

# **Brothers in Arms**

## **Part II**

**Abdul Ahmed III**

**Nov 26, 2011**

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*“To be Somali is to be a people united by one language and divided by maps”  
Salman Rushdie*

In 1977, the then Somali Government led by the members of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) provided full military and diplomatic support for Western Somali Liberation Forces (WSLF). The objective of this unreserved support was to help Somali people in the Ogaden region restore their independence from the ruthless Derge Regime of Ethiopia. For all Somali people, this was understood to be a just cause.

Unfortunately, however there were two major problems for the Somali government; first, the world community – both Western and Eastern Blocs - interpreted Somalia’s support for WSLF to be an irredentist war to unite ethnic Somali people across the border with the republic. (Something the Somali government either didn’t quite understand or wasn’t able to). Second and equally important problem was the management of the war and politicization of the Somali Army. For instance, in spite of an impressive war plan and superb execution of the war, the Somali Army was often internally weakened by serious non-military political problems such as unconcealed disregard of merit in favor of political loyalty in promotions.

While it is worth mentioning of these important facts, it is indeed beyond the scope of this series of articles to discuss either factor in detail. This series is about the lives and bonds of brothers in arms men who fought for their country regardless of their political stance. Moreover, it is often acknowledged by Somali Army officers that the top generals of the Somali central command played a crucial role in recognizing the need for commanding officers of high caliber at the field. Particularly as the 1977 war is concerned, there is ample evidence that the central command attempted its best to minimize politicization of the war effort. To that extent most of the war planners and a great majority of the field commanders are believed to be the best that Somalia had at that time. Among these were all those who led the fronts in Qabridahare, Wardheer, Godey, Dhagahbur, Jigjiga and Harar.



Gen. Mohamed A. Samatar

The Somali National Army was commanded by Gen Mohamed Ali Samatar , assisted by Chief of National Army Staff Gen Abdalla Fadil (member of SRC), The deputy chief Col Ahmed Hassan Muse (member of SRC) aided by two assistant commanders; Col Omar Hagi Mohamed Masale and Col Mohamed Nur Gallal. These officers directed the entire war effort and were assisted by Army directorates.

The Somali national army directorates assisting the central command included the Directorate of Mobilization under Abuukar Liibaan Aftooje (Southern Galkayo), Directorate of Logistics under Hassan Roobleh (of Jowhar) , Directorate of Communications headed by Major Abdalla Bidaar (Southern Galkayo), Col Abdullahi Ali Omar (Garowe) and foreign relations by Col Ibrahim Begadi (Begadi Of Afgoi). There were also Three Divisions namely 60<sup>th</sup> Division centered in Baidoa and headed by Col Omar Anjeeh (of Hargeisa), 21<sup>st</sup> Division headed by Col Abdi Aluq (of Galgudud) and 26<sup>th</sup> Division headed by Col Yussuf Salhaan (of Bosaso) a well respected officer and the only division head who participated in active fronts.

The Somali war effort was also divided into two main command centers, the North Command based in Hargeisa and Southern Command based in Biadoa/Mogadishu. The approximate delineation of the two commands is the river Webi Shebeille. The war was also devised to be executed in Phases; Phase I included Godey, Qabri-Dahare, Wardheer and Dhagahbur, Phase II – North would include Jigjiga, Harar and Diri Dhabe. Phase II South included Imey, Sidamo region, the vast land between Godey and Negeille.

The leaders of the Fronts in the Northern Region, included Col Yussuf Salhan leader of Jigaga Center, the deputy leader of JigJiga front Col Najji (of Benadir), the leader of Dhagah bur front Col Abdirahman Aare (of South Galkayo),, the leader of the Qabri Dahare Col Ali Hussein (of Sheikh- Bura'o). Leader of Warder Col Farah Handulle (of Galkayo), the Leader of Harar Front Col Ali Ismail (of Bender Qassim), and his deputy Major Abdullahi HAji Ali Madar (of Galkayo). Others include Major Hashi Ali Jumaale (Guri-Eel, Galguduud), Major Dahir Aden Indha Qarshe.(Southern of Galkayo), Major Yassin Hurfee (of Galkayo),

The Southern Region Leaders Included Col Abdullahi Yussuf the leader of Negheille Center and his deputies Col Abdulkadir Berked (of Begedi of Afgio) , Col Ahmed Ilgir (of Burtinle), Col Mohamed Abshir (of



