Somalia:

Voices from the Front

Col. (Rtd) J M Owuoth

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Authors Note

This book has been in gestation for well over thirty years and is generally anchored on my rich military experience, my deep spirituality and training in psychology. Overall it is grounded in the lens and frameworks of a Kenya Defence Forces commissioned officer.

The material on the book therefore is sourced from my memories, journals and personal records.

As deemed appropriate, names have been changed to protect the privacy of some individuals.

I have reconstructed the times, dates, events and conversations portrayed in this book to the best of my recollection cross checking my memories with reliable sources.

There is always some literary licence and creativity when writing a book and this work is no exception and so the happenings as depicted are embellished true accounts not necessarily mine personally but may have been shared within my military circles.

As the book was with the publishers, a tragic helicopter accident led to the demise of the KDF chief of defence forces (CDF).

A prediction as fronted by this book that the CDF office he held was soon to be occupied by an officer of my cadet years is merely coincidental and was tagged in good faith predicated on the expected normal run of events.

Finally, any errors that may have been reflected in the book are entirely mine.

Colonel (Rtd) Joseph Mulowa Owuoth 'ndc' 'psc' (K)- April 2024

Preface

From January 1992, with the fall of President Siad Barre, Somalia has been a country in turmoil. Armed factional squabbles, famine, diseases, piracy and floods have been the scourge of the country for thirty or so years. Neighbouring Kenya had desisted from the military option to enforce peace into the country instead choosing to support the many diplomatic efforts and various peace processes. Then the Islamic Jihadists militia group Al Shabaab emerged and perennially became a source of security related incidences in Kenya.

The militia threat became unbearable with constant border violations with fatal consequences. By July 2011, the attacks and atrocities by the Islamic jihadists had reached alarming levels, causing public discontent as expressed in the national assembly. The print media was also constantly accusing the government of laxity in securing the citizenry and country. A political decision was made and the Kenya Defence Forces marched into Somalia invoking Article 51 of the United Nations charter.

On the morning of 14 October 2011, KDF crossed into Somalia, commencing the first full scale military engagement in the territory of a neighbouring country since the independence of the country. The operation was named *operation Linda Nchi*.

The particular enemy in the theatre was and remains the Al Shabaab jihadist militant group. Whose stated principal objective is to establish an Islamic caliphate in the ethnic Somali inhabited regions in the Horn of Africa under the banner of "Islamic Emirate of Somalia". The major motivating factor for the militant group is the strong appeal to the Islamic faith.

The book covers the period between 2011 and 2014 and is introspection by several soldiers when at the war front and the impact of the war experiences when back in the peace time location.

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5. Colonels (Rtd) Solomon Kaleli and Shadrack Mutacho.
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10. His Beatitude, the Patriarch Peter Kaloki Ndambuki.
11. The KDF veteran community
12. The Gilo family group.
13. The Armed Forces Training College (AFTC) intake 21 of August, 1986.
14. And Maurice Odhiambo and Teresa Sule, for being there.

List of Abbreviations

AFTC	:	Armed Forces Training College
AMISOM	:	African Union Mission in Somalia
BG	:	Battle Group
BN	:	Battalion
C in C	:	Commander in Chief
CDF	:	Chief of Defence Forces
CO	:	Commanding Officer
DFMH	:	Defence Memorial Hospital
GEN	:	General
GOC	:	General officer Commanding
GPS	:	Global Positioning System
IDP	:	Internally Displaced Persons
IED	:	Improvised Explosive Device
KDF	:	Kenya Defence Forces
Lt Col	:	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt	:	Lieutenant
NATO	:	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OC	:	Officer Commanding
PKM	:	A Russian-made machine gun
QMSI	:	Qualified Master Sergeant Instructor
RPG	:	Rocket Propelled Grenade

To the Dudubures- you are I.

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Back To The Front

The vintage YY official manufacturers name Hughes 503A-tail number 506 that conveyed me to the Somali war front is a tiny four seater plane has none of the glamour of the bigger and more powerful helicopters that the KDF holds in its aviation inventory. It is considered vintage because it had seen action by the United States forces in the Korean and Vietnam theatres and that her weapons- the medium machine gun and the rockets do not swivel like modern helicopters.

For using the armament, the pilot has to rely on the same technique used nearly fifty years ago by pointing the aircraft at the identified target, fly directly towards it and shoot. The chopper does not even have a gun sight. The chopper also has less armour than other most any other military aircraft. To put more armour on the craft would force the crew to carry less fuel and ammunition to offset the added weight; so it remains vintage.

But the troops on the ground love this chopper. It has a history of protecting infantry troops by darting above them (YY) and has not infrequently extricated troops from very perilous situations. The capability of being a high flying chopper giving it a bird's eye view of the combat terrain together with the capability of bringing

deadly fire in the form of rockets and machine gun fire has led it to be praised as "eyes *with teeth*".

We crossed the Kenya Somalia common border at about 0900 hrs, and three minutes later we were overflying the Dhobley operational base, a place I had set up on the night of 14 October 2011.The hot Somalia heat bounced off the ground to welcome me, the new formation commander. A one-star general, a Brigadier and the new African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) sector 2 commander.

My journey to Dhobley had commenced at nine o'clock sharp from Embakasi air base in Nairobi. As per the regulations, there were two of the vintage helis tasked for my movement. My pilot was one Lt Col Jonah Mwingi whom we had done a command course and staff course when still junior officers, our paths had not crossed after that so I greeted him with a bit of cordiality asking him if we were designed to work together in Dhobley

He had replied tersely:

"No sir I am dropping you to Dhobley and back. This is my final official flight as am starting my retirement in three days"

By my calculation, the pilot Jonah must have been in early fifties, too young to retire, I thought and too old to start a new career too. A very experienced pilot, personal loss and also a big loss to the nation *celle vie*; I kept quiet, what was there to say?

The Choppers took off and flew steadily east almost in a geographical straight line for close to two hours headed for Garrissa for refuelling and onwards to Dhobley

Garrissa is a big military base which had been an effective launching pad during anti *Shifta* operations post-independence. With time it is now getting to be dilapidated and risks being swallowed by the fast growing town. I had out of courtesy called the Garrissa base commander informing him that I was scheduled to land at the edge of his camp purely for refuelling a task which was to last less than twenty minutes before heading further east to the Somalia front. I had no intention of entering his camp as it could interfere with the routine of the camp and again because the deployed unit in the location was not under my command.

I was wrong, as my plane made a landing, I noticed that he had set up a tent and some bites with several waiters hovering about waiting for me at the airstrip; I was mildly surprised but was really appreciative of the gesture. He had been one of the top cadets when I was a trainer in the military academy and our military paths always seemed to cross as we both rose through the ranks. We shared a cup, actually a thermos of tea in a very jovial manner as we reminisced on the many shared experiences.

Dadaab

Refuelling over for the two choppers too we took off again for the 180 kilometres or so second phase of the journey.

I asked the pilots to overfly the Dadaab refugee camp for my view. They swooped low and went out of the way to overfly the three different branches of the refugee camp at Hagadera, Ifo and the main camp of Dadaab. It is the scourge of the Somalis that the different clans cannot live peacefully together even when sharing the same tormenting experience as refugees hence every major clan had settled in a different location with the unwritten code for the other clans to keep off.

Having a population of close to 400, 000 Dadaab can easily be the fifth largest cosmopolitan in the country. I had first set foot at Dadaab as a young officer with the rank of a captain in 1991, Dadaab then (it still) was a back place, just a road junction centre linking Liboi, Garrissa and Modogashe with nothing extra to show and only having a semblance of becoming active only on Wednesday mornings when the livestock market became active for only a few hours.

This changed in mid-1992 when the deluge of refugees flooded in from Somalia trekking in from the border town of Liboi, 100 Kilometre distant. They were a pitiful sight and the welcoming UN NGOS were openly

blaming the Kenyan government for what they perceived as lack of humanity to the now refugees.

As I flew, I looked at Dadaab now and saw that in every direction for up to 10 kilometres, the vegetation had been cut down for firewood use exposing miles upon mile upon mile of reddish brown sandy ground formerly covered in stunted shrubs now desolate making life even more and exceptionally severe.

The Somali is a proud man but I knew that the big fraction of the refugees had lost hope and become content to continue on as the world's charity wards in Dadaab.

I had been in place as part of the security contingent when the first refugees from Somalia had started to trickle in to Dadaab, the United Nations High commissioner for refugees (UNHCR) as per that standard operating instructions had offered them the basics for construction of their own shelters which includes some tentage, poles, and some form of food ration.

But these would be refugees from Somalia were then proud and were generally dressed in expensive gauzy robes of subtle shades, mauves, yellows, purples, magentas and cinnamon colour catching their hairs in fine net scarves; they looked then very dignified and werejustifiably looked down on their Kenya cousins. Keen not to soil their delicate hands they preferred to pay the local Kenyan Somalis to build for them their own

shelters. But then, if you keenly observed them, they seemed to have had a higher state of living compared to their Kenyan cousins, their clothes seemed of better material, their shoes and even their carriage bags too. The few who had vehicles had four wheelers which had yet to be seen criss crossing our Kenyan roads, so I thought, I understood their pride and a feeling so prevalent in the mind of any fleeing person that the issue would somehow sort itself out within a month or so and they would trek back to their homes ad settle on their routine activities.

Thirty years had now come and gone and a new generation had been born and I suspect were more Kenyan than Somalis.

We flew on and in about thirty minutes we overflew the border town of Liboi and the big signature of a General Service Unit tented camp co-located on the common border together with the custom offices and the Kenya Revenue offices.

We crossed the border and again overflew Dhobley town three kilometres in to Somalia. Looking at Dhobley from the air brought in some feeling of 13 years earlier almost to the day, I had been part of the arrow head of the KDF crossing the border in support of the Somali National Army after taking the village town of Dhobley.

Dhobley

Dhobley is a Somali word and was adopted by the town on account of the thick black cotton soil which during the rainy season curtails all vehicular movement. The town lying in an open Somalia scrubland on the Kenya Somalia border can claim its importance to geography as the first and last township as you live or enter Somalia into Kenya.

As a border town the centre is ramshackle but bustling with zest and life and like all border towns has its own peculiarity. The town's one street is roofed with corrugated iron sheets and every building roof here is in various advanced stages of rusty erosion. The whole street has a surface of hard earth which as pointed out becomes a quagmire of black sticky mud in the wet season. The shops are colloquially known as *souk el tawil* shortened merely as souk. Several wheeled donkey carriages mainly carrying water in yellow containers criss cross as they do their daily grind of supplying water from the two boreholes constructed by an Islamic NGO.

Apart from the claustrophobic proximity of the buildings to one another and the noisome cloying stench of rubbish and assorted decomposing matter. Hens, goats, sheep scavenge every rubbish pile and accessible drain bed in search of edible scraps. Teenage boys named *skoris* could also be seen selling tray full of biros and

sunglasses and cheap watches from china loaded onto wheelbarrows.

Dhobley provided rich pickings for the AS as the common border with Kenya had heavy traffic of goods being ferried to the Refugee camps or being smuggled to Kenya's hinterlands. So reasonably AS and even had maintained token presence in the town for over a decade taxing the traders.

Dhobley had fallen to the combined forces of the SNA at about midday of 14 October 2011.

In mid-2011, with all indications indicating that the SNA was mustering her forces and were set to liberate Somalia from the Jihadi group, the AS had upped their presence in the town with the erection of three select strong points at the hospital in the northern part of the town, another strong point in the Police station which was in the centre of the town and at a relatively well built bungalow in the southern parts of the town.

The Jihadists pick up mounted heavy weaponry consisting of the 12.7 millimetre anti-aircraft weapon had not shown presence but were believed to be held far out of town as reserve and banking on their firepower and mobility to be deployed as appropriate.

The SNA had made two attempts to wrest Dhobley town from the AS but had both attempts relatively easily beaten back by the more experienced AS fighters.

The SNA proved third time lucky on the dawn of 11 of course with a bit of nudge from "big brother".

The ten thousand or so residents who were in Dhobley that day will never forget it.

The pre-dawn attack on the morning of 14 October 2011 started with loud explosions as the town centre erupted with fire from an avalanche of mortar rounds, machine guns and small arms cluttered about, red and green tracers interlaced careening into the air making nice weaving patterns in the morning light. Gunshots washed every inch of the town saturating it with spurts of luminescent tracers, then the *technicals* mounted with the 12.7 mm coughed in the background from the scrubland east of the town. It is a monstrous sound from the 12.7 mm weapon and fearsome too cutting down trees and weak walls while tearing angry, ragged holes in the air.

By midday, after suffering major losses, the AS made a hasty withdrawal towards the direction of the township of Tabda as Dhobley was finally liberated.

Interestingly, what still resonates to my mind that despite with all the booming noise and Dhobley turning into a Christmas tree, one issue still resonates in my mind that of a rooster crowing loudly in the melee.

During my first stint, the situation was querulous and the KDF was viewed with so much suspicion and dread. Despite rescuing the town from the AS, KDF were

not in a position to casually pass through the town save when making flag patrols and then when the troops were well armed with rehearsed likely manoeuvres in case of any enemy action.

I wondered if there had been some increased social interactions between the predominantly Christian KDF and civilian staff in the sector headquarters and the Muslim predominant and conservative citizenry of Dhobley?

Prostitution has always been the faithless companion of armies and war. Was that applicable in this dominant Islamic town? I wondered inwardly. Had there been a case of a dashing soldier winning the heart of a beautiful belle residing in Dhobley? In later years will there be a case of a Mariam Onyango? Asha Njoroge? Osman Mwamburi? Ramadhan Gitogo? Abdurahman Sidwaka? Haji Osango? Abdiswamad Tororey?

We shall wait and see.

Recollection

KDF has been good to me. Since my experience in Somalia I had been promoted twice, did a tour of duty as a defence attaché in a European country for three plus years, attended a course in War College in the UK and now was set to retire in thirteen months. All in all, it had been a nice ride and KDF had proved to be the best employer ever. But then, there was one possible big ladder beckoning, only a rung in the ladder to be a Major General and yes, deep down I was hoping that things will work out positively in that promotion direction ...well you never know.

Everything remaining constant, I was set to retire in less than 12 months and was actually not keen on it. My fear was the technicalities of re-entry back to the civilian society and specifically the village environment; it would be a steep re-learning curve considering my many years' sojourn outside the village. The military had grabbed me as a sprightly young man of 20 and had milked me dry literally though they catered for me in every way possible, but then there is always something amiss.

I sincerely feared the re-entry process. From my enlistment, my visits to the village had every year decreased as my economics prowess and my overall exposure and outward view of things also sort of improved exponentially in comparison to the villagers rather drab existence. With my investments outside the

village environment, my visit to the village was now only at select occasions like Christmas Easter and the occasional funeral. Shamefacedly, I had started avoiding the village as I had clearly drifted away from my extended relatives and childhood buddies.

But then we including me all eventually are to retire from any place of sustenance including the mighty KDF.

My brain neurons went on overdrive as I recalled something I had read about the four ways a senior officer exits the military career. The first is being in a safe environment, minimum exposure and the slow fading into oblivion.

The second method is by officers who stay too long, extending their time in the military with a prayer and a hope that they were going to be rewarded in the next promotion board; they fail to win the coveted promotion and limp out of the system, eternally bitter with the system and some select senior officers who they blame or perceive failed to consider them for the next promotion or juicy appointment. A big fraction of officers in many militaries in the world fit this bill.

The third option are the fortunate few, who rise to the top of the pyramid or close enough as generals and go out in a blaze of glory or as the British would say- with bayonets fixed, flags flying, drums beating and trumpets blowing.

The last lot are the officers especially when the military is involved in a combat situation (or maybe even in a political situation), these officers despite all good intentions crash out in flames.

I tried to count the number of officers who were hand in glove involved in the planning and the first execution of the ongoing campaign against Al Shabaab. How many were still in service? How many were still in the military and in "good books", how many had crashed out? I left those thoughts stop by the edge. What though was fixed in my mind was that if there was a time I needed prayers then it was now when taking on this delicate combat command duty.

The HQ at Dhobley

From the air, as the helicopter pilot made its finals I looked at my new headquarters, about a kilometre wide at its widest point uncannily it was shaped like the map of Kenya from the air, I could see a convoy of about 10 vehicles grinding its way from I suspect Beles Qoqani township sixty or so kilometres away to the east.

6 tall observation towers were on select locations with machine guns muzzles jutting out long menacing clearly visible over the sandbags. With bunkers dotted the entire locality and all around the enclosure were barbed wire and concertina and beyond them on every direction were flat open fields that extended for about

five hundred metres in every direction, open for fields of fire.

Cities of tents and metallic containers sprawled from one corner to the other with the perimeter fence pronounced by hescos barriers. Several aviation assets were neatly parked in a hardened ground

A generator hummed in the distance, a well-trodden volleyball pitch remained gawking

The Dhobley headquarter I was seeing was a far cry to the Dhobley I had spent my first night in. With our troops on hot pursuit, the headquarter had moved in late afternoon and we got into a frenzy of digging in and making it a defensible position in case the jihadists were to attempt a counter attack.

It had been a long night.

The following days were dedicated to improve the defences always with the expectation that of a possible jihadists attack seeing that this was an asymmetric operation defined by having no set boundaries.

With time, the headquarters at Dhobley had acquired the look of a fully-fledged logistic base with select sub-units and detachments arriving in trickles, a mortar platoon, an artillery battery, an armoured detachment, military police, signals, medics, media, supplies, aviation, motor transport and so on each passing month contributing to juts of new perimeter space to make it what it had turned out to be.

The vintage helicopter swooped and wheeled and clattered and circled and finally settled onto the landing ground on its skid. Its shuddering rotors beat the dead hot air and the perimeter was swept by angry turbulence dust and light equipment whipped through the air in the helicopters wind.

A sound sort of quaked and then became quite from Dhobley town two kilometres or so away. It was the Muezzin putting on the loudspeaker and soon enough the voice of the muezzin filled the airwaves in an old high pitched resonant call. It was the Muslim midday call of prayer. The Dhuhr.

The helicopter dust settled and I alighted.

I looked around and noticed the stooping figure of Colonel James Matiku aka "stoob"- I don't know the etymology of the nick name stoob but it seemed to fit him. He was to be my second in command. A tall man at slightly over six feet, he was a robust fiftyish, a chain smoker and lover of the weekend drink. His presence was enough to cheer one up as seemed to carry around with him the recipe for instant fun. He was extremely popular with the men. Matiku was a close friend having shared ranks and attended three military courses together; we had also worked together in the same office for a year or two. It was rumoured that he had a crocodile farm an hour or so drive east of Nairobi city. A fitness fanatic, as a young officer he represented his formation in

sports as a Karateka but was never very serious in the sport, but then it was known all over Nanyuki where his unit was domiciled and as narrated by his contemporaries then that he was the right man to have on your side in the not so uncommon midnight street fights of Nanyuki.

I noticed that he had started piling on weight, I had been part of his arc of honour during his wedding, then he had been slim and taller and the soon to be Mrs Matiku was a brown, model like slim lady. I inwardly wondered how Mrs Matiku looked like now, probably big and fat.

We greeted each other jovially.

Next to him was the serious looking Warrant officer class 1 (WO1) Ndungu. A typical infantry sergeant major, hard as nails, unimaginative and unswervingly obedient. Three plus decades earlier, the Warrant officer had been a young soldier who had been tasked to shepherd the cadets, including me when we had joined the military at then Armed Forces Training College (AFTC).

Like me, he had risen through the ranks and we later worked together at the school of Infantry where I was the commandant and he was the qualified master sergeant Instructor (QMSI) in weaponry. Then as now, he was tough adventurous and efficient with some extra perception of easily identifying malingerers.

He was the first man I heard using the verb – skiver- a word I checked in a dictionary (Google had not been

born then) and is defined as: *"a person who persistently avoids work or responsibility"* later learnt to be he also had a strong grip on the men and was at every instance a welcome institutional memory.

As I looked at the warrant officer, my thoughts dwelt back on my first day in a military camp.

Armed Forces Training College (AFTC)

Checking in

On that memorable August Monday morning in 1986, I together with 100 or so other youth stood at the gate of the armed force training college (AFTC) idly watching vehicles moving in and out of the gate. We were the potential cadets having been selectively recruited from the existing 47 districts of the country and keen to be broken into "soldiers" nay officers.

The gates of AFTC are imposing 9ft tall metallic structures painted with –I learnt later- AFTC colours of sky blue, red and dark hue. The college motto stood out strongly emblazoned in the centre *'mbele milele'* –Forward ever. This motto would later have different male genital connotations to our youthful minds.

