen years until 1991. In that position, he oversaw the administration and operation of the two sea ports as well as Inland Waterways at Lake Tana in Bahir Dar and Gorgora, Lakes Shala and Abaya in Arba Minch, and the Barro River in Gambella. He also spear-headed and oversaw grand projects such as the development of a third port at the island of Haleb off of Assab, a Maritime Academy, a state-of-the-art boat manufacturing center—one of a kind in eastern Africa—and a new ship maintenance yard. The Maritime Academy envisioned under the leadership of Cmdr. Zeleke was designed to provide degree and diploma level training to students in several Marine related fields.

Cmdr. Zeleke's administration style and achievements drew much praise from those who had the opportunity to visit the massive development and expansion of infrastructure of the ports and the modern housing and recreational facilities built for port employees. He was a recipient of many awards for distinguished service from the two administrations under which he served. He is known to many as one the most hardworking individuals, dedicated to the development of his country. The hallmark of his administration style was building and

sustaining the moral of his colleagues and building durable bridges between his organization and the public. He worked tirelessly day and night and spent very little time at the main office in Addis Ababa, choosing instead to personally oversee the daily port operation in Assab and Massawa. Those who remember his work ethic pray that the passing of a man so dedicated to the betterment of his fellow citizens is not the mark of the end of an era that produced men of such strength, integrity, and dedication.



A self effacing man, who avoided publicity and fan fair, Cmdr. Zeleke has left a legacy that posterity will look to for an example of burning patriotism and love of country. He left his off-springs a legacy of dedication to country and fellow citizens through thick and thin. They hope our nation will continue to breed men of such integrity, dedication and good will who will sacrifice for the common good. Cmdr. Zeleke entered eternal peace on June 18, 2009 at 12:30 PM, after fighting a terminal illness over the past several months. He was a kind and loving father and a role-model to his children. To his friends and family members, he was a man willing to extend a helping hand to anyone in need. His memory will live forever etched in the minds of those who knew him and will be carried forward through the lives he enriched.

Cmdr. Zeleke is survived by his two sons, Neamin Zeleke and Adinew Zeleke and two grandchildren, Emalafe Neamin and Eyor Neamin. Family, friends, and admirers of Cmdr. Zeleke shall be converging at St. Micheal Church in Washington DC to pay tribute to this great Ethiopian. Following the service, Cmdr. Zeleke's remains will travel to Ethiopia to his final resting place.

Service: St. Michael Church Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 3010 Earl Place, NE,
Washington DC

Date: Tuesday, June 23, 2009

Time: 10:30 .AM

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