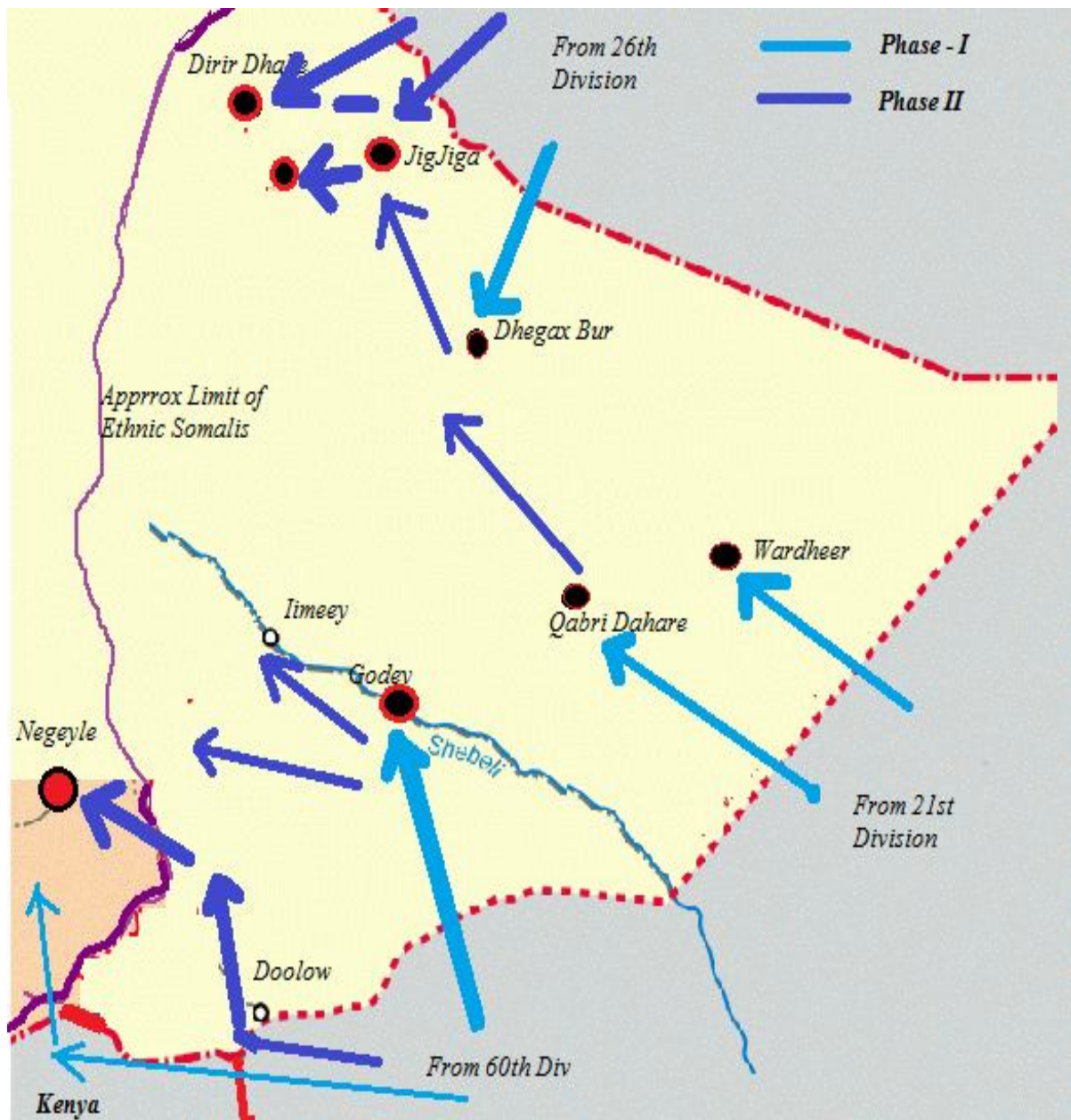
Mohamed Aden

Harfa), Col Abdullahi Irro the leader of Godey Center and his deputy Major Abdulkadir Kosar (of Hargeisa), Major Dhegjar (of Borama), Capt. Asker, Capt Shukri Bedel and Head of the Commando Batalion in Belidoogle Major Mohmamed Aden (of Laas Anood) who arrived in Godey front as reinforcement from Balidoogle, and Head of the initial commando units Lt. Abdirizaq Saif , and many other thousands of non commissioned officers and soldiers. Among the most noted is non-commissioned sub-officers Nur Warsame Guled (of El bur) a highly admired warrior who selflessly fought and gained the respect of the commanding officers and his subordinate soldiers alike.