So there we were in all shapes and sizes, tall, short, bearded, clean shaven, crooked grins, bow legged *et al* and clad in as many ways suits, track suits, and even in one extreme case-a Maasai shuka! But all geared for one mission to be recruited as officers in the Kenyan armed forces.

Each of us had a set reason to join the military, for some maybe it could have been for a sense of duty for the country, a call for patriotism, probably for others it was desire for adventure or travel or financial stability, educational opportunities, family traditions or a chance

to acquire valuable skills and even discipline. The motivations varied among all of us reflecting a combination of personal, societal or economic factors.

It was an interesting morning on that day at AFTC for it was here that I learnt that there existed some two ethnic communities named *Gabra* and *Rendille.* In all my school going days and young adult life, I had never encountered such name for a tribe and was even confounded when I met the two youth answering to those two tribes and who were also keen to be recruited as officers.

Naturally, I took a special interest in the two who had soft hair, were rake thin and looked malnourished. I wondered if indeed they fitted the bill of being human beings like me. One of them seemed friendly, smiled at me but I was apprehensive as his eyes were unnaturally too close, his ears also sort of was in unnatural angle. These my mind thought were clearly a human predator. I stepped back ready to leg it out at short notice. Of course they were all potential cadets and just like me and meant well. But anybody should understand my concerns.

Finally, the imposing gates opened and a soldier clad in military fatigues walked out.

"*Nyinyi ndio mnataka kua gadets(sic) fuata mimi!"* He paused and looked at us seriously and made the comment "*Ala!"*

Well, I could understand his request that we follow him –but why use the term "*ala!"* Did it mean that we were about to refuse his instructions but then I realised that it was merely a challenge being thrown, the battle lines drawn!

The initial paperwork complete, we were to embark on a two-week selection process. This was to involve both physical and mental aptitude tests all geared to see if we could make the demanding qualification needed for officer material. We were addressed by an officer with three pips on the shoulder who was to oversee the exercise.

He stood in front of us in well-tailored khaki uniform, arms akimbo. Behind him stood a group soldiers both in uniform and many more in Tracksuits-Foxes keen to be left wild in a chicken House-I could see that they were literally licking their lips.

"*Gentlemen"* the captain intoned as if he was addressing a church congregation "*and this is the first and last time I call you that. We are embarking on a major operation set to select the men from the boys from this group, this will involve acute physical stress on you-I expect that 3 or 4 of the lucky ones among the group will die in the exercise…-"God forgive their souls".*

There was a flutter within our ranks. The captain continued.

"4 or 5 of you are bound to have fractures ranging from the jaw bone to your asses-God grant you speedy recoveries".

More shuffles within our ranks.

The captain continued:

"Some clever ones among you are likely to escape and disappear-God grant you added intelligence". He went on- "*the remaining big number, thick as you are –will most likely remain to slogging it here-be prepared for anything, death and deformity- death would be better, I suppose-far much better".*

His assessment later proved to be uncanny correct. He turned to another bulky looking fellow, with a big girth-he must have just about swallowed an 18-inch television. He had a big plumed godfather hat and a big unwieldy stick snuggled under his arm. We later learnt that it was called a "*pace stick"*. This was qualified master sergeant Instructor-QMSI. He is the disciplinarian of any army, the enforcer, a perfect soldier-a soldier's soldier and the official garrison bully-The sergeant major.

"*Sergeant Major*!" the captain called out

"Sir" he barked out

"Let the exercise begin"

The QMSI saluted briskly as the officer walked away, He turned to us.

"*Bloody hell!"* he bellowed, *"bloody useless cadets*" he screamed at no one in particular "*nikifunga macho nifungue wawe wameng'aaaa*!!" He was ordering the junior soldiers to make us clean. Did it mean we were going to

be forcefully bathed? We realized we were to be taken to the barber shop for haircuts and "*rapido*". But I wondered why the shouting? Why the insults? Why the theatrics? Can't he just say it quietly-but I had no time to think of any answers –we were hurriedly handed over to the garrison barber.

I had been comfortable as a teacher before joining the army and now I was wondering at what kind of world I had let myself in a world where the simplest question was answered with anger and obscenities and where reason seemingly had no part.

The military is a fine institution, put on a smart Versace suit, classic Gucci shoes, expensive *Maasai* belt, pamper yourself with the expensive Korsor aftershave-but until you have a regulation one-inch haircut – you remain untidy.

We finally were clean-shaven from a rude and precise non talking barber. Barbers are supposed to be talkative; it goes with the trade-but not this one. He had his instructions and he meant to meet them.

Our shavings completed, the next 10 days were the most exhaustive and strenuous days in my 22-year life. It started with a 42 kilometre run; they abbreviate it to a 42 Kilometre dash, physical exercises, rope climbing, football, boxing, basketball, impromptu speeches, classwork. All this under the watchful eyes of senior officers who were our judges and awarding marks for

each task at hand. Each evening however, true to the Captains early words three or four of the potential cadets were called out, refunded back their fare to their districts with the ominous words-"*hutoshi*","*hujaiva*" or "*you are idle*". Their military dreams were no longer valid.

Armed Forces Training College (AFTC)

AFTC is unique, there is nothing like it anywhere else in this world or as far as I know in any other; its name and its reputation for discipline is legendary.

There was something about the atmosphere of energy and zest inside the gates that was sort of lacking outside. Everyone was on the move, no one was slouching or loafing and the effect to me was like that of a charge of electricity to the brain. The enclosure there has apparently no use of half-hearted efforts or anything that can vaguely be classified as under the description of idleness. The pace therefore if not on the double then the legs must be moving like scissor blades.

Military Posting to the prestigious AFTC College as an instructor requires several qualifications among them -a malicious disposition- an ability to grunt and an attempt never to admit that the cadets have improved in any task. It is as if the instructors have particularly been created by God for one task at hand and after that assuredly to go back and join their creator. The other mark of the instructor is the ability to speak or rather

er…double speak. Consider these gems from some instructors

"Parade, iko! Watu ndio hakuna"

"Parade hapana mbaya lakini hapana mzuri hata kidogo!"

"Keep your chin up and head down!"

"Nani huyo anataka kumwagika?"

" Kunguru Sili!"

"Dudu Bure!"

"Panyako!"

" Rope climbing Monkey"

"Wewe ni mtu kweli?"

"Moving with and without LMG"

"Nilikuachakwapositionhiizidikuniangalianautaonakitendonitachofanyawakatinikipataamriaboutturnbynubersabouttturnoneswali?Kamahakunaswali,youtheplatoonwhenexecutingthismovementwillcalloutonetwothreeone"

From raw civilian to soldier

Quality training is said to be the best gift a nation can give a soldier. It follows then that the basis of soldier training is hinged on the teamwork; discipline and an unquestioning obedience to orders.

To cultivate this sense of teamwork, the whole cauldron of different people, race, and tribe educational background are first to be brewed together in, stirred up to form a flowing syrupy mixture in what the French call *Brassage*.

It gets worse; the training is designed to shackle you, to domesticate you, to make you complacent. Obedient, neutered. To do what's expected of you, never what you want; working on a lifeless job, being an oh-so-very-good boy

In all cases the training normally starts with the issue of uniforms. The uniform has two major tasks –to kill off the sense of individuality and to give you a sense of identity. To a recruit and cadet, it is further designed to assist in breaking you and to easily brainwash you.

The selection week finished and almost half of the team remaining after the grueling two weeks we lined up to be issued with our first issue of military kit.

I with my clean shaven head was the first on the queue at the Quartermaster's compound. The quartermaster runs the army as he is responsible to provide everything to the fighting man-from beans to bullets, from shoelaces to underpants (antitank!!!).

It was interesting that we signed for our kit from an upturned writing page.

I picked up my first black funny looking cloth which looked like everything and nothing at the same time –I later learnt it was called –beret. A nice name for such an ugly looking thing. And there was the lanyard, belt 58, brushes, vest shoes canvas and finally I picked up a pair of boots; I stopped moving looking at the boots, something was wrong with them

"Wewe nanga!" harakisha! You goat! you are holding the queue" the store man shouted at me.

"Sir! The shoes are both right feet" I stammered.

"You are the kind to cause trouble eeh!" He shouted back, *"I have been watching you since you stepped in this compound-I have been keenly watching you -I tell you true, this college is not big enough for you and me-wewe hutoboi-haki ya mama!"*

But he reluctantly gave me another pair.

The kitting continued, it was here I found common things with different names, it was here I found items like drawer's cotton(anti-tank!), rope climbing monkey, sling rifle, mess tin, mug drinking soldier, drawers hanging low, box soldier, it was here I also found officer sitting easy and was freely given a house wife…

Qualified Master Sergeant Instructor (QMSI)

To accurately describe the professional nature of these fine gentlemen called sergeant majors would require the use of language not fit for polite company. Let your imagination run riot and think of a big man, exceptionally smart, sharp witted foul mouthed soldier, never attempting any friendly banter, all seeing, ever suspicious, mouth eternally dripping profane words.

In all fairness to the QMSI, new cadets are generally speaking, are stupid. Not intellectually necessarily, although occasionally sometimes that maybe true, but

stupid in the sense that they are completely ignorant regarding the new culture and way of life being thrust upon them.

They don't know how to behave or talk or dress in this new environment. As such, in the simple task to convert these group from being civilians to being members of the KDF, and to accomplish a common task, QMSIs need to be tough, demanding, and simply mean, fulfilling every cliché regarding their language and intensity that one would expect.

To be sure, the hardness and even meanness of the QMSIs and instructors in the military training schools are a form of kindness. The instructors are expected to be mean and training meant to be tough because the job is bound to be ugly and tough. It would be unkind to be any other than with young people being prepared for the profession of war. In the training environment, the instructors couldn't kill their trainees to prove a point so they resorted to shaming, physical punishment and verbal abuse.

It takes six weeks to break a civilian to be a soldier. The first six weeks at the Armed Forces Training College (AFTC) were the toughest time for us selected cadets. It has been said that it is a preview of hell; and it is.

The military training is designed to unleash the driving force that is within a person. A vision, dream, or desire isn't enough.

You need a driving force to help you work away at it and overcome the inevitable setbacks. A goal without a driving force lacks passion and is vulnerable to abandonment or self-destruction.

It's the little voice inside your head that tells you not to give up so easily. It's the freakish ability to avoid sleeping in because you have bigger things to do. It's the protector of your goals. It's the crusher of excuses. It's the assertiveness to ask for something a second time when you know you should.

It's the ability to be unreasonable enough to make things happen, that perhaps shouldn't happen. It's the ability to take all your disadvantages, shortcomings, critics and society's biases against you and where you're from, and use them to your advantage with a smile on your face.

A driving force controls how you think and what you do, unconsciously.

And more often than not the driving force may only be unleashed under pressure

Being under extreme pressure can bring out the best in a person or the worst, depending on the situation. If they are in a situation that they are well trained for, severe pressure can induce action by muscle memory so they can work and think ahead at the same time, especially in a crisis.

On the other hand, pressure causes stress but the better you are trained and know how to handle your job, the less the pressure will get to you in a derogatory manner.

The end is the same, to prepare a man of war as well and as cheaply as possible; to train him to fight and then live to fight another day and interestingly, in AFTC it starts with the shining of boots.

The shoe manufacturer who has won the contracts to make boots for the KDF use leather that is impregnated with some kind of tannin, fat or oil and with best intentions, I suppose, so that the boots will remain supple and water proof for much longer.

But such virtues are not thought of so highly in AFTC, thus the first task for the cadet is to extract this extra and unwanted grease and oils and paint from a new boot. Constituents that which cost the manufacturer dear when putting them in the boot and the Cadet much pain when removing it. The task which involved the entire first weekend of training was done under the direction and watchful eyes of the senior cadets, and involves, using iron tent pegs and *pangas* heated in a fire to red hot and then pressed on the leather so that the fat and grease and oil and any other ingredient is steamed off and the boot adopts the same colouring it had as hide from that not so lucky bovine.

It then follows another hour or three when the poor junior cadet again has to start re-polishing the boot again and again smearing it and using shoe polish until it shines again and *magnifique* to pass inspection by the Commander in Chief almost a year later.

As cadets we went to sleep in ungodly hours; we woke up at unearthly hours. To say that it was a mere six weeks is missing the point, a cadet's day normally has 30 hours or thereabouts sometimes even more. For one thing, everything has to be done at the double with so much shouting and threats, and we were inspected all the time to make sure that was done properly- every time.

We were dressed in blue oversize shorts with a big white belt, and pink shirts (Only the military can think of this colour clash) on our heads we had camouflage jungle hats and on our feet, the clumsy boots with the thick socks rolled over to the same pattern. Calling us clowns would have been the understatement of the year. We were each issued with a personal weapon a G3 weapon weighing 9.3 pounds (Never attempt to convert the weight in Kilogrammes, dare not!). Mine was butt number 72, registration number 661124536-G.

A normal day for a cadet under training would start at 0400 O'clock with laying out of the full kit, an exercise which would have taken one-hour flat because it would first involve brushing the bed with a brush to reach a certain pattern before lovingly placing the assorted

clothing in a set manner in exactly the same way and measurements with the next cadet.

Including the extra pair of boots and canvas shoes, all this time being shouted upon and harassed by junior non-commissioned officer instructor (JNCO) of the rank of corporals.one hour later at 5 o'clock in the morning, we could be out for morning run, a distance which could be dictated by the Physical Training Instructor on duty but never less than six kilometres one way, back from the run we would commence the cleaning of the accommodations and the surroundings, even on pitch dark mornings.

At 6 o'clock sharp we were queuing up at the armoury to collect our weapons which also had to be thoroughly cleaned daily to pass muster. In between we would have had a mere five minutes to take breakfast which was accompanied by a slice of bread and a boiled egg all taken 'at the double".

By 7 o'clock we were at the drill square, the sun slowly rising from the Aberdare ranges to our east. We would do the different drills repeating each move *ad infinito* as we bashed the square under the platoon sergeants, calling out loudly.

The QMSIS would be maintaining watchful eyes from the edge of the parade square. At about quarter to 8 o'clock the QMSIS would now take over the parade and make their first parade inspection with so many name

calling and shaming. At eight o'clock, the commissioned officers- the platoon commanders- would take over the parade for the officer commander's inspection. By this time, the body felt as if the day was almost fully spent, yet it was barely starting.

The official daily training programme would then start. It would be basic field craft, basic weapon handling, basic infantry tactics, basic communication, physical training, introductory firing of the G3 weapon, map reading, route march and of course- always- foot and arms drill or square bashing with the square being the tarmacked parade ground square.

Drill is the bedrock of discipline so we spent hours on end in the drill square which involved the monotonous learning how to march smartly, marching with the rifle in different ways, presenting arms, standing at ease, how to march in step, proper saluting all this under the mouthy direction of the drill sergeant. Any perceived shortcoming on the parade square would involve some form of punishment like running round the square with your weapon aloft, press ups or even being taken to the cooler for a short drench.

The cooler was a sort of punishment where "an idle cadet" could be sprayed with water from a hose. I was a common candidate for the cooler and much to the chagrin of the instructors; I sort of found it very

refreshing though the embarrassment value was also quite high.

Communal punishment was common and meant to instil a lesson that the platoon could fall or stand by the ability to work as a team. In that respect, the platoon is the microcosm of the army as a whole.

And generally once or twice in the week there was the assault course. The assault course – pronounced – *asolo* course- was a demanding physical exercise. It consists of a number of obstacles such as a high wall, rope swings, ditches and obstacle ropes made in a number of ways. Clearing the assault course can only be done as part of team effort. Occasionally, the training team makes the assault course "more interesting "by pouring water to make the cadets get muddy to liven things a bit.

Lunch was normally taken at exactly 1 pm consisting daily of rice and meat with a sprinkling of macaroni and beans. Again it was taken at the double and for sure was never filling. We the cadets were perennially hungry. And always the perennial calls of *fallen!* (Fall in)

Classes/ training ended at 5 o'clock sharp, we returned the personal weapons to the armoury at the double followed by a refreshing cup of evening tea before another bout of cleaning around the college compound was done now under the watchful eyes of the senior cadets.

The senior cadets had been in the college for more than six months and were now referred to as cadet officers unlike our poor lot who were still officer cadets. Select senior cadets were even more sadistic and came hard on us even more than the college instructors. of course, they were acting under instructions and were also being assessed by the college. Their abuses though lacked that sting and were more of a yelp than a practised bark.

Supper was taken at 1800 hours sharp and consisted daily of well-prepared Ugali and meat sprinkled with vegetables. It was again never filling which also explains why the accommodation lavatory remained relatively clean as it was barely used for there was nothing to offload.

Evenings were spent in cleaning our kit and washing the clothes and ironing them to be ready for muster parade the following day all under the senior cadet's watch. Polishing the boots to meet the next day muster parade standards was an exercise in patience considering the boots would have been muddy from the days training. A boot which failed to meet the standards the following day would be considered idle and the poor cadet would have to go to the project.

This involves putting on a full battle order and a ground sheet and sweating out at lunch hour while the rest were having their lunch. Lanet can be hot in the

afternoon and going for the project was one of the most demanding exercises of the six weeks.

But then the overall shared tedium helped to build a strong sense of comradeship. We always went to bed at about two o'clock in the morning with some enterprising cadets sleeping under the bed instead of spoiling the set full kit with the hope of regaining at least an hour of sleep in the morning.

On Sundays we woke up at the Godly hour of 6 O'clock and after breakfast commenced with the general cleaning called fatigue. We then were marched to church for service ending at about midday and resumed fatigue which continued well after lunch whereby we were again marched to the barber shop for shaving at our cost.

Passing off the square

After six weeks of very demanding training, we were ready to graduate as soldiers. This is supposed to be a big occasion in a cadet's life, because after this we were to be allowed to discard the short trousers put on the combat suit, wear a beret and allowed to march without calling out. It was even getting better, a good pass out in the square might even lead to -The platoon sergeant had whispered to us in that very rare moment of human weakness- us being given an afternoon off to Nakuru town which at this juncture in cadet training seemed heaven.

To be sure, the pass out on the square is a small incident which was intentionally made into a big issue with so many rehearsals in any spare time and like any military parade finally made us a bundle of nerves. It was plain simple. We were to march for parade under the command of our platoon sergeant, halt and stand at ease position.

The OC and the platoon commanders were seated in the front with a table holding several individual files. When a cadet's personal file was picked, the cadets name was called out, you were to come to attention and march straight to where the officers were.

Make a perfect halt, salute, call out your service number, rank and name in a loud voice, salute turn around and march back to your place in the *fall in*. At the end of it all, when all the cadets had successfully done their bit, the platoon sergeant took over the parade and led in marching us in the parade square and doing various common parade drills like saluting.

The passing of the square went off almost perfectly except for one big bodied cadet in my platoon who always marched in a gangly way as if he was keen not to have his heel touch the ground who after presenting himself to the commissioned officers marched back and halted in front of the cadet platoon confused, chewing his lower lips, shaking his head this way and that way while

just glaring at the platoon with the whites of his eyes so exposed. We smothered a laugh.

To date we have never asked this officer what was in his mind. We understood. It is the heat of the moment; or to use a common expression *Kuchanganyikiwa* or for the digital savvy "Kupoteza *network*".

We were then finally mustered as soldiers though we did not get the afternoon off as the inspecting officer had castigated us as he walked out from the parade square:

"*Too idle, a mere bunch of nig-nogs, even Mahatma Gandhi in his bare feet could have made a better more sounding halt.*"

Time was slow and daily dragged, but a great camaraderie and a great *es spirit de corp* was building among us the cadets, since when everybody suffers nobody actually suffers.

We got into the rhythm of things; we slept slightly earlier waking up quite late at about 5 o'clock in the morning. We got acquainted with the other weapons in an infantry battalion, we took part in competitive sports, combat appreciation was introduced to us, we loved range firing, we went out to a battle camp with the senior cadets to put all learnt or yet to be learnt to practise and soon we escorted the senior cadets as they commissioned and became officers.

Senior Cadets

Soon we were promoted to be senior cadets with new shoulder patches and proudly put on lanyards with an extra shilling in our payslips as allowances. We were allowed to spend time in the cadet's mess managed our own mess and formed a cadet government and yes, even imbibed beer at opportune times. We were young; we had a lot of fun, in those days. Work hard, play hard: that was our formula. It was the best years of our young lives.