In the first Somali-Ethiopian War in 1964, Somalia had only few trained officers, such as Mohame Ali Samatar, Abdullahi Yusuf , Doonyaale, Aideed, Sharmaan And M Abdalla Fadil. Somalia didn't have command level or staff college graduate, didn't not have an air force, or air defense. However in just less than 13-years, Somalia has assembled one of the most impressive armies in the African continent and the 5<sup>th</sup> largest Army in the entire African continent.

At the time of the war, the Somali Armed Forces were estimated to be nearly 40, 000 strong, supported by nearly 15,000 -20, 000 non-regulars and militias. Somalia had 6-Tank Battalions, 10-mechanized, 10 Infantry Battalions, 4 Commando Battalions, 5- Air Defense Battalions, 7-Armored Battalions and more than 60 Combat Aircrafts. Somalia in every measure had one of the most sophisticated military in the region and according to US scholars and observers, Somali Armed Forces war plan and its execution under the leadership of Gen Samatar has surprised and impressed both Soviets and Americans Military experts.

Figure 1.0 below shows Somalia's plan to first launch the Godey campaign on July 13 and simultaneously attack Qabri-Dahare and Dhagahbur the following days. This plan would disadvantage Ethiopians in Qabri-Dahare which in turn will make the town of Wardheer an easy take for the Somali Army.



Few days after the Godey campaign begun – from July 13 – July 24, the Somali forces from the 21<sup>st</sup> Div simultaneously launched highly sophisticated attack on Qabri-Dahare and Warder on the third week of July . Col Ali Hussein ( of Shekh-Togdheer region) was the commanding officer and the front leader of the Qabri-Dahare front. Major AbdulAziz Bowbowleh.(Galkayo, Mudug) was appointed as the deputy commander. Both of these officers were trained in Operational command at Frunze Military Academy. In fact Major AbdulAziz was the last group of Somali officers who completed their staff training at Frunze just about a year after Col Ali Hussein.



Col Ali Hussein

The Colonel was a highly respected officer, well liked and mild mannered gentleman, he is known to have been the type who minds his business. Just like many other officers, Col Ali Hussein was not a political loyalist but a professional officer. Similarly Major Abdulaziz bowbowleh was perhaps one the brightest of his generation, they both kept their politics to themselves and were ready to do what was asked of them by their country, to fight and fight well they did.



AbdulKadir Koosaar

While the Qabri Dahare campaign was led by these infantry officers, they were relied heavily on the support of Tank battalions led by Major Yaasiin Ahmed Hurfe himself trained in mechanized warfare in the USSR. Other officers in the field included Col Mohamed Ali Abokor (of Buhodle) a political appointee, trained in USSR's politics institutes.

If Godey was the surprise attack of the first Phase, Qabri Dahare was the anti-thesis of surprise attack, it was battle of full mechanized battalions and large Infantry. A battle that sealed the victory of the first phase of the Somali War Plan. The Somali officers, under the leadership of Col Ali Hussein had systematically coordinated an infantry and tank assault on 11<sup>th</sup> brigade of Ethiopian forces in Qabridahare.

They were briefly hindered by land mines and faulty intelligence. Unfortunately however, the Somali intelligence had under estimated both the size and the military equipment of Ethiopia's 11<sup>th</sup> brigade. (11<sup>th</sup> brigade was heavily reinforced by Ethiopia's Revolutionary Militia's). This resulted in unanticipated tough resistance, unexpected counter offensive of the underestimated Ethiopian Army.

On July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Col Ali Hussein and his deputies planned a double edged, multilayered attack plan consisting of heavy uninterrupted 48-hours of bombardment and immediate forced entry of ground troops aided by Tanks and armored vehicles. In essence, Qabri-Dahare was liberated in two days of sustained attacks and coincidentally Qabri-Dahare's fall was just few hours after Godey's fall in Somali hands.

Among the unsung heroes of Qabri-Dahare was Major, Yassin Hurfe (Galkayo, Mudug) a well liked, graduate of USSR Academy of Mechanized and Motorized Services, strong minded officer who commanded like a father and fought like a soldier. Major Yassin was killed in the last hours of the battle and many of the officers of Qabri-Dahare believe that his contributions were unparalleled. The fall Qabri-Dahare nearly guaranteed the liberation of Wardher.