As a senior cadet, the training was still demanding but then we were now fit and had more classroom hours than the field and yes, junior cadets had reported, we heavily leaned on them and the attention of the college was now more on breaking them down than on us. Our relationship with the junior NCOS was now limited and we maintained mutual self-respecting distance with the SNCOS and the warrant officers.

As senior cadets, we also received a significant amount of leadership training through programs that are designed to emphasize leadership, develop decision making, and teach on how to delegate responsibility, and prepare us to ultimately lead troops. In the end, the training was geared to have a well-rounded military leader who understands how wars are fought, why wars are fought, and how to fight and more importantly how not to fight a war.

We went for adventure training in Loitokitok, the instructors called it a holiday camp. On the foothills of Mt. Kilimanjaro, we ran the marathon the exact 26 miles and 385 yards and almost equalled the commonwealth record. The solo night stretched us, made us discover ourselves.

Solo Night

As the name denotes, solo night is a night spent alone, not exactly alone but with our fears and with mosquitoes having a feast day in the wild. A cadet is issued with 5 litres of fresh water, a kilogramme or so of fresh meat, a half kilogramme of sugar, rice, tea leaves and three match sticks. He is armed only with a machete, a sleeping bag and a ground sheet.

A fresh clean writing material is also handed over to him to use to record his thoughts in the lonely hours. The cadet is then dropped alone at a secluded spot in the wilds of Loitokitok and instructed not to venture out of a radius of 100 metres beyond the drop point and wait to be recovered after a day or two.

It is well known that the lions of Narok and Amboseli are renown for being fond of fresh human meat, and wild dogs hunt in a pack and leopards are extremely territorial and that rhinoceros are nature's own unpaid fire-fighters stamping on any fire in the wilds. It

is not also rocket science that animals can smell roasted or cooked meat from dozens of kilometres.

Immediately the platoon commander dropped me in my allocated space within the wilds, I first buried the lump of meat deep in the ground, gathered enough firewood to make a fire big enough to burn all sinners on earth or more importantly to keep off any would be four legged intruders and to give me company.

To a lone survivor, a fire makes one feel better, less alone and also makes one get warm it also acts as a deterrent against wild animals apart from using it for cooking.

I lit the fire next to a huge tree and using my *panga* hacked notches in the bark of the tree to the first strong branch for easy get way- just in case- I then used sturdy poles leaning on the tree trunk and covered it with the ground sheet to cover me from the elements. I boiled rice on my mess tin, ate it slowly and then sat down warming myself on the fire and sort of prayed, I think.

I had no watch, conveniently kept for me by the instructors (or to be more specific by the demonstration staff) time… un-measured time …slid away. The darkness then rushed in, fierce violet darkness; with the *panga* in my hand I had a fitful night with mosquitos having a field night as the stars blinking enormously in a velvet blue sky. To my west I could the towering peaks

of Mt Kilimanjaro but all around was a gigantic emptiness under the stars.

My fears engaged my thoughts overnight. As I looked up, a star studded Milky Way and galaxy; each of the bright heavenly bodies has its own place. The orient communities believed strongly in the message from the heavenly bodies that each had its own role and everything is written in these bodies or so they claimed. They align howsoever they wish, with consequences.

The stars shone down and looked down on us earthlings from high up. I felt humbled by the distance of flaming unvisited worlds; I had a feeling of melancholy with the significance of one's self in the cosmos and overall with the unexplainable order of things. The melancholic feeling drifted away into space and left acceptance.

The stars continued to shine down, there was Orion the great hunter, Leo the lion, there was the Capricorn constellation, the mountain goat, there was the north star, the Pleiades and then there were the planets and I suspected the thunderous milky way. I had a friend entirely besotted with astrology and could make no decision whatsoever unless he had consulted a book on the zodiacs. Just to be civil, I had once asked him to consult the oracles in the zodiac for me and after questioning my birthday which falls on the 23rd day of December he outlined his findings as such:

"These *wiry winter borns have to struggle against the odds to achieve their aims, motivated by ambition, a love of power and security. They get to the top not by good luck by sheer persistence and industry"*

I kept my thinking to myself. That apt description could have fitted everybody born in the northern hemisphere during the month of December! I kept my counsel to myself.

Thinking of the astral, I recalled that it was personally unsettling in some political quarters of the United states of America (USA) when some white house staffer had leaked out information that at one time the most powerful man on earth then-Ronald Reagan consulted astrologers before making major decisions in the white house. It needed a top public relations spin doctor to manage the emerging public opprobrium.

The night lengthened and my thoughts went overboard. I sang the nursery rhymes with a deep down hope that it would keep the wild cats away. The cats in the wild – they say-fear the human sound, it is ingratiating to their senses and when advancing or about to assault a man a good shout from the man would make it stop dead in its tracks.

"Row , row your boat!" I sang loudly "*Gently down the stream, merrily merrily life is but a dream!*

"Baa baa black Sheep, baa baa black sheep have you any wool? yes sir, yes sir, three bags full one for the master, one for the dame and one for the little girl who lives down the stream!"

Did we, do we have dames in Africa? I mean in the literal sense?

" Bubli kan bubli kan. Number 28 I went for a walk and now I stop under break Blue band bye bye zero, zero is zero round and round I am a boy I salute for the king. Close your eyes and count 28, 1, 2, 3, bend for the king…"

I lost the lyrics" …and hummed it along – whatever it meant.

"Kookaburra *sits by the old gum tree, merrily…."* I hummed it again as I couldn't place the lyrics

Do we have kookaburras in Africa?

"Were you ever in Quebec/ stowing timber on the decks, where there is a king with a golden heart riding on a donkey?"

"Father Abraham had many sons I am one of them and so are you so let us just praise the lord"

"Trust and obey, there is no other way to be happy in Jesus …but if you trust and obey"

"Jack and Jill went up the hill…"

"Double, double, toil and trouble, Fire burn and cauldron bubble…"

"Old Macdonald had a farm hea hea haw, he had a cow in his farm hehe haw

With a miao miao here, miao maiao there everywhere mia miao…"

"Mwenye *tumbo mwenya shamba alipanda viazi akachimba chimba akakuta ee almasi lo! Lo! bahati lo! Lo! bahati lo! Lo! bahati kwa mtu mwenye shamba….*

Akatupa jembe huko akaenda mjini kununua motoka rahisi rahisi sana

Lo! Lo! bahati kwa mtu mwenye shamba."

"Kuna mtu shambani , kuna mtu shambani, iya iya kuna mtu shambani

Na mtu ataka mke iya iya

Na mke ataka mtoto, iya iya

Na mtoto ataka yaya, iya iya na motto ataka yaya

Na yaya ataka Mbwa iya iya

Na mbwa ataka mfupa iya iya "

"Mama nipe mayai , nimechoka na uji sijashiba

Kila siku ugali na kabeji nyeupe

Lazima tutapatwa na magonjwa…."

"Naskia sauti

Sauti ya mama

Sauti ya baba, sauti ya mama

sasa ni saa sita sasa ni saa sita

mwalimu kwaheri…"

My secondary school quotes also streaked in deep from my sub conscious:

"Go placidly amid the haste and remember what peace there is in silence …"

And my Sunday school lessons:

"The lord is my shepherd, nothing shall I want fresh and green are the pastures

Where he gives me repose, near restful waters,

He leadeth me…"

The night lengthened as I added more fuel to the fire. My thoughts then dwelt on some street preacher in Nakuru, an unlikely one sounding more of a composed Catholic priest than the evangelical ones famous for the old fashioned shouting, hysterical, ungrammatical, gasping sort of preachers big on exhortation phrases descriptive of lakes of burning brimstone and ages of endless torment abounding.

This preacher had captured our attention by asking us the bored street listeners to mentally think of a date in the far future. A very important day on our life cycle which was the day of our funeral. He asked each of us to list the people on our mind who were likely to use their resources and time to come to our funerals.

"But" he added with a finger lifted in the sky, *"don't include your immediate family or even extended family, they are bound by blood to come"* he said.

He paused again, finger in the sky:

" Don't include the neighbours- they are socially bound to attend your funeral."

He paused. Again another finger to the sky;

"Don't list your present work mates- they are duty bound to attend your funeral."

I thought deep and hard for people likely to willingly attend my funerals who were not fellow cadets, or neighbours or relatives.

My list stopped at four. I reviewed it again and settled at three. Early the following morning I revised the list again and settled at one.

A thought cropped up in me. If we are so obsessed with how my funeral is conducted why not start making insurance for this:

I could name it, I thought, the *professional mourners SACCO. The marketing bit of it would read this way*

- ✓ We offer first class last expense services.
- ✓ For a small rider- you can get experienced men and women loud wailers.
- ✓ How many mourners do you want on your finals, how many do you want for the wake? How many pall bearers?
- ✓ Do you want *tero buru* facilities? How many bulls do we hire for this solemn activity? How many cows?

Tero Buru is a phrase common during funerals for some western communities which involve a big herd of cattle herded to the highest point of the village a distance away before coming rampaging towards the home with youth whipping them for speed.

Their entrance to the home is immediately after the final rites and sets up another frenzy of weeping. The idea is that the marauding cattle would pick any bad

omen which had led to the demise of the home owner and as the cattle are herded across the river it is believed that ill omen would have been chased too.

My ghoulish thoughts veered towards cremation and considered putting it in my will. Cremation seems breezy, neat and fast and not so many mourners would love to troop and witness a cremation. Which implies reduced spending in the financial sense?

Has the military ever conducted a cremation parade for a fallen soldier?

I wondered? The QMSI drill will need to earn extra pay- I smiled.

Being a director of professional mourning company, I think, ensures that you get a first class funeral service and genuine mourners and tears as your staff would be genuinely mourning an assured job loss.

I stopped my eerie imagination from running riot.

That was tomorrow's worry.

The Trainers

Naturally, my thoughts revolved back to the college where I had now spent more than half the year, where the drilling I was getting was meant to put me in good standing throughout my career. Then, I did not think so, but life, as the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard tells us, can only be understood backward.

That got me thinking about how we learn to excel. As youngsters, we are far from fully formed. We have not yet had the life and work experiences that will define and shape us. Those typically come in our twenties, when we are exposed to supervisors and managers and leaders for the first time. Those early interactions can be extremely important.

It is a piece of great fortune to have been exposed to those standard-bearers and nit-pickers from the sergeants. It was not fun at the time, let me admit; many of instructors were terse and brusque, and despotic in their approach.

They would brook no relaxation of the standard. There were many moments of despair at being pulled up yet again, at being told something done was not good enough. Figuratively our cadet feet were held to a burning fire many a time. It was painful, but I know now that it was also fruitful.

The profession of arms requires this strict adherence to rules, standards, and codes. It's an all-or-nothing

requirement. A slapdash or lackadaisical approach does not cut it.

There was the college commandant, a Brigadier, living in the college premises, short and compact he physically dominated the entire college environment seemingly charging the college air with static.

Even to us, cadets you could just sense when the commandant was in camp, even without seeing him. And in the few instances we saw him, he would be walking in slow measured steps, impeccably neat in the khaki forage uniform.

Hands clasped in the back quiet and unassuming but then you could detect some latent power emanating from the man. Not a physical strength, but strength of spirit. The commandant of my cadet days was a natural leader.

Again, equally impressive, was the cadet commanding officer, a tall riveting officer with yes, a commanding presence, oratorical- an officer's officer-a voice like glass breaking, a near perfect memory or names and yes a flair for words-The CO had! The words cut to the bone and we cadets feared him to hell.

In the final parade rehearsals-In his metallic voice he had called one cadet whose marching was not up to the desired standards -*"I wish your mother had remained a virgin"*!

In the same voice he had reminded another one "I *wish your mother had never met your father!"* and to yet to

another cadet who always made big blunders in the parade square- "*they buried the child and brought the placenta here!*

There was our Cadet OC, an infantry major from the proudest KDF unit whose facial expression sometimes we would mistakenly equate to a smile, it wasn't, because the so called smile never reached the eyes which always remained blazing. The OC had the ability to prime us with words raising our spirits and morale to fever pitch as potential officers.

And then he would again go ballistics, which was not infrequent and we could pay for it by sweating it out on the project.

The OC whose most common expression was – "ara… *ama namna gani*-rose in the ranks and joined one of the most exclusive clubs in the country; commanding the Kenya army.

It is also credit to him that today, 10 of his charges during his three-year sojourn in the college are now adorning the general's baton and staff with all indications pointing it out that one of them is bound to ascend to the corner office of the KDF.

There was the cadet wing adjutant a captain whose initials were J R, very fit former bus conductor who could outrun many of us cadets. JR was I suspect also plain bonkers. A case in point, JR could sit in the counter for hours in the evening engaging in the normal banter at the

bar counter with other officers who were having drinks; as the bar was closing he could order say, six tots of his favourite hot drink and swallow it in swoop, he would then empty a soda in a gulp and rush to his bed to sleep expecting to get drunk while asleep. His argument for such an action was that despite the other officers slow drinking, he too had the same number of drinks.

JR could always do things in reverse JR could! Reportedly, he ate raw meat, drank water –and then would go and warm himself on fire! –just reversing things you know.

And then there was the college regimental Sergeant major whose bark was worse than his bite, though as cadets we would never know that. It was rumoured that he ate *ugali* and four or six tots of Captain Morgan rum for lunch. Purely to assist in voice projection. Purely.

There was the British tested cadet QMSI who fronted a regulation 55-inch width chest, and reportedly used a regulation soap (*sabuni ya kawaida)* as toothpaste, I have never had a dental problem! he would loudly proclaim.

There was QMSI small arms whose first lesson had been:

"*Mimi naitwa ….*" he mentioned his name. *-kila mtu sema hivyo-* we all dutifully repeated his name-"*rudia tena jina*"-and we all chorused again the name-*iko swali mpaka hapo*" He asked. I almost laughed -how do you ask questions even before the lesson has started!

And then there was also the diminutive Senior Instructor who wore blue checked long trouser, a white thick shirt and everyday a gumboot and claimed to be the very first assessor of cadets. His name was Kalundu and the cadet mess chief cook.

The solo night was endless.it was a long, long night as my thoughts went on overdrive until morning. In the Amboseli, morning comes like a curtain, one minute it is plain dark and the next minute the sun is up high. The sun came up, Mt Kilimanjaro shimmered in the heights and after a breakfast of strong tea and left over rice, I embarked on collecting firewood again for my second solo night.

I spent the day singing all the songs I knew, I danced, I prayed. I wrote a letter to my younger self. Again I spent a fitful night. late in the afternoon, I heard the sound of brakes and manual gear shift of a 109 land rover vehicle manoeuvring and presto, the platoon commander appeared to pick me. He came closely followed with an armed soldier, looked at me and burst out laughing; I suspect I must have looked like Robinson Crusoe.

The final episode of the adventure training was the flight to Nanyuki and the scaling of Mount Kenya, an experience which can only be lived as it cannot be accurately be described. We were through with the fattening camp and back to AFTC, a sincilanting change parade which ended up with a 20 kilometre route march

designed to tune our minds back to the more disciplined barracks environment.

Soon we were out again for the final battle camp. The battle camp is designed to put into practise in the field what was learnt in class. We therefore went through the rigours of combat appreciation (Nowadays they call it estimates), we did tactical exercise without troops (TEWTS) We did field map reading and we fired all the battalion weapons, the machine guns, the mortars, the missiles- the lot.

We went through a battle simulation exercise, not once but twice where we crawled under live fire with the machine gun fire rounds ripping overhead, it was scary; you could feel the air getting out of the way for the incoming bullets.

We practised on all phases of war with some cadets picked and given field command appointments (Kisanga Rifles!) such as platoon and section commanders and ordered to carry out some major tactical task like patrol, or ambush or infiltration or raid or attack or defence. The instructors would watch this sort of exercise particularly closely, because if there is any doubt about a cadet's suitability then this where it would show. It was relentless and stressful.

And then there was jungle training. Jungle training is the essence of infantry soldiering in many ways; our five-day jungle training was done at a forest called *Porro*.

A secondary jungle and an exceptionally cold location. It is more difficult to navigate a secondary jungle as it is much thicker and difficult to move around in than the original primary rain forest.

It was hot and steamy in the day and you are heavy laden since you have to carry everything you need with you. Navigation was also very difficult in Porro and distance is measured in time rather than distance covered. It was physically demanding and called on all our fitness reserves.

One agreeable aspect of operating in the jungle is that we ended getting up to 10 hours sleep-every night. Sleep, during other operations is normally in short supply, because much operational activity takes place in the hours of darkness.

But in the jungle, the night is so dark that movement becomes almost impossible except by use of torch and having a torch in such an environment makes you an easy pick for the enemy. Less agreeable were the leeches, thoroughly unpleasant creatures which would fasten on the legs and everywhere else. It rained on our final two nights at Poro forest much to the delight of the college instructors as it was proof that the objective of the exercise was truly met.

After eight weeks we were through with our field training and were back to AFTC for our final parade rehearsals and commissioning.

It was bound to end.

And on a sunny mid-morning of 21 August 1987 – 54 weeks after we had set foot in the college – we marched in slow and quick time with the commander in Chief (C in C), the president taking our salute. At review order, we recited the oath of allegiance to the president and the nation of Kenya; immediately after he solemnly read out the words that converted us from cadets to officers.

The C in C then presented gifts to the cadets who stood out in the course. The best cadet all round is normally presented with the ceremonial sword of honour. During the many parade rehearsals I sometimes wondered on what was generally the career projections of such top cadets over the years how do they traverse the known career ladders and ranks and how fast? Do they experience accelerated career traction post commissioning? What fraction ends up as generals?

Is this career influencing factors related in any way to the matrixes used to grade them at cadet's school as best? How do they perform as in the above criteria relative to others officers from the same intake?

Is there a merit, to the military maxim that each service has inbuilt maxim for getting rid of its best?

I had read some literature alluding that in the United states of America (USA) and Britain, rarely do the best in cadet school make it the top of the military hierarchy with

many leaving the service early generally after ten years or so to join the Foreign Service or the private sector.

Does that fact add to the flogged expression that all the best generals leave the military as captains?

We had several foreign cadets from Malawi, Tanzania, Swaziland, Uganda and Nigeria training with us with the best foreign cadet was also handed over a present by the C in C and again I wondered on their career prospects having come out best in a foreign based institution.

We had Kenyan cadets also doing the cadet course in several foreign institutions and wondered how their career prospects blossomed or wilted with the home environment. Had a study been done on this?

But then my consolation was that the top wartime commanders in history had performed dismally in the cadet training. The supreme world war two Commander - the perfumed general- Dwight Eisenhower had been listed 61 out of 164 in West Point. General George Armstrong Custer infamous for the little big horn river massacre trailed miserably in class and could not even have commissioned save for a bit of nudge from an influential relative.

Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery of the unbeatable-unbearable fame finished in the bottom quarter of his Sandhurst class same to Winston Churchill.

Napoleon Bonaparte cadet performance was also nothing to write home about.

Later while in service I learnt that there was a phenomenon called the "Sandhurst curse" a situation where post independent young officers plucked from secondary schools and trained in the famous royal military academy in Sandhurst failed to fit into the new Kenya Army when back at home and quickly eased themselves (or were made to) back to civilian life. The failure to effectively settle in was attributed to the exceptional polishing and high standards garnered abroad as compared to the relatively Spartan conditions here at home.

I wondered if Cadet School in Kenya kept such records and could they be openly released for public assessment especially if one is keen to serve in the top public offices?

A solemn moment for us came when the C in C finally presented us with the beautifully worded commission parchments signed personally by him in his green ink pen. The words on the commission parchment are archaically worded…. *"To all who see these I present greetings and know that, reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valour, fidelity and abilities do appoint you a commissioned officer of the Kenya Defence Forces. You will therefore carefully and diligently discharge the duties of the*

office to which appointed by doing and performing all manner all manner of things thereto"

Thereafter we gave a resounding three loud cheers to the president.

Thereafter the senior under officer, the best all round cadet of the course gave out a final order "officers *to your duties- Slow march!*

The first march as a group of officers was a slow march as we marched resplendent in our ceremonial attire of top red tunics and black bottom trousers with a strip of red on black off the parade square to a yellow mark directly in front of the C in C. The marked yellow mark, proverbially, marks the separation of the cadets as officers with the rest.

After this mark, some of the cadets were now destined to bloom as officers and even to be generals with others doomed to slog it for some time in the system and finally whimper away into other less patriotic callings. But at that moment what mattered to all of us was making the perfect slow march and breaking the salute on reaching the yellow mark with the haunting refrain but eternal tune of *auld lang synge* played sonorously with the sweetness and melancholy the Kenya army band could manage split the air waves and hung quavering in the air for moments before soaring ethereally over the neat surroundings of AFTC.

It was all over.

Soldiering On

Together with three other others, I had reported to my first unit forever to be referred to as mother unit. We were then extremely proud with the one pip of a second lieutenant on our shoulders and thought we were the first people in the universe to wear the pip. That was before we met the unit adjutant; who rightly brought us back to earth with a thump. (Or rather with ups)

There is a saying in the military that units are like brands of beer, there are actually no bad beer per se, only that some beer brands are better than others. This was one of the better units within the outskirts of Nairobi. Though now officers and platoon commanders we were expected to rely on the wisdom of the NCOs/SNCOs and especially the platoon sergeant

No matter how much training you may have received, there is no template to show you how to personally work your way and get a proper fitting into your mother unit, everybody has to work it out by himself. So much of it is a matter of common sense, of establishing the right relationship with the new faces you are bound to work with. I realised though that everybody was glad to assist the new officer to get his bearings right (Particularly the Adjutant though in not so subtle manner!)

With time I fitted into the unit as a platoon commander, I grew up in the system and hopefully wiser.

As a subaltern, I learnt the ropes; I did national ceremonial parades, duty officer of the day. We went for exercises; I did a tour in North Eastern province where going for several day vehicular patrols were the norm those days.

I had my first contact with the bandits from Somalia, I attended requisite courses in the country, got married, got a disciplinary hearing on being charged. The charge sometimes makes me smile; it had happened this way: it was during an inspection to adjudge the combat preparation of the unit referred to as "administrative inspection" shortened as admin.

It is a strenuous time for the unit and tempers invariably get overly frayed. I had given the wrong order during rehearsals and messed the expected smart turnout during the marching order. A disciplinary action (referred to as charges) had to be taken against my person for the slovenly attitude to duty. Today, the particular wordings of the charges sometimes make me chuckle, it read:

"He, the accused, failed to call out the word ajua- a word he knew or was expected to know"

Typical military thinking- which other organisation punishes you more for what you failed to do, than what you did?

What, pray, in this case, what was more serious, giving the wrong order or failing to call out "*Ajua*!"

I was reprimanded and my career continued. I attended an overseas course, occasionally like every officer went through the usual financial doldrums and failed to pay my mess bill, got sloshed in the counter, took part in a United Nations mission in Sierra Leone and overall earned my pay.

The Army is a meritocracy, with career planning and very tightly structured career progressing at each stage, just like in life, some move forward, others fall by the wayside. Soon I was selected for the dreaded grade two staff course- a bit late in my career – I thought.

As a Major and at the ripe age of 44 I found myself as a student in the defence staff college, the college is located at the outskirts of the city and in the opening remarks of the course some words were bandied around not warmly received by any student:

"forget all what you have learnt in your time in uniform, it counts for little enough in terms of your future, because you start again here. What happens to the remaining quadrant of your military life will almost be exclusively be determined by how well you do on this course. So, assume you know nothing"

How, I wondered can one assume to know nothing! And how do instructors impart knowledge then, is it not supposed to be from known to unknown?

The staff college- also named as grade two- is broad: basic staff duties, battle procedure, conduct of training,

physical fitness, international studies and military history.

Students are taught in groups of 10-14 known as syndicates by an instructor referred to as directing staff (DS). The DS are lieutenant colonels supposedly picked from the most promising and who had excelled in the same course and have attended a same kind of course at another college preferably overseas for comparative reasons aimed to broaden their thinking.

There is a lot of writing involved, plain pencil and pen writing despite the computer age.

Your written work is very carefully marked and corrected as appropriately by the DS in red ink (RIC). It is not uncommon that the red ink corrections appearing more on the page than the student's original blue ink.

What the DS are looking for are all the time is the power of analysis – the ability to digest complex material rapidly, to identify what's really important and to then to express your thoughts verbally or writing in a lucid and succinct manner.

Just like in advanced cadet training, the course also had hours specifically for TEWTS but at a much deeper level. the course became even more mentally stimulating as the college was also providing a diploma or a master's degree in strategic studies which of course added to the overall work load of the one-year course.

I barely managed to scrape though the course; despite this I got promoted later in the year and for about three years I worked as an instructor at the infantry school and was an instructor where in late 2011, the KDF for the first time was committed totally as a conventional force into Somalia under the code name operation Linda Nchi.

General Officer Commanding (GOC)

I once heard that, "There is nothing so close to God on earth as a General on a battle field." This senior officer is the first and last line of defence. It's by far and away the most important command.

To be a general in any military formation is probably the highest accord you can ever aspire to be in the profession of arms. It is the pyramid top. In every sense, you have to be lucky to be a general, that all the stars in the firmament get arranged in some way to enable you take over the general's baton- and there are so many permutations that are supposed to channel you in that direction depending on the country and the circumstances.

It is instructive that at the height of the Second World War, the Fuehrer Adolf Hitler was keen to head hunt for a general officer to take over a command; a general had been suggested to him with the prop that he was a very good general. Adolf Hitler, the Bohemian corporal who ruled the world, had quipped:

"I don't care if he is good or bad! I want him lucky!"

In essence, being considered general means that you have passed through many filtering processes, ranging from your marital status to your drinking habits, personal finances, emotional state, networks, and the lot…

The file has to be snow white.

When an officer takes the oath of general, what the public sees are merely the bible, the rank insignia, and the stars. But the amount of psychoanalysis, background intelligence checks, scenario mapping, business and private activities checks and family investigations is so huge that the file has to snow white before that oath

Ideally, the person who gets sworn in as CDF has never touched a bad loan, never kept a mistress, never had an affair, and has never had a single slip of the tongue. Put another way, to be a CDF and top ranking general, your honey trap must have zero data- honey trap being a colloquial word may be amenable to blackmail by use of mistresses, illegitimate children and previous extra sexual escapades.

You must also be wisely married with almost nil family disputes. So be a KDF general, then you must be a living saint and the national intelligence service has to use a tooth-comb to confirm all these

To an unworthy general, the thousands of men and women under him are no more than components of a battalion or brigade, faceless creatures who go to make up daily strength reports, items to be disposed of by a word or signature, command or even by mere gesture. One word from him and hundreds of soldiers stand to defend, attack, withdraw, or march to their deaths.

Generals are like shadows from which no soldier can escape. They define the boundaries within which their

subordinates can operate, they also specify the objectives to be attained composed of finite numbers of men, of weapons, and war materiel. The deductions being accounted for by dead, wounded, missing, sick, postings and so on. To a general, only numbers and ranks, never names.

As a one-star general though I had a name. The soldiers knew through the normal KDF dispatches and by the ubiquitous social media. I also had a face, having been in a college environment as an instructor and also having commanded an infantry unit

But then my tasking as a general in a war zone was immeasurably greater than that of a CEO of a corporate organisation. Just like them, I have power and influence and importance, and yes, they too have to shoulder responsibility. But it is a responsibility of a very different kind, a very special responsibility, and it is that alone that makes their position so incomparably different.

A general operates with human lives.

The most important responsibility for a general—like all officers—has is the human needs of the soldiers. This can be expressed as a truism: if you do not love your soldiers, you have no business in command. Its essence is that soldiers are the operators of war equipment. Regardless of how good the equipment is, the soldiers behind it must have the morale, will to fight, and drive to win.

It is the responsibility of the general to ensure that soldiers have the morale and will to fight and this is achieved through good administration, equipment, training and recognition of individuals and teams.

Therefore, my decisions in the Somalia theatre will be death decisions. They are unlikely to affect the odd individual alone, as in the case of, say, judges, doctors, or engineers, but hundreds of human beings simultaneously.

My thoughts continued on overdrive, a general like me on the front must be prepared to take the hardest decision of losing soldiers unflinchingly, and that being so, I had in my mind intended to approach this task with profound humility as I must be fully aware of this special calling could lead to the highest price a human being can pay.

Unlike the Al Shabaab, Human life can't merely be considered to be a form of war materiel to be employed with mechanical indifference.

Lieutenant General Njoroge in his Memoirs-P*romises to Keep and miles to go* gives a glimpse on the making of a general. He writes"The military training for generals universally starts at the cadet level. Generals are usually the top officers in the in the military hierarchy pyramid.

Generals come from those officers who were the top graduates in the military academies, and only those officers who do very well at the military academy usually

rise to the highest level because the demands at that level require highly intelligent, courageous, and skilful officers.

Out of a cadet intake of about 100, for example, only one percent are likely to make it to the rank of a brigadier and above, with the rest 99 percent retiring at the rank of colonel and below". He continues:

"Generals, therefore, have one of the most difficult tasks because they are expected to inspire men into the line of danger and utmost sacrifice for national survival. It is therefore a big dilemma that men can go to war and fight for the general or that the general can lead the men to their "Final destiny"

In the realm of general ship, however, we cannot afford any imperfections. Ambiguities or inadequacies. The price of failure has to be painted in blood and errors which might be termed human in any other sphere of life are fatal in a nations books.

My thoughts reverted back to my present location at Dhobley- Col Matiku was talking to me inviting me to a large tent where I was to be officially welcomed and given a situation brief.

The Briefing Team

I walked into the briefing tent; it was a big modern American made tent with one side lifted up for natural

light and free air flow. The tables had been arranged and reconfigured into a "U" shape and marking my spot in the centre of the "U" was my name plate, a new pen, a notebook, a bottle of water and a plastic mug with the miniature ceremonial flags of Kenya, AMISOM and Somalia arranged in.

The chair I noticed had been wiped down to a shine and at a glance everything seemed well arranged and in place. An overhead projector was in place and had projected on a screen on a big font the mission of my command.

The officers all standing had neatly saluted, and I returned their salute and asked them to sit down.

I looked at them; my staff; staff officers are like corner men in professional boxing; they are rarely appreciated or noticed, but they win bouts and wars. A good general knows that the information fed from his staff would lead to a good decision so he makes sure that he head hunts and picks good – and right people - to be his immediate staff.

It occurred to me as I watched them look at me and attempt to place me to see something indefinable with me and I suspect they had missed nothing they had gone through me with the completeness of an enemy intelligence expert. Indeed, I had power of life or death over them because if my decisions were bad then they died.

Col Matiku gave the opening remarks officially welcoming me to the sector and finally handing over the briefing to the G2.

KDF and AMISOM had adopted the American way of doing things in staff duties allocating the letters of the alphabet to various staff duties dividing them into four main groups.

G1 is personnel matters, G2 intelligence, G3 operations and G4 supplies and logistics. The other sub branches could further be subdivided further under this four main sub branches like signals, IT, medical, media, liaison, Cyber Security, chaplaincy, pay and so on. "G" denotes a senior headquarter with Subordinate headquarters taking the letter "S".

As per tradition and to set the best mood for the briefings, a review of the situation is normally the task of the intelligence/liaison which as pointed out is denoted as G2.

The G2 (for intelligence) is responsible for monitoring, analysing and forecasting the enemy situation for the commander by playing the devil's advocate. A good G2 helps the commander act more swiftly and incisively than the enemy. A poor G-2 gives history lessons.

The G2, in this instance, was a Lieutenant Colonel who was to be loosely under my command as he had

several officers working under him who reported directly to the divisional headquarters.

The officer was a lively character whose military career and mine had intertwined in various ways, too; for example, we had undertaken two command courses together, and we understood each other very well.

It was a relief holding such a delicate and sensitive office as he had, time and time again in different settings, proved to be a reliable officer whom I could easily bounce my ideas and overall get a reasoned and workable answer; what's more, he was easy to talk to.

The G2 was a young 46, very black, round-faced, heavy-shouldered, thick lips with a small bulge of stomach creeping over his belt. He seemed to be glowing with health and confidence with a mastery of the language of the bard so common with the ethnic community which inhabits the shores of Lake Victoria. We had gone through staff course together and therefore knew each other perfectly. Interestingly, his service paper during grade two staff had been entitled: "Somalia; *the land that God forgot*" had emerged best winning him the prestigious Commandants award.

His playful mix and use of words was legendary, for example as a chief instructor at the school of Infantry (SOI) where we had briefly worked together he had described a student officer in his course report that the named officer was capable of producing positive results

in any undertaking "*Provided that he can temper his ambition and retain a sense of humility and humanity, he should go far, both in command and staff*"

The commandant of the school on reading had advised him to revise the report.

Pragmatic and highly operationally experienced with an offbeat sense of humour, I was sure he could give me a good collated dose of workable intelligence. It got better; it was well known within the KDF intelligence that outside the born Somali circles, his knowledge of the intriguing clan structure of the Somalis was encyclopaedic.

The officer's mouth was crooked as if his jaws had broken earlier and joined incorrectly. He talked from the right side of his face and with a very pronounced lisp. The crookedness became even more pronounced when he laughed out aloud. He was a voracious book lover and devoted Catholic who, despite his spirituality, loved imbibing the occasional Gin and tonic.

True to form, for the purpose of the brief on this morning, he had headed his brief as "*impossible Somalia*"

Impossible Somalia

The G2 review of the situation started with a power point dubbed *Desert rules*- he argued that to best understand Somalia, you need to look at it through the

lens of the desert Bedouins who Somalis could be related to at least culturally.

The write up was a long quote from Antony Friedman 1968 famous book- *From Beirut to Jerusalem*. On power point, it read**:**

Desert Rules

The best way to understand the influence of tribalism on political behaviour in Somalia is by looking at the phenomenon in its purest original form among the nomadic Bedouin of the desert.

Life in the desert is always dominated by two overriding facts:

First, in the desert, water and grazing resources were so limited that "everyone had to become a wolf and be prepared to survive at the expense of the other tribe. There just weren't enough wells or grass to satisfy everyone all the time. Often it came down to who was going to get the last blade of grass and you had to make sure it was you. This meant that every man was simultaneously hunter and prey."

Second, in the desert there was no outside mediator or government to enforce laws or to adjudicate disputes in a neutral way between tribes when they resorted to predatory behaviour in order to survive.

Your family, your clan, your tribe were out there searching for grazing space on their own. There was no

police car patrolling the desert *wadis,* no 911 to call when you were in trouble, so you had to find ways to take care of yourself.

In such a lonely world, the only way to survive was by letting others know that if they violated you in any way, you would make them pay, and pay dearly. You sent that message first and foremost by banding together in alliances.

These alliances began with the most basic blood association—the family—and then expanded to the clan, the tribe, and then to other tribes.

Every Bedouin understood that because of the nature of his world, the bonds of kinship must be honoured before all other obligations; anyone who did not behave in this way was totally dishonoured. Hence the Bedouin Arabic proverb:

"Me against my brother,
My brother and I against our Father,
We and our father against the family.
The family against the clan;
The clan against the tribe
And all of us against the infidels!"

In the desert environment, many rural tribes changed their names to plural forms in order to give the impression that they were larger than they were but even this was not enough protection.

Sometimes you found yourself in the middle of the desert far away from your core kin group, and the temptation for others to violate you was great.

Therefore, you had to make sure that if someone violated you in any way—even the smallest way—you would not only punish them but punish them in a manner that signalled to all the other families, clans, or tribes around that this is what happens to anyone who tampers with me.

"*Back off*" was the credo. "*I am my own defence force and I am good.*"

A tribe could earn this reputation either by using physical violence to badly hurt those who wronged them, or by using the Bedouin system of justice to get all the families, clans, or tribes in the area to impose a heavy fine on the offender.

Either way, a family, clan, or tribe's first line of defence was always its known ability to go all the way in exacting a price from those who dared to tread on them. To be sure, a tribe can make concessions to, or compromises with, their rivals, provided these concessions grow from proven strength or magnanimity.

What you never do in the desert, though, is allow concessions to be arbitrarily imposed on you. If someone steals half your water, you can never say,

"*Well, this time I will let it go, but don't ever let me catch you doing it again, "*

Because in this world of lone wolves, anyone who becomes viewed as a sheep is in trouble—a point underscored by the Bedouin legend about the old man and his Turkey.

"An elderly Bedouin man discovered that by eating Turkey he could restore his virility.

So he bought himself a Turkey and he kept it around the tent, and every day he watched it grow. He stuffed it with food, thinking, Wow, I am really going to be a bull. One day, though, the Turkey was stolen. So the Bedouin called his sons together and said:

"Boys, we are in great danger now— terrible danger. My Turkey's been stolen."

The boys laughed and asked,

"Father, what do you need a Turkey for?"

He said,

"Never mind, never mind. It is not important why I need the Turkey, all that is important is that it has been stolen, and we must get it back."

But his sons ignored him and forgot about the Turkey. A few weeks, later the old man's camel was stolen. His sons came to him and said:

"Father, your camel's been stolen, what should we do?"

And the old man said,

"Find my turkey."

A few weeks later, the old man's horse was stolen, and the sons came and said,

"*Father, your horse was stolen, what should we do? “*

He said,

"*Find my Turkey.*"

Finally, a few weeks later, someone raped his daughter.

The father went to his sons and said:

"*It is all because of the turkey. When they saw that they could take my turkey, we lost everything.”*

The Country That God Forgot

The Somalis are the indigenous inhabitants of the Horn of Africa for the last 7000 years with their presence at one time stretching from the banks of Tana River in Kenya to the Red sea coast. It is also believed that the Somalis were some of the earliest non-Arabs to convert to Islam following the influence of some of the first companions of the prophet who had briefly settled in Merca and Mogadishu following the persecution of the first believers.

The Somali is a Cushite distinctively different from the surrounding Bantu peoples; he has finer features, carry themselves more upright and are a proud personality.

This is not to say that all aspects of the Somali are good. He is also treacherous, thinks nothing of murder and is bloody minded to a degree. The elders of the Somali ornate in hennaed space –shaped beards that remind one of the ancient Assyrians, to whom they may well be related, look splendid enough.

The story of Somalia and their character involves immense contradictions, brave magnificent, honourable, generous hospitable and gracious. But then as author, I M Lewis, spelled it-

"…The Somali person is also capable of the most chivalrous act imaginable and the most treacherous -all within the day".

The Somalis came from the Middle East centuries ago; in biblical times, the present Somalia was known as the land of punt, from which came supplies of frankincense and myrrh.

It is interesting that in the pre independence days in Kenya, the British colonial government also gave token Somalis were superior to the other African tribes, they had higher rates of pay officially, were welcomed to join the Kings African Rifles (KAR) as Non-commissioned officers.

Lately, Somalia has been labelled in some quarters as a country that God forgot, from its creation in 1960, the geographical coordinates now known as Somalia has been nations striving unsuccessfully to be a state. The quest for a state finally collapsed in 1991 into anarchy of clan based fiefdoms following the overthrow of then President Siad Barre.

Since 2012 when internationally backed government was put in place. Somalia has been inching towards stability but the new authorities has been challenged from Al Qaeda linked Al Shabaab insurgents.

Not only has Somalia been defined as deviant but also its people are depicted as incapable of solving their own problems.

The G-2 then on PowerPoint analysed the Somali psyche in the modern settings as follows:

- ✓ The typical Somali after over thirty years of civil war has become used to war which has led to a certain form of national psychosis.
- ✓ An individual family has an average of 6 children per wife, leading to a population explosion. The population is young and uneducated, at least in formal ways, in a country with few natural resources.
- ✓ The only safety valve in the boiling demographic time bomb has been the high emigration rate to Kenya, Ethiopia, the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries, Canada, the Emirates, and the United States of America (USA).
- ✓ The Somali tend to be very creative with the truth, which is a diplomat's way of saying they lie. To a foreigner, their lie is more pronounced. You only get the full quota of truth if the truth will be useful and will serve the person you are speaking to. In essence, therefore, only versions of truth exist in Somalia.
- ✓ It is a land of mistrust, which, in some ways, removes any ambiguity. Trust no one, and you will not be misled or betrayed. The common Somali is also distrustful of any foreign ideologies, urban dwellers, intellectuals, politicians, and, of course, non-

Muslims, whom they derogatorily referred to as infidels. (Kuffar)

- ✓ The social and political situation in the country and especially the clan dynamics is complex and takes time to understand
- ✓ About 90% of the adult male population chew Khat-(Miraa) a stimulant that causes excitement and euphoria It can also induce manic behaviour and hyperactivity. A big part of the population therefore is under the influence from about noon to bedtime. Khat is a big appetite suppressant. It could also be a mild aphrodisiac, or at least it makes people uninhibited which may also account for the high birth-rate.
- ✓ A country with lots of problems and fewer solutions and apparently incapable of sorting out their own issues unless a third party is involved.
- ✓ You will never buy a Somali with money. It is a country of favours; you must therefore strive always to learn how to make a deal.
- ✓ Clannism is the weakest chord in the Somalis psyche; it is also their strongest point.
- ✓ After thirty years of discord, diaspora and technology, the traditional high status and hold by the Elders as decision makers and mediators has been eroded and the society is haywire for some clans.