Col Farah Handule (of Galkayo) and his deputy Major Mahomaed Mahmood Sheikh (of Bullo-Berdeh) have elegantly succeeded the capture of Warder. It is in Wardheer that the largest number of Ethiopian Prisoners of War were captured in Wardheer, not because the Ethiopian forces didn't fight for their hold but because the Wardheer plan as part of the national strategy guaranteed this outcome. It is estimated that up to 350-400 Ethiopian troops were either captured or had unconditionally surrendered.

The last front in the Phase-I of the Somali plan was Degahbur Front, an important town in just off the Haud in Northern Somalia. The capture of Dhegahbur was delayed for about 15-days in part for faulty intelligence and unanticipated Ethiopian resistance. Eventually Dhegahbur would fall in Somali hands under the leadership of Col Abdirahman Aare, assisted by an infantry brigade led by Col Ali Ismail. (More details about the battle of Wardheer and Dhegahbur will be published at a later stage).

By late July Somalia controlled Godey, Qabri-Dahare and Wardheer, Dhegahbur would fall in Somali hands in early August, Somalia would then enter the second phase of its national war plan, which included opening of new fronts in JigJiga, Harar and Diridhaba in the North and Imey and Negheille in the South.

Sensing the successful end of Phase-I of the Somali War Plan, the Somali government, has enacted major reshuffle and re-alignment of the Somali National Forces to position itself for the subsequent phases of the war. This included re-assignment of officers to new roles. Appointment of General Mahmood Geelle Yussuf (SRC member) as the new Joint Chief of Staff of Somali Army. The Somali Government also reinstated Col Abdullahi Yussuf and Col M Farah Aideed. Col Abdullahi Yussuf was appointed to lead the Negheille front extending from the vast south western territories of Bali just beyond southwest Godey to the Town of Negheille. Col Aideed on the other hand was appointed to lead a military training base in central Somalia in order to produce a much needed personnel for the subsequent phases of the war plan.

By late September of 1977, the Somali government completed the re-assignment of many of the officers at the Central Command to a new Command Center in Hargeisa; including high ranking

officers such as Omar Haji Mohammed Masale who was sent to coordinate war effort in Hargeisa, and Galaal, who was appointed to lead the Dirir Dhabe front. The head of the 26-division Col Yussuf Salhaan was assigned to lead the JigJiga Front. Col Abukar Aftooje was sent to lead activities in the Iimeey Front.

Similarly, the reorganization also included the leaders of Godey, Qabri-Dahare, Col Ali Hussein the leader of Qabri-Dahare was re-assigned to participate in the second phase of the war under 26th-division, Col Begedi was assigned to Godey to replace the Godey front leader Col Irro who was restated as chief commanding staff officer in 60th-Div responsible for mobilization and organization and support of 6-Brigades for the second phase of the war for Negheille Center under the leadership of the Col Abdullahi Yussuf.

In the years after the Somali-Ethiopia war, Col Ali Hussein became a highly respected war hero and commander of the 21<sup>st</sup> division, and later the head of the communications directorate of the Somali Army. Col Ali Hussein joined SNM in 1989 and is credited for the re-organization of the SNM military in late 1989-1990, Col Ali Hussein died in 2003 after prolonged ailment. Major Abdul-Aziz Bowbowleh and Major Dahir indha-Qarsho continued to be part of important northern fronts. Col Farah Handulle became a governor of several regions of Somalia and was killed by SNM in a road ambush in late 1987. Col Begedi, Col Abukar Aftooje, Col Abdirahman Aare, Col M Ali Abokor and Col Ali Ismail became Generals of the Army and have held varying responsibilities. Gen Begedi, and Gen Aftooje, Gen Aare, Gen M Ali Abokor would become Somali Military Attachee in Saudi Arabia, France, China and the USA respectively. Gen Ali Ismail held many positions and eventually became head of the National Strategy Academy.

Abdul Ahmed III  
WardheerNews contributor  
Email: [abdul.ahmed@thoapi.org](mailto:abdul.ahmed@thoapi.org)

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*Abdul Ahmed III also contributes to THOAPI and other research institutions in Arizona, Washington DC., and Virginia.*