- ✓ In Somalia, just like biblical times- revenge is sacred and hatred noble.
- ✓ When you think you have a solution to a particular burning issue among the Somali, they have changed the question.
- ✓ Somalis by character are too independent minded and is partly the reason for the eternal chaos where Somalis live. Everyone is a prima donna, everyone is a king. You can't get them to agree to on anything.

Umma- The Nation That Is Islam

The briefing continued.

This time, an officer of the rank of a major who introduced himself as the sector Imam, now took over. Tall, slim and seemingly pious, he had the distinctive look of a Somali. His briefing was entirely to enlighten me to a deeper understanding of the Muslim religion.

"Islam", he said, in a staccato voice as an opening statement "*has always been at the centre of the lives of the ordinary Somali. Few Muslims people in the world observe the rituals and piety of Islam with such regularity and emotion as the typical Somali*".

The Imam then plunged into a shortened PowerPoint brief that lasted over an hour and laid it thick. His deep notes are as outlined:

- ✓ Islam is a universal religion. Its teaching encompasses all aspects of life and its ultimate goal is the establishment of a global Islamic state. This political idea of Islam is embodied in the concept of the Umma (Community) which is the idea that all Muslims, wherever they reside, are bound together through a common faith that transcends all geographical, political, or national boundaries.
- ✓ This common bond is formed through Muslims allegiance to Allah and to the prophet Mohamed. Because Muslims believe that Allah revealed all laws

concerning religious and secular matters through the prophet, the entire Umma is therefore governed by divine law, or Sharia.

- ✓ Sharia is applicable at all times and places and therefore transcends geographical boundaries and supersedes all other laws.

But who was Mohamed?

- ✓ Mohammed Ibn Abdallah Ibn Abdi al Muttalib (570AD -632AD) the prophet of Islam and founder of the religion of Islam was born in 570 and grew up as an impoverished and illiterate camel driver from Mecca whose life changed when at about 25 married a forty year old rich widow. This allowed him to pursue his calling which came through a revelation as instructions from Allah himself.
- ✓ These revelations are outlined in a 77,430 words recitation called the Koran which is the central religious text of Islam. The Koran is believed to have been verbally revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel and was written over a period of approximately 23 years beginning in 609 CE, and concluding on the eighth day of June 632 CE, the day and year of Muhammad's death.
- ✓ During the period of revelation, the Koran was preserved in two ways. Firstly, many of Mohamed's

companions, including those who did not know how to write, memorized the Koran. Secondly, those who knew how to write would write down the Koran as Muhammad recited the verses. Since he was the final prophet, all other religions were therefore considered obsolete.

- ✓ The Koran is a monologue with Allah as the only speaker and with no particular concern for narrative continuity. Where the Koran fails to spell out a special issue, or when it is not possible to fully understand the Koranic words, which is sometimes common; Muhammad's example can then shed a light on the proper interpretation.
- ✓ The ahadith (Plural of Hadith) are volumes upon volumes of stories of Mohamed in which and sometimes his followers explain how and in what situations various verses of the Koran came to him. In the Hadith, Mohamed quotes words of Allah that do not appear in the Koran and Muslims consider them to be just as much as the revealed word of Allah as the Koran itself. The focus of hadith, is war; with the centrality being a violent Jihad.
- ✓ The Koran is supposedly the perfect and unchangeable word of God Himself. This means that a Muslim cannot easily discard doctrines which he doesn't like. All verses must be taken into account completely, whether they make sense or not and

whether it is liked or not. Any attempted innovation of the Koran referred to as '*Bi'dah*' is considered a major sin punishable by death and hell fire.

- ✓ It is noteworthy that the recitation starts off peacefully and gradually becomes more imperialistic and aggressive. When Mohammed started preaching in Mecca, he had very little military power and thus preached tolerance. As he gradually developed a strong army, the Koran changed its tone containing a declaration of war against the infidel world.

The Imam continued with his power-point narration outlining on the circumstances leading to the revelation:

- ✓ Mohamed was awakened one night by the angel Gabriel in Mecca and was told to wake up and to take a night journey to paradise. To prepare for the journey, the angel slit Mohamed's body open, removed his heart and washed it. When it was replaced it was filled with faith and wisdom. Mohamed then mounted a sort of Horse, a mare named el-Burhaq. El -Burhaq had a human face, a mule's body and a peacock's tail. This amazing animal could travel as far as the eye could see in a single stride.

- ✓ The Koran has a passage that mentions the farthest place. Jerusalem is never mentioned by name, but the early wise men figured the farthest place was Jerusalem. Reaching Jerusalem, Mohamed tethered El Buraq to the western wall of the temple of Herod and ascended to the temple mount. Here he discovered the great rock of Abraham's sacrifice, which had also been the altar of the Hebrew temple. Mohamed then leaped from the rock onto a ladder of light that led him to the paradise.
- ✓ The rock started following Mohamed, but angel Gabriel (Jibril) who had fallen to Jerusalem ahead of Mohamed, ordered the rock to stay put and the rock obeyed. Later a great shrine was built over it, called the dome of the rock, where the present Al Aksa mosque stands. Al Aksa means the farthest place.
- ✓ El Buraq was waiting for Mohamed when he got to heaven. Once again aboard the mount. Mohamed rode through the seven paradises of heaven. He met patriarchs and the prophets of the book and saw all angels at prayer. He said that Moses was a fairly reddish faced man and that Jesus was of average height and had a lot of freckles, as did Solomon.
- ✓ Quickly gaining all the knowledge and wisdom of the saints, angels and prophets, he was allowed a private audience with Allah and was the only man to ever see Allah unmasked. Muhammad and Allah

spoke at length to define the various aspects of Islam. Allah wanted the people to pray to him thirty-five times daily, but Mohamed argued that him into letting them pray a more practical five times daily. After his visit Muhammad returned to Mecca the same night.

- ✓ The Koran has many other things besides punishments and rewards. It gives instructions about fornication, adultery, disobedient peoples, alms, murder corruption, insults, debtors, the pits, divorce, blame casting, dowries, persecution, fasting, the day of burning, fighting, backsliding, backbiting, covetousness, gambling, infanticide, burying infants, heathenism, inheritance laws, how to sleep, menstruation, parental duties, wet-nursing, Marital Intercourse, oaths, dissension, orphans, eating in others houses, prayer times and requirements, the evil eye, ownership of horses, suckling, the scene of judgement, prohibition of wine and alcohol, renegades, retaliations, Satan's, repentance, slanderers, treatment of slaves, widow's wills, thievery, suspicion, usury, cunning omens, diets and food laws, sexual dishonour, eunuchs , mother hood, regulations for keeping concubines, transgression, omens, diets and food laws, enemies. Evil spirits, fraud, idolatry, Allah's powers of dispensing death, breaking bonds with kin, avarice,

ritual washing, fate of sinners, conspiracy, treatment of enemies and women refugees, lewdness, rain, plots and counter plots, world unity and mercy.

- ✓ All Muslims have no control over their own lives and destinies. Illness, death, drought, pestilence, earthquakes, any disasters must be fatalistically accepted as the will of Allah.
- ✓ Only by being a believer, accepting Mohamed's words accepting Allah can one get into paradise. So life on this earth is really not to be enjoyed but it is merely in preparation of joining Mohamed forever in heaven.
- ✓ Islam is a way of life and the fore mentioned only touches the vast number of other objects the Koran instructs on.

The Imam was fully in his element and continued with his brief.

There are five pillars of Islam, he said, and enumerated them as follows:

- ✓ The first pillar is the Moslem's total submission to Allah. He must say in all sincerity and belief that: *"There is no God, but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet"* This is the Muslims canonical rule of faith and is named the *Shahada.*
- ✓ The Muslim must pray five times daily but after a ritual ablution and do the prescribed genuflections.

Kneeling and bowing to Mecca and prostrating himself. Many times during the prayer the words "Allah Akbar" (God is great) are recited.

- ✓ The Muslim must pay a purification tax for almsgiving.
- ✓ The Moslem must fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the religions holiest time for that is the month the Koran was sent down to direct the human lives. During the month of Ramadan, the gates of heaven open and the angel Gabriel asks grace for everyone. Old people in particular pray very hard for the forgiveness of their sins since they will be the ones trying to get into paradise the soonest. Although not seen by Human eyes, even trees kneel towards Mecca during Ramadan.
- ✓ Fasting is compulsory for every Muslim during the daylight hours for the entire month. Day from night is told by the seeing of a white thread, if a white thread can be seen then that is night, if a black thread can be seen then it is daytime. During this period, most of the daylight hours are spent in the mosque praying. During these hours, there is complete abstinence from food, drink, smoking and sex. By Allah's grace, pregnant women, wet nurses, the very aged and small children are exempt from fasting. Most Important to Moslems is the Sunna, although

the Sunna is not formally written down, it cannot be divorced from the Koran. It is an interpretation of the values of the Koran by experience and tradition. Those who believe in the Sunna are called Sunni Muslims and are predominant in the Muslim fraternity. Africa is generally Sunni and so is the East African region including Somalia.

- ✓ The fifth and final pillar of Islam says every Muslim must make the pilgrimage or haj to Mecca at least once in his life-resources allowing. In Mecca, there is a black stone in a shrine called the Kaaba which is considered the most sacred place in the Muslim faith. Historically the Kaaba had been a pagan shrine but Mohamed converted it to be a place of worship on receipts of the message from Allah hence all Muslims pray facing the Kaaba.

The Koran and The Armed Jihad

With Mohamed's prophetic career so thoroughly marked by blood and warfare, it is of no surprise that the Koran would be similarly violent and intransigent.

- ✓ Soon after receiving revelations from Allah, Mohamed began by just preaching to his tribe -the Quyrash- the worship of one true God and his own position as prophet but he was not well received by his Quyrash brethren in Mecca who reacted disdainfully to his prophetic call and refused to give up their many gods.
- ✓ Ultimately and very resentful, he finally fled his native Mecca for the nearby Medina where a band of tribal warriors had accepted him as prophet and pledged loyalty to him. These new Moslem communities began raiding the caravan of the Quyrash with Mohamed personally leading many of the raids. These raids kept the nascent Muslim solvent and helped form the Islamic theology.
- ✓ A major victory at Badr against insurmountable odds became the legendary turning point for the Muslims as Mohamed claimed that even armies of Angels joined with the Muslims to smite the Quraysh
- ✓ From being a tiny, despised community, the Muslims were now a force with which the pagans of

Arabia had to contend with –and they began to strike terror in the hearts of their enemies and Mohamed's claim to be the last prophet of the one, true God appeared validated by a victory against enormous odds.

- ✓ With certain attitudes and assumptions were being planted in the minds of Muslims, jihadists group to this day. These included a conviction that Allah would grant victory to his people against foes that are superior in number or fire power, so long as they remained faithful to his commands.
- ✓ It was also big on things worldly and that war victories entitled the Muslims to appropriate the possessions of the vanquished as booty.
- ✓ Bloody vengeance against one enemy was also closely spelt out that it belonged not solely to the lord, but also to those who submitted to him on earth.
- ✓ That is the literal meaning of the word Islam: Submission. With those rejecting Islam to be considered "*The vilest of creatures'* and thus undeserving of any mercy.
- ✓ Prisoners taken in battle against the Muslims may be put to death at the discretion of the Muslim leaders. And finally personal loyalty to the prophet was emphasized that anyone who insulted or even

opposed Mohammed or his people deserves a humiliating death-beheading if possible.

- ✓ There are over a hundred verses in the Koran that exhort believers to wage Jihad against unbelievers:

"O prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is hell, an evil refuge indeed."

"Strive hard" in Arabic is *Jahidi,* a verbal form of the noun Jihad. In Islamic theology, *jihad fi sabil Allah* refers specifically to taking up arms for Islam. This striving was to be on the battlefield:

"When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly"

- ✓ The warfare was to be directed against both those who rejected Islam and those who professed to be Muslims but did not hold to the fullness of the faith.
- ✓ The Koran is clear enough about the warfare that Muslims must wage against unbelievers but it lacks clarity as in its entirety, It is reported that one of his followers asked the prophet to name the best deed of becoming a Muslim, the prophet had responded:*" to participate in Jihad in Allah's cause".*
- ✓ The jihadists are fighting so that Allah's words and religion to reign supreme. This involves to the re-establishment of full Islamic law in Muslim countries and above all the restoration of the caliphate.in other

words; Jihad will only end with the restoration of the Hegemony of Islam. Modern day Jihadist movements consciously pattern themselves after the Jihadi warriors of old and frequently invoke their memories.

- ✓ To be sure extremist Muslims are open to only three options as regards their interaction with the rest of humanity- or as they put it – unbelievers. The hadith narrates as such:

  "…make a holy war, when you meet your enemies invite them to three courses of action, if they respond to any of these, you also accept it and withhold yourself from them any harm. Invite them to accept Islam; if they respond to you, accept it from them and desist from fighting against them…if they refuse, to accept Islam, demand from them Jizya. If they agree to pay accept it from them and hold of your hands. If they refuse to pay the tax, seek Allah's help and fight them"

The Imam finally sat down after looking at me for a full minute. I was not sure what was in his mind.

The operations officer also referred to as G3 then took over the podium.

The G3- is for operations The G-3 is responsible for converting the commander's intentions into plans. He is the Alpha male among staff officers. He is responsible for keeping his grip on the battle at all times and alerting the commander to problems that require a decision on his

part. A good G3 makes his commanders life easier, while a poor one makes life hell for the rest of the staff.

The G3 in this case was a student of mine as a cadet though then it seemed as if he was the silent type as I could not very well place him. I was later to learn that his nickname was "rabbit" on account of his two top teeth being very prominent. The name was a carry-over from his cadet days attributed to the cadet instructors. He had a sleepy growl of a face that made his comments sound like afterthoughts. I had been told that he was efficient, a glutton for staff work and to his subordinates, a hard taskmaster.

His brief dwelt on the Al shabaab as a force.

Al- Shabaab and Suicide Bombing

Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, commonly known as Al-Shabaab (The youth) rode to prominence on the tidal wave of Somalia nationalism following Ethiopia's invasion of the country in 2006.

- ✓ This insurgent group anchored in Islamic fundamentalism is the particular enemy in the theatre that is Somalia. AS has been a worthy enemy ruthlessly devoted to the cause with the group incorporating elements of Somalia nationalism into its Islamic cause. Just like other jihadists extremist groups, the groups ultimate goal is the establishment of a global Islamic state with Somalia being a mere stepping stone for further territorial gains from which they may wage unrelenting Jihad.
- ✓ A strong point for the AS is that they have a steady supply of recruits from Somalis big youth pool. The youth who have never ventured into any formal modern schooling because modern schools as we know them don't exist in the country and have never been running for the last thirty years or so. In essence a whole generation has never been to school with the only access to education being the Islamic madrassas where they are infused into the impurity of all religions except Islam.

- ✓ They therefore make perfect soldiers for Al Shabaab; as soldiers of Islam, it is drilled into them to have no memories of the past and to have no plans for the future. They live entirely in the present.
- ✓ The AS soldier is literally, the orphan of war, the rootless and the restless, economically deprived with little self-knowledge trained to admire the war because it is the only occupation they can easily adapt to.
- ✓ Their life has no meaning except for the simple belief in a messianic, puritan Islam drummed into them by a simple village Mullahs as the only prop they can lean onto to give meaning to their lives. Untrained for anything, even in the traditional occupations of their forefathers such as farming, herding or even fishing- they are what Karl Max would have termed as Lumpen proletariat.
- ✓ Their mentors motivate them by drilling into them the ancient Islamic beliefs and demand that they followed this 1400-year-old script to the letter. The youthful ranks of the AS therefore deeply spout koranic quotations in every aspect of their routine undertakings.
- ✓ And then there is the brotherhood of arms. the strong attachments which come in the training and prosecuting war offers the youngsters not just a religious cause to fight for but a whole life to fully

embrace and make their existence meaningful. They are disciplined, motivated and ruthlessly devoted in attaining their aims. The set belief is that god is on their side and the warped interpretation of Islam is their only interpretation. Crudely put, their brains have physically been removed and the mullah's brains supplanted in its place.

- ✓ The sharia law does not allow politics or political parties therefore since the soldiers are fighting for a heavenly cause, there are no salaries factored for them though they are issued with food, clothes, shoes and weapons.
- ✓ Their weapons too are a mix of improvisation, resourcefulness from some key overseas benefactors. The AK-47 is their ubiquitous weapon of choice, a poor man's weapon as it is easy to maintain, hardy and has a high cyclic rate of fire. To make it more practical, many modifications are done on the personal weapon including removing parts to the weapon to make it even lighter and easier to use. Two man weapons like heavy machine guns are tweaked making it easier to operate by a single fighter.
- ✓ Al Shabaab has of late embraced suicide bombings. Modern suicide terrorism emerged in the early 1980s and grew to become a familiar phenomenon globally as a form of asymmetric warfare. The capacity of a

suicide attack to inflict mass casualties and immense destruction endows its perpetrators with an aura of power that far exceeds the actual strength.

- ✓ Etymology aside, studies have indicated that a suicide bomber's motivation is due to an explosive mix of nervousness, pride, anger, sense of powerlessness, culture and religious fervour.
- ✓ Suicide bombings have high symbolic value because the willingness of the perpetrators to die signals high resolve and dedication to the cause. Their action also assists in galvanizing popular support, helps to generate financial support for the organization and becomes a source of new recruits for future suicide missions.
- ✓ Men attach more value to vengeance than women; and young people are more prepared to act in a vengeful manner than older individuals. It is not surprising, then, to find that most suicide bombers are both young and male. However, there are emergence of female suicide bombers but very few.
- ✓ Suicide terrorism, therefore, is not a cheap weapon as one might think; it is not a one-time spontaneous activity. But rather consider it is a tactic which calls for significant resources if the end state is to be met. Very few communities can willingly give their daughters and sons at their prime of youth to immolate themselves. The individual set for this task

to become a human bomb, may cost an organization less than a missile but then the tasking organization must need to invest heavily and systematically in propaganda designed to build and then maintain that "martyr's cult" if they are to avoid a backlash from relatives and friends and the wider community.

- ✓ The AS and other extremist organizations are, therefore, forced to resort to foreign volunteers, partly to make a statement that it was about their support globally but even more importantly because the foreign volunteers are cheaper in the long run; much cheaper since there are no close family ties.
- ✓ It might seem strange but the publicized virgins promised to Islamic martyrs in paradise is no myth or distortion of Islamic theology. The Koran paints a picture of frankly material and lushly sensual paradise for his followers containing everything a seventh century Arabian desert –dweller could possibly dream of: Gold and fine material things, fruit, wine, water and women.
- ✓ The promise of paradise was one of the principal means by which the prophet motivated his followers. It makes fighting in Jihad a win–win proposition: If a Muslim warrior was victorious , he enjoyed booty on earth ; if he was killed, he enjoyed

virtually identical rewards in the afterlife – on a much grander scale.as the Koran grandly puts it:

"in paradise, the martyr is to be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls and dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, he would also recline on green cushions and rich carpets of beauty while sitting on thrones encrusted with gold and precious stones and share in dishes and goblets of gold on which would be all that the souls desire all that the eyes could delight in. including an abundance of fruits, dates and pomegranates. For the carnivorous, there would be the flesh of fowls any that they may desire"

- ✓ The promise of paradise to those who slay and are slain for Allah is the principal justification for suicide bombings. The bombers are laying claim to this promise by slaying Allah's enemies and being slain in the process.
- ✓ To the suicide bomber, the nature of the target is the only thing that matters. Whether or not the perpetrator dies in the process does not affect the morality of the act.
- ✓ Targeting military assets is morally superior to targeting non-combatants. Taking maximum precautions to limit harm to innocent bystanders is morally superior to indulging in indiscriminate attacks. The value placed on their own life by the bomber does not feature in the moral argument.

- ✓ The suicide bomber has four distinct mental states that determine his suitability.
    - One is that deep and total conviction that the deed is being done for a truly holy cause.
    - secondly, his action has been automatically blessed by Allah himself and that a guaranteed and immediate passage to paradise is invariably bound to follow and ...
    - Lastly, his action outweighs any residual love of life. It is important to point out that the depth of hatred that must be imbued in the *shahids* alongside the love of Allah. One of the two will not work; the hatred must be like a corrosive acid inside the soul.

There then followed briefs from the other staff officers starting with the G -1

The G-1 develops and implements effective policy and leads programs that build sustained personnel readiness in the Army's greatest asset the soldier. He is responsible for development, management and execution of all manpower and personnel plans, programs and policies. His job covers an eclectic mixture of discipline, legal matters, welfare pay and allowances, promotions conditions of service and even ceremonials.

A good G1- ensures a high morale only for the service personnel and that are retained in the service.

Officers are deemed responsible for their own morale. A poor G-1 ensures that the commander sacks soldiers.

The G-1 in this case had a hungry looking face, he talked as if he was on rote in short clipped sentences standing upright as if he was on parade and his eyes not leaving my face. I suspect he gave no quarters and was an officer of fixed opinion without grey areas in his dictionary. I suspected he was hard on the personnel and I mentally made a note to have a more open mind when dealing with his briefs on personnel matters.

The logistics officer- the G-4 took over the brief

The G-4 is the logistics officer- He is responsible to the Commander to ensure that the commanders vision and the operations ambitious orders are supported with adequate supplies of fuel viz petrol, oil and lubricants, ammunition, food, water spare parts major components and other requirements are delivered at the right place and time under combat conditions. B and B - Beans and bullets as the Americans would phrase it. He is the only member of the G-staff expected to work miracles on a routine basis.

The G-4 was a tall officer with good looks and a hearty laugh and naturally a well-known connoisseur of female charms, His peers when in the peacetime environment had mirthfully nicknamed him as Gyna, I suppose an abbreviation for gynaecologist. Unsurprisingly, I later learnt that the G-4 had organised

with the leading butchery in Liboi and was therefore every weekend supplied with copious helpings of lamb eyes and testicles which he personally cooked outside his private kitchen next to his tent and from where he devoured those gonads and eyes with relish.

With time too, I later realised that he was efficient in a very casual manner and indeed in some instances actually managed to work major logistic miracles.

Finally, the briefings were concluded, a short break followed and the team again took their seats and awaited my comments. I had many burning questions and engaged them in a question and answer session. The engagement is as listed.

Questions from The Commander

My first question was directed to no one in particular.

"As a sector Commander" I asked" ***How will I measure my success?"***

The answer was forthcoming from one officer, wearing a major's rank.

"In sector Kismayu, where there is a major port, the success of the sector commander is measured by any ship which arrives and offloads without enemy action. That is his success; his major success was on the day when there was a traffic jam in the city of Kismayu.

We laughed.

“In your case sir, the officer continued, ‘you will always have some small but many successes, a successful ambush, a raid or even the fact that the major towns of Dhobley, Beles-qoqani, Tabda and Afmadow are throbbing with commerce and routine. That i think will be the measure of your success. But then sir, he added, the military is merely a means to achievement of the objective. The final success belongs to the political class.

I put on a stern face.

“So what you are suggesting here is that the sector commander is merely a pawn in a chess board of the Somali political class?”

He dodged my question by making a non-committal answer of “Sir?”.

There was a prolonged silence until Col Matiku stepped in to save the hour and answered:

“Any military use force must, by definition, be in pursuit of a political objective; the means are the tools- diplomacy, sanctions, military force etc and the ways are how you apply the tools to achieve the objective. Al shabaab end is not terrorism- that is their manner of applying the means of violence; their end is the political one of achieving the ascendancy of Islamic fundamentalism. The sectors objective- the end- must be the physical and intellectual defeat of Al Shabaab Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to our country. The means to this end certainly include the use of armed force, but also

very importantly engagement of the battle of idea. Furthermore, it has to be understood that this is an asymmetric war in which the degree of violence has to be very carefully judged to avoid a detrimental effect overall.

What are the capabilities of the Somali National Army (SNA) to hold the country as AMISOM is set for drawdown is in the offing?

The answer came from a lady officer, a captain who was part of the intelligence team named Barbara. Instead of a Kevlar helmet- she had a combat coloured head scarf. Combat coloured yes, but still a head scarf. These daughters of Eve know how to push boundaries! I thought. I kept quiet but knew that this was a case that needed to be revisited in due course.

Her answer was forthright.

"Several reasons curtail the capability of making the SNA to be a capable fighting force. One, she said, their officer cadre may have attended various courses and gotten the commission designed to lead the new Somali army but then there lacked an experienced and non-commissioned corps to buttress the officers and provide the institutional memory for the new SNA thanks to their three plus decades of internal strife and lack of a standing army. Secondly, the Somali as a people lack the phlegmatic temperament, staff skills and even the basic mutual trust so desirous in a fighting body- but then she

added, the present trained force is capable of fighting very well as long as they felt that they were being supported by AMISOM close by.

My second question was directed to the Imam.

As pointed out, the normal Somali is very devoted to the faith. Is there a personal clash from a SNA soldier fighting against an AS fighter who arguably is fighting for the spread of the faith?

"Agreed, there is bound to be a clash in matters of faith considering that the AS are totally radicalized with a radical Muslim described as someone who believes in absolute, literal and thorough implementation of Islam on himself or the society or both. Radicalism isn't always evangelical but more often than not it takes *some* form of political strife.

The relatively better training of the SNA put them in good stead to resist calls for extremism as painted by the AS, but that remains a sensitive issue considering that the AS have a very convincing propaganda machinery and secondly, there have been cases of members of the same family fighting in opposite sides in the conflict. This brings some deep ethical and role conflict.

I had so many questions set for the Imam and I pressed on.

Isn't the God of Islam the same as the Christian God, why is it not possible to have a peaceful co -

existence between Christians and Muslims in Somalia like we do in Kenya barely 5 kilometres away?

The answer was forthcoming from the Imam

"Christianity and Islam are diametrically opposed to one another. While on the surface both religions come from roughly the same area of the world and promote a belief in one God, their respective teachings and moral values are literally polar opposites. There is a difference between the conceptions and perception that the two religions hold. They can be listed as such:

- ✓ ***Tawhid-*** *For Muslims, they have the doctrine of the Tawhid, which means that "God our Lord, your Lord is one". This concept is strongly emphasized in the Koran. For Christians, the God is a triun God, The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. Three persons sharing the same essence of divinity which the Islamic doctrine totally disagree and derogatively reject.*
- ✓ ***The Divinity of Christ*** *- In Christianity Jesus is basically the incarnation of the Divine. Islam denigrates Jesus to a mere man, a prophet who is of lower "rank" than Mohamed.*
- ✓ ***Christ's Death on the Cross and Resurrection*** *- In Christianity, Jesus died on the cross and came back to life on the third day. Islam teaches that Jesus was prematurely called to heaven by Allah, and another person was crucified in his place. Since Muslim's Jesus didn't die, he cannot therefore be resurrected.*

- ✓ ***Christ dying for humanity sins*** *- In Christianity, Jesus died for mankind's sins. Whoever accepts Jesus' sacrifice, will be atoned from his or her sins. In Islam, since Jesus didn't die and was just a mere human, he therefore cannot atone for anyone's sins.*
- ✓ ***Christ coming back to judge the living and the dead*** *- Christ is the central figure of the Christian end times. Christians believe that Jesus will come back in power to rule the whole world as Divine King. In Islam, Jesus a.k.a. Issa al-Masih is said to come back, as well. But when he does, he will come back to destroy the Christian faith and practice. Then he will take a wife and retire and die here on earth after a couple of years.*

The Imam persisted on his discourse

Beyond the basic tenets, you will also see that the teachings of Christianity and Islam are polar opposites. For example, take apart Jesus' manifesto - *The Sermon on the Mount* - and compare the teachings contained therein with Islam's teachings:

- **Loving your Enemy** - Jesus tells you to turn the other cheek in face of adversity and loving even your enemies. Islam is in every aspect non-pacifistic. In fact, the Qur'an repeatedly admonishes Muslims who refuse to take part in an armed Jihad and even regulates how and

when to fight the unbelievers, and how to divide the war booty gained from the Jihad.

- **Divorce -** Jesus rejects the Old Testament notion of a man is able to divorce his wife by writing a letter. Muhammad goes the other way and teaches that a man can irrevocably divorce his wife just by saying "Talaq, Talaq, Talaq!" Also, Christianity teaches that husband and wife are "one flesh" and so therefore polygamy is forbidden. However, Islam promotes polygamy and concubinage mainly in the form of captured sex slaves.
- **Oaths -** Jesus forbids saying oaths made to God. Muhammad teaches that you have to say your oaths to Allah.
- **Adultery -** Jesus teaches that adultery starts with the intention. Islam teaches that intentions that are not translated into action do not lead to sin.
- **Praying** - Jesus teaches that you shouldn't pray in "vain repetitions," because God already knows what you need before you even say it. Islam, on the other hand, is a religion of repetitions: repetitive body movements during each of the daily prayers, repeated prayers for each body movement, going around the Kaaba 7x, etc.
- In Christianity **Hell** is the state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God,

while **Heaven** is an eternity at God's side. The torment of Hell comes from an eternal existence excluded from God. The bliss of Heaven comes from being in eternal companionship with God. In Islam however, Allah and his angels are the ones who actively do the torturing of the unbeliever in hell. All the while, the Islamic Paradise is filled with earthly pleasures that might have been forbidden for Muslims while they were alive on earth: rivers of alcoholic drinks, under aged boy-servants, multiple sex-mates who stay can perpetually rejuvenate their virginity, perpetual penile erections, etc.

So I persisted**:**

"Is there a chance that Al Shabaab can be destroyed if the fighters are all converted to Christianity?"

He answered back, "On paper yes, that could work out but it is improbable, it is easier to convert a Christian to be a Muslim than vice versa. Indeed, if we can convince the 80 per cent of Kenyans professing the Christian faith to convert, then this issue of Al Shabaab will be over as we will be all Muslims and hence creation of a Darussalam. A haven of peace.

In other words, Islam is an actively proselytizing religion, so whilst Muslims respect the right of Christians to remain Christian, they believe that Christians would be better off if they converted to Islam. Extremist

Muslims believe that peace that will only come when everyone is a Muslim or at least subject to the Islamic sharia law. And to establish that peace, Muslims must wage war."

So no hope for peace unless AS is vanquished militarily?

"No hope. And nothing can stop them except overwhelming force and violence- a language they too well understand, evil cannot be appeased. But then the danger is that if you come too hard on them militarily you are bound to turn many of them and their families to be al shabaab adherents and the cycle of violence will persist. A very judicious balance is therefore called for when forced to apply official violence."

But the conditions for accepting to pay jizzya are so cruel; you become almost a slave and a second class citizen- I pointed out

The answer from the Imam was crude:

"Well you can always consider converting. And that must be the sunni version of Islam as practised in Africa, because if you convert to the suffi version. You still will be considered kuffar and liable to be killed."

Al Shabaab has terrorised the country for so many years, why has there been no revolt from the common Somalis?

"The common Somali cannot be counted upon to revolt. Even if they earnest desire is to overthrow AS and finally have a chance to live a life worth living, they genuinely can't do it. AS has all the guns and plenty of thugs to enforce their will. Protests, riots, peaceful demonstrations will just get you mutilated and killed. Those who do not give out sons to be soldiers for AS live in abject squalor, having a son as a soldier or martyr is basically a prerequisite for the family to get aid donations and food. There isn't any way an internal resistance might organize either. People might not like AS, but they all know what happens to those who defy it.

The weak point for any Somali is the clan, and AS has will fully clamped on that by having all the different clans linked together by religion. That is their strong point.

Some clans have openly fought against the AS but have ended up being losers on account of reduced aid and curtailing of any movements from their clan areas.

It is easier to *worship authority than attempting to correct it."*

Kenya has a big Muslim population in the coastal areas and in the North Eastern inhabited by the Somalis- Why does it seem that there is more Islamic fundamentalism violence from the Somali communities compared to the coastal communities?

"Environment conditions character; the windblown, gritty acerbating nature of the expansive North Eastern Province suggests and tempers the tough Somali outlook."

Considering that most suicide terrorism cases have been in a way tied to the Muslim faith, is suicide an Islamic religio-cultural tradition?

"That argument dissolves in the counter arguments of history and from the holy writings. Suicide Terrorism has been part and parcel of human history even before the advent of Islam, the phenomenon appearing among the Jewish Sicaris in the 1st Century, among the Moslem Hashishiyun in the 11th Century, and among the Asians in the 18th Century. During World War II, the Japanese military also perfected the technique of Kamikaze pilots. Rajiv Gandhi was killed by a Tamil Tiger female suicide bomber.

Islam has been around for 1400 years but nothing points to Islam as a religion advocating suicide as a method of fighting the enemy. Not even in their holy writings.

Muslims link to suicide terrorism can be attributed to the relatively recent introduction of suicide bombing by Hezbollah in 1983 in Lebanon who carried out close to 50 suicide bombings during the 1980's and 1990's."

"The Koran states that the punishment for murder is execution unless the survivors waive it. The punishment for suicide is eternal hell and there is no way out.

Once again it needs to be pointed out that the driving force for this act is not religion but a cocktail of motivations ranging from personal to communal. "

I pressed on with another question.

Why is it taking so long to bring peace to Somalia?

Two interlinked words, the captain lady answered, "Patriotism and Diaspora. Any Somali citizen of substance today has no attachment to the country; his main concern is to find ways to go to the diaspora. And neighbouring Kenya too is diaspora. Having a relative in the diaspora especially in the more developed societies is source of pride for the extended family. Sadly, it explains why the entire cabinet now operates from Kenya and all the presidential candidates after an election loss troop back to the diaspora until another election. Without imbuing the country with a strong sense of patriotism and pride in youth of the country there is unlikely to be permanent peace. The effects of the long drawn internal strife has also stifled all the activities of the would be civil society which in many nations controls the excesses of the elected government**."**

My next question was answered by an officer who I remembered I had trained as a cadet. His answer was long with pointed pauses.

My question had been:

Where do you place the loyalty of the common Somali?

"The typical Somali first loyalty is to himself then to his faith or vice versa. The next loyalty is to his clan and his family followed by a loose loyalty to the concept of being a Somali. His last loyalty is to – if it exists at all- is to the government."

Why has the AS been such a fanatical soldier totally devoted to the cause at the pain of death?

"They don't think they can lose. Even if they lose on earth, they win in paradise. We are not fighting a civilization we are at war with the culture of death."

But then is Islamic Sharia law compatible with the other secular laws?

The Imam had ready answer

"First, Islam teaches that Shariah comes from Allah. So, in line with Allah's universalism, Islamic doctrine teaches that Shariah should be applied throughout the world: all other legal systems that currently exist should give way to Shariah.

Islamic law is superior to all other legal systems, Islam teaches, because it originates from a perfect source, Allah. In effect, it's a global, legal system. Shariah transcends time and place. It is cross-cultural and ahistorical; that is, it is applicable to any society today and in the future."

But there have been some arguments from some Islamic Apologists claiming that Shariah is not compatible with any legal system?

"That is not possible," another officer who I learnt was the sector legal officer jutted in.

"Even comparing the basics, there is a massive difference between Shariah and secular law. For example, innocent until proven guilty is a cardinal precept in modern laws. Innocence is assumed until guilt is proved in secular legal systems, but Islamic law assumes guilt until the accused proves otherwise. That crucial, fundamental difference completely separates contemporary, secular legal systems from Shariah.

Also, contemporary, secular law celebrates 'equity'. Equity, in the legal sense, means that the punishment should fit the crime**.** In other words, limb amputation for theft is utterly unthinkable in secular law; the punishment far exceeds the nature of the crime. And in the sphere of religion, the 'crime' of blasphemy no longer exists in the modern world as is deemed they are contrary to the freedom of free speech and thinking. By contrast, Shariah harshly punishes any perceived blasphemy against Islam. Shariah has no place in civilized, contemporary cosmopolitan societies around the world.

To be clear, while individual Muslims may find personal value and guidance in their faith, the imposition of Sharia as a legal system is a leap into the abyss of

theocracy. The notion that such a system, which often includes draconian punishments and institutionalized inequality, can foster true justice and well-being is a fantasy that ignores a litany of harsh realities. A legal system worthy of respect in the 21st century must be based on universal human rights and secular ethics, not the ancient texts of any religion. The idea of Sharia as a source of justice and ethics is not just a simple anachronism; it's a dangerous delusion."

Rank equals knowledge. They all expectantly looked at me as I moved to the podium and began to spell out my command philosophy.

A Soldier Prays

The panorama gleams with a heartland beauty and the Minaret towers shimmers in the morning light**.** The Marabou stork, ever detached, takes off in a flap of wings and the vagrant strains of the beautiful sounds of the Muezzin's call penetrates the silence in the far distance.

The prayer call, whispers, falls and murmurs with the wind as it has done for almost a century and a half; it is God's sound coming from the voice of the Muezzin. It first ruffles the Somali dirt, it lifts off and bounces onto the scrubland brush and heads towards the sea welcoming the fishermen - and the pirates too - back from their demanding and risky nightly sojourn; it politely massages the Ocean of the Indians whispering and reminding the lapping waves of that third day of creation.

It then plunges into the deep warm waters and blesses the sea creatures, the Lobster and the Mackerel, the Shrimp and the Whale, the Shark and the red Snapper. And then from the deep it rises again back inland to my lonely location, a lonely soldier in a foreign land on overnight duty and thirsting for prayer.

It could be baffling, but it remains ironic, that my place of prayer is in a dangerous location far from home, it is air conditioned full time, aloof and also partly under the ground. It could also easily be my grave.

My place of prayer is in a fox hole on the Somalia's war front.

The fox hole, trench, bunker, dirt hole or "*Handaki*" as it is called in Swahili is a hole dug in the ground where the soldier in combat digs in to give him some level of protection from the enemy's direct fire and exploding ordinance.

I have been in the *Handaki* for the last four months as part of Kenyan contingent in the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). AMISOM has been tasked to sanitise Somalia from the Al Shabab, extremist Islamic group intent to impose and spread their brand of austere Islam. The engagements against the enemy combatants have been few and short; but they have been intensive and deadly when they occur.

So we the soldiers while away the hours in waiting but in total silence.

And silence speaks and it always speaks loudly to me, a lonely soul struggling to stay awake, under a brooding night sky. Here the quest for prayer comes out on its own volition from the deep atavistic depth of the soul, it comes as natural as an unexplained emptiness which sweeps me above and beyond the realities of life and wipes out the need for the physical need of food or warmth or rest or worry. To me it becomes an application of mind to the divine, the soul, memory, imagination and will.

All great religions have been founded from such silences as the hunger for communing with the divine springs up, gnawing deep, persistent and sharp.

In a war theatre, you don't have to be old. The experience ages you. You find yourself learning so much, you learn the smell of blood, the sound of pain, the gasp of death, the anger of fighting, the projectile of vomit and few other things that could never be taught in training.

And then you also learn how to pray.

Indeed, confronted daily with the spectre of untimely death, one really has few choices whether to pray or not…It is the only choice. Prayer which with time had only posed itself in the limitless space of the soul has therefore come back to me so naturally, a familiar yearning and stirring once so embedded with my childhood experiences. It is the quest for God. It can't be hidden; it leaps out and reveals itself under pressure bursting forth like water in a dry *wadi.*

The thirst of God always exists and daily the muezzin calls brings it to me so much to the fore- It cannot fail to do so, when the profoundest human questions always abound within me.

How did humanity come into being? Are we-human beings- all truly alone? What is the truth? How long is eternity? What is love? Is there life after death? Is there a psychological backlash in playing God by killing a fellow human being?

You never forget your first love and you will never forget your first kill in combat. And my first killing in the field of battle disturbs me in a special way; something brewing deep down in my subconscious. It had been at an ambush set by the enemy and I had pumped in several bullets at an enemy who seemingly barely out of his teenage years who had made a suicidal dash in my direction with his weapon blazing.

He died open mouthed; probably without pain. The encounter brought some unexplained emotional euphoria. I was thrilled with what I had done. No mistake about this, the euphoria had nothing to do with ending another this unknown person's life, I felt euphoric because in the engagement, I had not panicked, I had subdued instinct, I had conquered my fears which the military training and discipline had conditioned me to. I had not let down my platoon, my friends or my commander. I have never done hard drugs, but I am yet to believe that there is anything which would ever be equal to that first encounter in battle.

This feeling of exhilaration is particularly disturbing to me as I know that there is within most men –even soldiers in combat- an intense resistance to killing a fellow human being.

My attempts to examine my emotions, self-introspection, have been so blanketed by well …emptiness; As if my core has become numb. I still cling

to the subconscious delusion that this state is temporary, that proper penance later would purge my pain and misery and make me whole again

My introspection persists in the *handak*i with some unexplained feelings that beyond the terror that am now experienced in the Al Shabaab front, there is *that* special fullness that I am living now that no other experience in the remainder of my life would ever equal, that beyond doubt, the rest of my life would be spent remembering in flashes the agonizing episodes and fullness that was, that is Somalia.

It is evening; the darkness falls suddenly like a curtain as it always does. It is promising to be a black night; a cloaked moon appears as the sun dives deep to the west. And I tie down my shoe laces, grab my rifle and slither in the *Handaki*. But then, I pause as I feel that particular yearning to make my peace, to commune with that unexplained all powerful being. The prayers then flow, not from the guts or the head or from the heart but deep from the soul. It is as meek as it is quietly liberating. The prayer for the soldier in the warfront does not bother to seize the moment; it lets it be.

My fox-hole comrade in a meditative silence nods, he finds himself also bowing reverently to that unknown powerful spirit– he fully understands and he too communes.

There are no atheists in fox holes.

Musings of A Police Officer

Damajale is a mere 36 kilometres from the Kenya Somalia border as a bird flies and about 45 kilometres south of the relatively much older and bigger shopping centre of Liboi. In 1989, as a lieutenant, I was tasked for patrol to the village of Damajale. Then the population was about 100 living in several grass thatched dwellings.

Under guard of the village were ten administration policemen living in Spartan conditions. The major identifying feature then was the borehole which had been sunk by the government. During my visit, the borehole was faulty and the residents were drawing water using donkeys from a dirty algae infested pool two kilometres or so from the centre. Somalia was then crumbling and cross border attacks on isolated settlements from an emerging Jihadist group which was in the process of taking power in the country was not un-common occurrence.

This incidence happens in late 1992.

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46662 Administration Police Corporal Elam Shiundu is a worried man. Very worried with the challenges and loneliness of command and the isolation of responsibility and even more worrying the plain feeling that no one will really understand if things go wrong worries him stiff.

Shiundu is a section commander at an isolated chief's camp at Damajale on the expansive Kenya – Somalia border. The village or rather shanty town with a population of about 500 sits about 30 km from the unmarked border crossing point. It is an active outpost with endless to and fro movements across the common border.

Neighbouring Somalia remains a failed state awash with weapons with ultra-orthodox, Islamic extremists loosely bound under an armed coalition dubbed Islamic court union (ICU) controlling the capital and steadily gaining ground in the southern parts of the country. The Islamic Court Fighters (ICF) have distinguished themselves as fearless fighters with a brutal devotion to the cause of spreading their austere brand of Islam to all of Somalia. Their source of funding –and it is well funded –remains unclear, but the subtle hand of Al Qaeda is strongly suspected.

Corporal shiundu sucks on his cigarette, worry lines etched on his face. He looks up at the cloudless sky, the sun shines hard, unforgiving, unblinking, unconcerned – neutral. He looks at his 9 charges; 3 of them fresh from the recent controversial intake at Administration Police Training College (APTC). Shiundu scrubs a hand across his brow. Very new meat, someday they will learn, he thinks, his eyes grow abstracted holding the weight and years of his experience as it follows his 3 new charges. Yes, they will learn.

Yes, they will have to learn.

A week before he had witnessed a surge of refugees crossing over into the country from Somalia to seek refuge from the marauding ICU Fighters. The refugees spoke of the ICU being young men too indoctrinated and brainwashed to reason with any perceived anti-Islamic stance. The more coordinated and well-funded NGO'S had stepped in and a semblance of order was finally realized in the shanty town.

But that was not Shiundu's major worry.

A day before early in the morning he had noticed that the town was restless and preparing to move as donkeys and camels were being laden with the refugees and the town dwellers goods. The corporal had walked to the chief's house-he too was busy packing. The corporal made his enquiries- *"The Islamists are coming!"* The chief had answered barely lifting his head from the packing.

"They are after the refugees, this town is going to be rooted out!" He had added.

"*How do you know this*?" Shiundu asked barely controlling his anger

"*Mimi Najua"* (I know!) The chief had replied.

"*What have you done about it, have you informed the DO?, have you…"*

Shiundu had a dozen questions; the chief ignored him, finished his packing and zoomed off to nowhere.

In an hour the chiefdom was now almost deserted save for him and his 8 charges and few other civilians who for a reason or another had failed to trek out. His charges looked at him-the question unasked-why don't we also move out? He was not in the AP force for glory – but then they too knew the answer –they had nowhere to go, they were here to defend the flag of the republic-tattered it was but still the flag. Always the flag.

"*Sikwada*!" He called out to his deputy "*Make a tour of the town and give me a tally of the remaining people* "

"*Yes sir*!" Sikwada dutifully answered.

"*Make also a tally of all livestock and all other abandoned goods*"

"*Yes sir*"

"*Send scouts 400 metres away to be on the lookout and give us early warning*"

"*Yes Sir*"

"*See that all the spare ammunition in the store are all in the Handakis and also see that everybody has been allocated his arc of responsibility in the "handaki".*

"*Yes Sir*"

"And Sikwada?"

"*Yes sir*"

"*Have my gun cleaned*"

"*Sir!*"

Fighting from the trenches is normally the only option to the soldier who has the advantage of being in place or in military parlance- *'holding ground"*. It is also the only option to the soldier who is inferior in numbers and outgunned. Shiundu was not worried about the ICU fighters routing them out.

That was out of question; 9 patient soldiers holding ground are a formidable force and would require close to ten times that number against them to successfully oust them from the handakis. The only hitch however was that he was immobile and apart from the chief's office, he could not defend any other part of the township.

He also had no means of providing accurate and actionable intelligence to the DO as the only means of radio communication was dead and had been so for well over 2 years. It also meant that the chances of his position being reinforced or replenished with logistics were slim.

Let them come, he mused, let them come with their fast driven "*Technicals*" with their heavy calibre machine guns, their drug crazed brute brains and unshaven beards, let them come-with their warped purist Islamic ideals let them come!

He knew their normal pattern of attack. They would come in the early morning with maybe 5 or 6 of the "*Technicals*" and swamp the village, the mounted guns blazing away at nothing expecting any opposition just to wither away.

But he also knew how to counter this. His men would hold their fire in the trenches and wait until the fanatics were within the range of the G-3. And then he would give the order and then his G-3s would cough and splatter. A good G3 in your hand is indeed the best asset in the handaki—a careful shot could sledgehammer a person right out of existence, in a wink, no pain, probably, if hit square.

But then he also knew that they were a formidable force. A force which is not tied down in defence has the advantage of speed, mobility and flexibility. Operating in small groups aboard the "*Technicals*" also releases them from the bureaucracy of command –waiting for direction for the next move. The attackers also had the advantage of that precious commodity –time. They have the leisure of choosing a time most convenient to them.

But that did not dent Shiundu's thinking, let them come, he mused, Yes, Let them ransack any other towns But not his town, Not that of 42662 Corporal Elam Shitembete Shiundu-No sir!

It was idle to speculate, Corporal Shiundu took a long pull of his cigarette his hard face deeply lined, he looked and felt very old, and he sighed and ground the remaining inch of the cigarette butt thoroughly in the ground.

There was work to be done.

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Damajale is now a major shopping centre and an administrative capital with a population of about 10,000 and a vibrant primary school. Water gushes from a permanent borehole and is a last major shopping center into Somalia 36Km away. It is also an administrative capital for a constituency and has a fully-fledged security station and life in Damajale centre plods on.

Damajale is a reflection of the resolve of mankind.

The Depressed Sniper

I am a super sniper of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and I love my job. It explains why I had volunteered to do a second tour of duty here in the AMISOM Base at Beles Qoqani (BQ), It also explains why am now doing my second month with 7 MIB after doing a stint with the 3 MIB.

It is interesting that the new MIB is yet to fully embrace me fully as one of them, I understand. Human relations at the best of times tend to be fickle and more so in the in the profession of arms, trust is imperative and a very useful component and it takes time to build fully embrace it.

Probably, am also in a big way, responsible for the slow growth of the trust. I have a hungry looking face always in the verge of depression and though young, just under twenty-seven years, I always feel old, too old; I think I could tell old methuselah a word or two.

My words are also few and very measured, that the longest speech I frequently make in a day is "…Ah bwana…" The new team which found me in the location also claim that I always fail to identify a joke unless people around me are well into laughing. But then, I normally grasp the joke even before the punch line but then well…silence is always golden.

Rightly, they claim that I have a studios glance, a hungry look, the look of a predator, a man who knows he is dangerous. Maybe they are just like Julius Caesar who was uncomfortable with thin people, that they need constant need watching.

But then they cannot or could not imagine the demons tearing me apart in the head, demanding that I end it all, that I seek a transition, a final one. I have been resisting this very comfortable solution but then deep down I have a feeling that the demonic voices are slowly winning, that it is only a matter of time. Just a matter of time before I end it all. Just a matter of time.

To be sure, I joined the KDF with an intention of joining the Navy and to be a submariner, I had fantasied deeply the feeling of going underwater in a cramped position and staying under water for months on end with almost no interaction with the other earthly folks and their chattering.

However, when I joined the KDF I found myself to be a footslogger in the infantry. It came to my realisation and to my commanders that I was a crack shot in all weapons and the fact that I was a loner; it was only natural that I become a sniper. A job I came to love greatly, especially when Somalia came calling.

Indeed, by the norms of soldiering, the sniper is a strange breed, he never gets close enough near the man

he kills, yet he sees them with clarity and an apparent proximity greater than anyone else today.

The sniper sees them while lying in total silence utterly immobile, he sees his target, watches him as he stretches and yawns, as he eats his meals. And then he dies, snipers are special –inside the head.

We snipers also live in our own private world.so total does the obsession with accuracy become that the lapse into a silence peopled only by our thoughts of the weights of the projectile heads, the power of various powder loads, the strength of the wind, the direction, how far will the bullet head drop over various distances what slight improvement can be made on the rifle.

When the common infantry soldier uses a rifle, the enemy is normally just a form, a shape that slams to the ground and dies when the bullet hits him in specific areas. The sniper on the other hand studies every tiny detail of the victim before squeezing the trigger and ending life.

It is simply not enough to be a marksman; the combat sniper is true man hunter. He has the capacity of total concentration, he must remain invisible, he must suppress the urge to ease aching muscles, to twitch, to scratch or even relive his bladder.

He does not have a heart only a lean meat piece size of a fist which is sheltered on the left size of the thorax.

The lean meat is purposely used only to pump blood to the body.

All that waiting turns a man to be generally private and rarely a conversationalist even off duty.

It has been said that there are four levels of human specialization in anything. Good, very good, outstanding and natural. To be a sniper like me, you have to be a natural as there is no enough training to make one a sniper. It has to come from within.

7MIB had arrived in the last week of June 2012, when the Somali weather was at its peak. The enemy knew a new unit had arrived and fired several bursts of gunfire from a distance as a haughty means of welcoming them.

Beles Qoqani was a cheerless place with a collection of handakis that stretched in a rough circle with the company headquarters in the centre. Here and there was PVC pipe stuck in the ground at an angle for the men to urinate into. Since there were no women, there was little need for privacy. Latrines were holes dug in the ground popularly referred to as “Long Drop”.

Like any group of men, there are characters that unknowingly enliven the overall atmosphere of a generally tense environment. In this instant the big buffoon of a platoon commander was the case. His name was Lt Awino, but had been nicknamed by the MIB as Field Marshall following his build and manner of talking like that of field Marshall Idi Amin Dada- one-time

president of neighbouring Uganda. On arrival at the BQ base camp, the pretender Field Marshall had looked at the Spartan arrangements and particularly at the latrine arrangements of squatting on a hole in the ground and had loudly wondered

…wanafikiria Mimi nitaenda choo wapi? Na squatting shaba (He pronounced *Shaba as sabaa) pia siwezani nayo?*

He had asked no one in particular.

A few days later, his platoon was tasked for foot patrol, it was the Lieutenants first patrol and fresh from the academy he had yet to experience any active engagement from the enemy. The Al shabaab did not disappoint and as the patrol was on the ground there was a burst of fire directed to the patrol from an Al shabaab sniper, the surprised lieutenant just stood and looked around

'*Kwani iko shooting range hapa?*' he had asked pronouncing shooting as "sooting"

His runner named Nicolas Mativo, a former rugby player had made a rugby tackle that brought him down a few seconds before the burst of fire aimed at his map carrying figure.

"*Jesus, I can't believe that they just shot at me!*" Lieutenant Awino cried out while breathing hard, Very hard.

"They wanted to kill me baba Viscount Montgomery!"

But then it takes everything to bring down the sail of second lieutenant Salvatore John Kennnedy Awino; after an appropriate pause and with the Al Shabaab duo despatched off, the situation sort of melted the lieutenant had turned his gaze at his runner, the soldier who effectively had saved him from instant death

"*Chunga discipline,*" Awino had declared *"hapana angusha officer vile ulifanya…officer anaangushwa kiungwana!"*

And the lieutenant was serious when saying this.

The platoon had trooped back to the camp, and despite the seriousness of the situation, to us, remaining in camp could sense some smothered grins as they walked into the defensive perimeter.

The field marshal had also walked in especially dishevelled and supported by the medic, what added to the general hilarity was that the medic was much smaller than the big lieutenant.

The entire crowd burst into laughter as the big lieutenant marched directly to the latrine literally running into the toilet the last few yards dropping his weapon as he fumbled with the door of the latrine. The lieutenant was in the small relieving room for close to one hour interspersed with loud groans as he downloaded, I suspect a rather too syrupy sewage.

The enemy made three spirited probing attacks at our defensive position; it consisted of sustained machine

gun fire from a distance of about 800 metres and once with mortar fire. All the attacks were easily parried away but then as harassing fire they were becoming a source of frayed nerves within the defensive position.

I considered the situation and sought audience with the platoon sergeant, this being the accepted chain of command.

Lieutenants have a lot of theoretical knowledge but not much experience, so they are deputised with a platoon sergeant who is maybe twice the lieutenant's age and has been around the military block for a while and an assured career soldier. In my case, Sergeant Nderi was the man to approach

The platoon sergeant Albert Nderi was a big man wide in the shoulder, pugnacious by nature, mercurial by temperament, full of instant opinions, didactic and dynamic and to his peers outspoken. He believed absolutely in his own judgement and was sure everything would turn out okay in the end. To the commissioned officers he was exceptionally disciplined but to the rest of us he was full of swear words interspersed with a strong mother tongue influence.

After twenty plus years in the field the sergeant had acquired a weathered look about him. His eyes were narrow from perennially squinting into the sun and wind were dark and fierce and would make any man stop and think before he looked into them a second time.

At peace time location, Sergeant Nderi loved his bottle of beer and you would know of his presence from a large boisterous laugh. But then he was a fair but strict man when discharging his duties, we, his charges called him grandpa behind his back and would easily swear by him.

My suggestion was unorthodox – It was this way: I, as a sniper was a crack shot, I had a silencer weapon with capabilities of hitting the enemy and besides this I was exceptionally trained to ignore normal human suffering. I therefore suggested that I a solitary figure be deployed outside the defences and from there using the night scope and long range weaponry monitor and disrupt potential enemy probing attacks during the silent hours.

Sergeant Nderi bought my idea and soon I had audience-a rare occurrence- with the sub unit leadership, The Officer commanding, the OC. The OC- Major Lutomia was an experienced hand having served well over a decade, for an officer, he was easy to talk to, sympathetic to any suggestions giving them unqualified due considerations after personally sifting them and weighing them in his mind.

The military calls this-intuition. He finally agreed to my suggestion quoting the great Winston Churchill *"enterprises of great pith and moment rely for their execution on men of courage."*

We therefore took time to perfect my idea principally on the means of communication, on personal safety and exit plan should the plan go awry.

Under top secrecy, in the stillness of the night, I slithered out of the perimeter defences and crawled to a distance of about one kilometre from the defences, I chose a well concealed thicket which at an obtuse angle of about 120 degrees I was able to carefully observe the activities in the defensive perimeter fence and at the same time possible enemy approach routes to the defensive position. It was agreed that I stay in the position for 2 days, 3 nights, a total of sixty hours, a piece of cake.

Apart from the ghillie suit and the rest of the sniper paraphernalia, in my hand was a sniper rifle it was the Orsis T -5000With DH5-20X56 Scope sight, with a silencer and a maximum range of 1200 Metres making it capable of bringing down a target out of sight from naked eyes. Its round was the .338 Lapua Magnum special. When a shot was fired from this wonderful invention, it merely coughed; a deadly cough.

I had a M-4 personal weapon with 60 rounds of ammunition, a browning pistol was tied to my right thigh. I had 5 litres of bottled water fortified with propitious amount of glucose on camel pack which had a pipe leading to my mouth for ease of drinking. Four other bottles each holding a litre were on my waist pouches.

With this excess litre of water, I knew I was capable of staying in this location and survive up to three weeks.

During training at the Survival training school at School of Infantry Isiolo, (A school which for a time and inexplicable reason had been aptly nicknamed Kabartonjo). Emphasis was always placed on the rule of three which is a general consensus that a person can live for three minutes without air, three days without water and three weeks without food.

I suspect that study was not done with the Somalia environment in mind, where a cloudless sun is at fever peak as early as 6 o'clock in the morning.

With proper camouflage, I settled in for the night. I knew that patience was my strongest point. Alert for any noise, I periodically used the night scope to scan my surroundings.

One of three things will happen if a sniper aims at you. One, you will never know because he doesn't take the shot, secondly, you will see or hear the bullet impact because he has missed. And thirdly It will be the last thing you will ever know because he took the shot and didn't miss. And if a sniper bullet gets you where he meant it to get you, then it is unlikely that you going to say any heroic last words. Because death will be instantaneous.

It was a long night with no enemy action and as the sun rose, I realised I had not slept a wink. I relieved

myself while in the prone position knowing that the hot Somalia sun would dry me off in a few minutes. It did.

With practised non movement while in the camouflaged prone position I watched the activities going on in the AMISOM defensive space. The routine unloading of a resupply convoy was going on. A nine-man team set off for foot patrol passing so close to my camouflaged location and failing to notice my presence.

The Somali sun beat hot as I continued with my passive surveillance. The burly figure of Lieutenant Awino brought me a rare smile as he settled down for some midday snack while bare chested outside his tent.

The day dragged on a**s** the Somali sun blazed down from straight ahead and the top the air shimmered with reflected heat.

My thoughts roamed all over and I found myself questioning my perceived lack of fear and also on the perceived cowardice and fearful action of the lieutenant under fire.

During world war two (WW2) the British conducted a series of studies to identify what makes men capable of overcoming their fears, a Psychiatrist-Herbert Spiegel called it the X factor-consciously or not-it is influenced greatly by devotion to the group or unit, by regard for their leader and by convictions for their cause, in the average soldier, which most of them were, this factor enabled men to control their fears and combat their

fatigue to a degree that they themselves did not believe possible among the men who are dependent on one another for their safety –all combat soldiers essentially- there is often an unspoken agreement to stick together no matter what. The reassurance that you will never be abandoned seems to help men act in ways that serves the whole unit rather than just themselves, sometimes however it effectively amounts to suicide pact.

Soldiers who are loyal to their peers and the unit never let them down. Soldiers fight for each other – loyalty is commitment. The most important way of earning this loyalty is performing well in combat. There's no loyalty fiercer than that of soldiers who trust each other to make it through the dangers of combat as a team

The last thought of a fighting man before he dies I think is that he was not dying for his country, he was not dying for Mum and or dad but he died for his brother next to him in dirty fatigues so that he might live to tell about it. To me, that's worth dying for.

I questioned myself if my foolhardy action was tied to the major political strategies as pointed out to us the poor bloody infantry men and realized it was not. The national grand strategy talks were not of our concern here at Beles Qokani or to any soldier in harm's way anywhere. The concern for the soldier is normally quite simple- stay alive!

Most fire fights go by so fast that acts of bravery or cowardice are more or less spontaneous. Soldiers might live the rest of their lives regretting a decision that they don't even remember making; they might receive a medal for doing something that was over before they even knew they were doing it.

I used the scope to look at the burly figure of Awino, tucking in corned beef, biscuits and sliced pineapple. From my sniper weapon, the distance was about 800 metres. Mentally I did my calculation.

At 800 meters away, a bullet would cover the distance in about a second, roughly 3000 kilometres an hour. So the gunshots would arrive a full second after they were fired, because light is virtually instantaneous, indeed illuminated rounds –tracers-can be easily perceived as they travel towards you.

The brain takes about two tenths of a second just to understand simple visual stimuli and another two tenths of a second to command muscles to react. So in essence, the distance you theoretically need about to dodge a bullet is around 600 metres.

You need a quarter second to register the tracer coming your way, -at this point-the bullet has travelled 200 metres, a quarter second to tell your muscles to react-the bullet is now travelled 400 metres and half a second to actually take the dive away. The bullet you dodge then will have passed you with a distinctive snap-the sound of

a small object breaking the sound barrier inches away from your head.

Theoretically that is.

As long as a supersonic bullet stays moving faster than the speed of sound, it will reach the target and do its thing before the sound reaches the target.

In-practice, you don't do the math; you just take cover and return fire

The catchword is if you heard the bullet whistle past you then it was not meant for you.

It takes about 1.5 seconds for your brain to "see", acknowledge, and begin to react to a possible threat. Hearing will take a bit longer - and, those in earshot of the gunshots will be severely limited in-range due to the subsonic and suppressed combinations,

It became unbearably hot as the day dragged on and against my better judgement sleep overtook me. During periods of active hostilities, it is a court martial offence for a sentry on duty to fall asleep. It might even warrant a firing squad depending on the mood and philosophy of the senior most field officers in place.

I, a well-trained sniper had unwittingly fallen asleep on my deployed location. I woke with a gasp and foreboding, my hand closing reflexively to my personal weapon. I Listened, attentive no sound, no quick surreptious slither, no rub of sandals on stone, no half controlled pulse driven breath. No enemy hovering,

slowly, relaxing, I turned and squinted at the far distance at the defensive locality of Echo Company of the 7 Mechanised infantry Battalion (MIB).

The Lieutenant was now probably on his third helping. I admired his enthusiasm for life and his magnificent appetite.

In spite of the prevailing calm the feeling of foreboding deepened and then identified itself dissolving into a less threatening more general state of gloom. I wondered how long a man could sleep if he really put his mind to it. Even a man who rarely slept soundly to start with?

Three, five, twenty millenniums of sleep was always within my arm reach; my inseparable friend. My gun. It went everywhere with me, to the cookhouse, to the latrine, to my bed in the *Handaki*. It was supposed to be there to save my life not to take it. I had lived with so many temptations and I lived with this too.

I remained alone on listening watch at the edge of the defensive position, my brain obstinately awake and thinking of nothing and everything at the same time. A feeling of restlessness, racing thoughts, an electrical awareness and a feeling that everything in the body though working full steam ahead and wouldn't slow down; I knew all the symptoms much too well. One could lie with eyes shut and relax every muscle until one

couldn't tell where one's arms and legs were and still sleep couldn't come.

I kicked my shins, for a while to restore some feelings to the bits that were numb from lying prone. I sipped some water from my camel bag and continued with my watch as a hovering headache started to get strong in my head.

By now, I had known intimately every spiny plant and shrub that grew within a radius of 100 metres from my firing position. I found my eyes going far oftener to the broad sweep of the Somali desert. The view was clean in a way and fierce and starkly beautiful; a wild, uncompromising, lonely place. I suddenly felt the urge which had been disturbing at the back of the mind, an urge to walk out to the desert.

I felt that, I only had to time my walk at first light in my battle order together with the flak jacket and head north to the desert and walk and walk evading any villages on my path and keep on going. I knew I could easily make 5 km to the hour and at about mid-day I could have covered say thirty kilometres.

I would then sit under a shrub, and arrange my pouches neatly next to me remove my shoes and dutifully brush them, roll my socks in the regulation full kit standards and neatly place them in the shoes as per regulation. It's good to have a clean break. After that I would light a cigarette and smoke it slowly as I diligently

cleaned my M -4 weapon. I would ensure that it was thoroughly, regulation clean, you never want a stoppage anytime especially now when you are set to get closure, an interminable and infinite one.

I would then pick a particular round and kiss it. In the movie, the "*Passion of the Christ*", Jesus too had passionately kissed his cross before loading it on his shoulder. You must passionately love what gives you closure. I would then clean the round and lovingly load it in the weapon chamber, I would then place the gun under the jaw, the rifle barrel lovingly feeling for that soft space between the jaw bones and then simply squeeze.

Travelling with a velocity of 900 metres per second. The 50 grain bullet would split the tongue, the nasal bit and open the head neatly into two before travelling into the air for another kilometre or so until it reached the apex of its upward trajectory and its kinetic energy fully expended. I hope my falling body would maintain an admirable lying position despite the open skull.

When a standard bullet, hits the soft tissue of the human body, the entry wound has a margin of abrasion around it and because of the elasticity of the skin and muscle, the circumference of most entry wounds tends to be smaller than the projectiles as it contracts almost instantly round the initial cavity.

The point about a rifled bullet is that it rotates at a high speed spiralling around an axis that extends from

tip to tail; the high speed spinning gives the bullet its stability and accuracy.

It is not only the kinetic energy of the bullet itself as it penetrates organs, bursts, bones and severs veins and arteries.

A secondary consequence of being shot is the high rate of infection as the round and associated gases entering the body through suck in atomized fragments of cloth, air and material has hit before entering the victim, a passage of dead and dying tissue is created in the body into which is sucked the filth of the environment by the vacuum behind projectile travelling at supersonic speed. It is even more dangerous that the damage caused by the destructive energy of the round itself.

What normally kills a person after being shot is normally the shock attributed to these many factors.

Killing myself seemed childishly simple; so appallingly tempting. 500 millenniums and closure was so simple.

It became evening and in Somalia, evening comes suddenly, one minute it is daytime, next moment it is dark. I scanned the environment using my scope and seeing nothing, I stretched myself and adopted a sitting position and ate some biscuits and water. I felt tired and had a feeling that this could be the night.

They finally came at about midnight and they were seven of them, young and moving with all

professionalism in an extended line formation, a space of about 3 metres between them. Five were armed and two were carrying a metal tube. An 82 millimetre (mm) mortar tube.

The medium mortar is the most popular weapon for the armies of the night, it is easy to train on, requires fewer logistics as it is easy to man handle and can have a devastating effect to the enemy. The mortar of choice of the Al Shabaab Jihadists is the 82 millimetre (MM) mortar, the 82 MM have been manufactured for the Chinese and then later by the Warsaw pact market.

They are in many ways exact replicas of the 81 millimetre Mortars made for the then northern Atlantic treaty organisations (NATO) but with one significant difference, they are greater in bore by one millimetre which gives them the undue advantage that they can use both Warsaw pact and NATO bombs.

I chambered a round in my sniper rifle as I monitored their activities of three of them mounting the mortar in order to lob bombs to the defensive location. The other four had spread themselves also in preparation; I supposed of releasing harassing fire immediately, the mortars had landed. From experience, the jihadists normally lobbed in quick succession 4 mortar shells and at the same time opening a burst of fire from the Russian made PKM machine gun. In three

minutes, they would have dismounted the mortar and disappeared in the surrounding thickets.

With the round in the chamber, I waited and sent a small transmission to Major Lutomia, the OC. I easily noticed the commander of the Jihadists; you can always pick the commander in such tasking, in this case, apart from being more bearded, he by gestures seemed to be coordinating the entire operation.

I waited, for the mortar to be fully mounted so that it could not be easy to dismount it once I set my sniper weapon in operation. As they prepared to load the mortar I immobilised the commander.

I shot him in the small of the back. He went down in a large surprised guttural sound. Sound carries well in the Somalia night and his wailing could be heard loud from my position and right into the AMISOM defended area. The rest of the jihadist team fired some various confused salvos in all direction and went aground.

I loaded another round in the chamber and waited. The situation persisted for about twenty minutes as the wailing and screaming of the fallen commander also persisted.

Curiously, I watched another AS jihadist crawling towards the fallen commander and he emptied a burst of fire to the still thrashing commander, despatching him hopefully to *Janaa*. I *too despatched* him to *Janaa* with a well-aimed shot at the forehead.

I again waited after loading yet another round in the chamber. I knew their confusion was deep as they were unsure where the killer shots were coming from considering that my sniper weapon was with a silencer.

Another long wait, and suddenly I noticed the slithering motion of two members of the team headed towards the mounted mortar with the intentions of disassembling it and carting it away as per their orders. I picked on one unlucky fellow again and immobilised him by hitting him at the pelvic area. He screamed loudly with his pitiful wailing voice reaching me in broken pieces. But this fellow was made of sterner stuff; he raised his weapon and shot himself under the chin.

But their nerves had already been broken and they broke cover fired wildly at nothing in particular as they made a disorganised withdrawal.

Saliva was now all over my mouth, I spat and waited, loading another round in the chamber as yet I could not account for one of the Jihadists. But soon I noticed him running headlong apparently with an intention of hurriedly disassembling the mortar and making a get way. I made him a shahidi. I sent a bullet directly to his brain through the opening of his left ear.

I felt alive after the shootings; there was no immediate danger now and we had major scores against the enemy for the night. The probing or harassing attacks

were bound to take a long time before being launched again.

I removed my shoes, leaned on a thicket and watched the greyness of the night slowly turn to the greyness of morning. It was still too dark to make my way back to the defensive perimeter. That was a sure blue on blue desire.

I waited and tried for a little sleep but my mind remained obstinately awake. Soon, the demons found space in my thinking, they yearned me on to just do it. To take a walk and do it, they cajoled. I keenly looked at my M-4 weapon and felt a strong urge to take the weapon and start the walk into the Somalia plains- it could be a wonderful walk, a simple walk and at the end of it there would be bliss. Perennial bliss; It was such an appallingly tempting thought. So childishly tempting. But a strong inertia was holding me down. It was the two unassuming men who were my commanders.

Sergeant Nderi and Major Lutomia, I thought of them desperately, they had put their faith in me and there was unfinished business with them. For those two men, I could not take the walk. Not now.

I felt immediately at peace after making this firm decision, which seemed extremely sensible, a great invasion off peace assailed me, my body felt relaxed and full of wellbeing and my mind became calm.

I had to live for the sake of others.

Last Will and Testament

I, Fayed Noor al Swedan*, the son of Haji Shardid Noor Bogol, resident of the village of Afmadhow, being of sound mind declare this here as my last and final will and testament…*

He was dressed in a nylon shirt and grey trousers; His face was scrawny with the sunken eyes set too close together giving him a perennially haggard and hungry look; an expressionless page not easy to recall. He was also beyond reason. He looked up his young face concentrating on the task at hand. Yes, he was young – sixteen going to seventeen – And he was ready to immolate himself.

Somalia's extremist group Al Shabaab has a recruitment pipeline which starts at a mosque in Hagadera refugee camp in Kenya and extends right into Somalia through the heavy patrolled border areas. Four months earlier the young and impressionable Fuad had used the same pipeline from Kenya and crossed into Somalia to join the Al Shabaab terror group.

And in Joining Al Shabaab; Fuad found himself. It was nothing as magical as discovering some secret part that had lain dormant but rather his energies had finally found their outlet and a serene feeling of belonging had engulfed him.

They were a band of them all youthful; many had joined to escape the rampant poverty in the Kenyan

refugee camps. Some, Fuad observed, had joined totally for the spread of the Islamic faith motivated perhaps by the magnetic power of the cyberspace where atrocities reported by other Islamic youth in the other volatile parts of the world were lusted to be imitated by the youthful adherents.

Some were motivated by perhaps by the unexplained self-destructive and unconscious instinct within some human psyche to embrace death.

But Fuad was beyond all this he had joined the cause due to the convincing allure of the charismatic and smooth talking foreign recruiter. The foreign recruiter had been smuggled into the refugee mosque where he had talked long into the night in a patient but motivating tuneful voice on the beauty of the faith. He never once attempted to raise his voice, never altered the pitch of his voice, he merely talked just above a whisper and his words had sunk softly and deep to the refugee youth.

Fuad Al Swedan had been hooked totally.

The following day he found himself joining the recruitment pipeline and eventual training deep inside Somalia. The trainers were five Arabs with bushy beards, permanently frowning and in perennial states of anger with clear madness oozing out of their shifty eyes.

And apart from the modern weaponry their training was not of this century, it was all as it were in the middle ages. They were merely being trained to cause terror, not

to kill but to murder. It was just meant to train them on blind obedience- a method of fostering lifelong stupidity.

Their trainers hatred of the Unbeliever, the Kuffar was deep and constantly hammered this venom to their charges that the AMISOM soldier was a Nasrani, (a corruption of a Nazarene) a Christian therefore destined to burn for all eternity in hell.

They spent hours too cramming the Koran in their makeshift madrassas; the syllabus being learning the Koran, Islamic Jurisprudence, Islamic life, law and sayings of the prophet, spreading the word of God, Islamic philosophy and the Arabic language- the language of the Koran.

Interestingly, none of the Taliban, including Fuad, could understand Arabic and therefore could not read the Koran but then it was daily crammed to them that they could read and recite vast portions of the Koran off head without actually knowing what it meant.

The only Surah that most of the jihadist student fighters knew and understood was Surah 1, a simple prayer of seven lines. Like all the Surahs, it begins:

"In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate. It is a prayer to Allah acknowledging him as the one having power of the day of judgement and beseeching the worshiper to stay on a righteous path".

The rest of the Koran was left up to holy men to study and explain.

And then they were taught to hate, to cultivate deep hatred for the unbelievers. the trainers understood that the hatred had to be buried deep into the minds and hearts of the mentees that the devil-*shaitani*- could never again be able to insinuate himself with the lie that Muslims could live side by side with those of other faiths.

"An Islam that was not ruling was not Islam. An Islam sick with infidels and their practices could not dare call itself Islam. An Islam that was not free of impurities was not Islam."

One of the instructors periodically intoned.

They were warned under pain of death never to try and build bridges with unbelievers, never to settle for "peace through understanding" as beautiful phrases bandied out by the westerners, the unbelievers, the apostates, the Nazranis.

Their vision of Islam's future really was a return to the past where the adherents were not in need of doctors or professors- only of holy Mullahs.

And they were assured that there was to be no let-up in their quest of purification of their faith. The struggle is never done, the trainers reminded them. They were to be prepared for a long war, because a faith that triumphed completely would go to sleep, a healthy faith demanded a struggle, an enemy, a *shaitan*. The religion-any religion – had to be refreshed with the blood of heretics and infidels!

Though the military training was hard -the Taliban - as they were called-proved to be keen, enthusiastic and agile. Too many questions from a Taliban or a student not considered devoted enough to the cause was taken through long interrogation sessions by the Arab trainers and not infrequently by a long accompanied walk to the nearby shrubs after which the instructors would walk back alone after a loud single loud rifle shot. This maintained the iron grip and discipline leaving no room for any emerging youthful indiscretions.

And it was the shifty Arabs and their kinky habits that broke Fuad. He had been sent on an errand to the Arab trainer's accommodation and had found them seated and uncharacteristically, Fuad had been offered a cup of black much sweetened tea which after a gulp took his consciousness away.

He had woken up much later battered, abused and soiled. The libidinous Arabs had used him and made him into a *manouk – a* derogatory Arabic noun for a man who plays the female part in male to male couplings.

Fuad al Swedan Wept.

The sense of abuse and lost innocence affected Fuad in many ways altering his character from being a jovial youth into one perennially depressed with constant panic attacks. His sense of self completely disappeared and he seriously considered suicide. This tendency was timely arrested at the edge by the Ustadh.

The Ustadh (*Arabic for "Teacher")* had appeared late in the training camp as an instructor.

Ustadh had been born in Southern Somalia but raised in Europe where he had relocated fathering six sons with a convert. He had now returned to his home country convinced that what Somalia needed was the spread of Islam through conquest and subjugation. Unlike the Arab trainers he had an open smile and convincing answers to any knotty theological questions.

It was Ustadh who Fuad in a confused and depressive stupor confided to after the unmentionable incident. It was Ustadh who had understood his predicament; it was Ustadh who did not attempt to apportion any blame. It was also Ustadh who suggested and directed his suicidal thoughts to more meaningful homi-suicide cause. It was the same Ustadh who had drafted and videotaped the last will and testament for Him. . And it was Ustadh that Fuad finally realized later was the most dangerous to humanity.

And with time, Fuad had sought many answers on the faith from Ustadh; Fuad recalled some of the questions:

" …The holy book says that if I become a shahid, I will be rewarded with 72 wives… will all 72 of them be my wives? Would I be able to divorce one or all of them? Can I punish them if they misbehave? Could I get rid of them and get some new ones? Would I be able to choose my virgins from a line-up

or will they be assigned to me? And what about my Sister-Zahra- she is also keen to be a shahid-will she be given 72 pure men for her reward? are not 72 men –and pure at that -too much for young Zahra?

The Ustadh had smiled indolently at his young charge and had answered:

"Don't *let such idle thoughts disturb you. Son, all these questions are irrelevant. Why do you think it is called paradise? It is just that, paradise. It means that you get your heart's desire"*

Fuad was still unsettled and continued with his questioning.

"Well, Hemedi our compatriot- became a shahid. How is Hemedi, going to partake from the 72 virgins if his manhood was buried with the rest of his body? Would they issue him a new instrument in paradise? If he is not issued a new instrument would that not be true hell, not paradise?"

I am a devout Muslim, but somethings are hard to understand. if Allah is merciful and compassionate why is he so consumed with horrible punishments and why must Muslims be committed to a holy war to destroy other people who are non-believers? Why can't Islam share the world with other people?

The Ustadh for once seemed irritated:

" Son, I can see that the accursed Satan has completely taken over your mind and placed one that is fixated on sex. You

need spiritual rehabilitation; I hope you will fully understand this once you become a Shahid."

But Fuad was insistent.

"Isn't it a wicked conviction that the path to attaining one's end lies in slaughtering the innocent? Couldn't I Fuad, achieve more as an Ustadh like you…would I not influence more people positively? And why? Oh! Ustadh should I be the one that God had selected for this mission and why not say, any of your six sons?"

Ustadh fixed him a lengthy stare before finally icily answering;

"You have your mission," he said. "And my sons have theirs."

Two months later, the Taliban's were finally ready to pass out and the top leadership of the Al Shabab arrived to witness the pass out, they came in driving in "Technicals" under armed young guards armed with an assortment of weaponry which immediately scoured out of the location into cover should AMISOM air resources have different ideas.

The Mullahs in their pass out remarks were relentless in their quest to build another caliphate and the Al Shabaab Taliban were to be the arrow head on this mission:

"Let your faith be strong" One had thundered to his charges "*Never be swayed to believe that any other god can be stronger than Allah or worse that another god can be equal*

to Allah!' Allah is the only God! Look at the Christians; they worship hollow statues and crosses! What kind of a worshipper drinks the blood of his lord?"

With the pass out parade, there were a few demonstrations for the Al Shabaab leadership which involved reciting of the Koran off head and range firing, and physical fitness, and marching drills.

The high point of the demonstration was of the stripping and assembling of the PKM machine gun with the winner who had managed to do it in the shortest time given as a prize, a brand new AK 47 weapon and three personal grenades. The runner up was given a used G3 weapon and two Grenades.

A camel had been slaughtered in their honour and after the swearing in which was of lengthy duration, the feasting began.

To the Somali, there are four ways of eating: One finger indicates disgust; two fingers indicate somewhat a show of pride; three fingers are an indication of normalcy; and four fingers to show voraciousness. This was strictly a four finger affair.

That was six weeks earlier, Fuad was now outside the *haram* place in Kenya's capital city, a place for the *Kuffa*r to relax and drink *haramu* and ogle and vomit and sin …and die. It was a desolate place only becoming active in the weekend nights when the sinful streamed in, looking for action, for liquor, for drugs and even *Kelbs*–

yes Dogs-to satiate them. Fuad felt tired and saturated by it all.

He remembered the revelation from the holy scriptures-if you should die or be slain in the course for Allah, his forgiveness and his mercy would surely be better than all the riches the infidels amass.

He made a mental prayer that had been:

"In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate.
Praise belongs to Allah, the lord of the worlds,
The merciful, the compassionate,
Wielder of the day of judgement.
Thus do we serve, and on thee do we call for help,
Guide us to the straight path,
The path of those upon whom thou has bestowed good,
Not that of those upon whom anger falls, or those who go astray"

The dancing continued in the Haram place. Fuad took a deep breath as his senses told him that it was time to seek eternal bliss. Ustadh would not be happy if he continued dithering.

With a stifled sob, Fuad Noor al Swedan sauntered over into the Haram place taking his self and 14 others with him to his heartless maker.

Last Post

If one lives long enough, everything will come, even death; and death did finally came to Richie's family. I had known Richie when he was barely in his pampers as by then his parents and I were neighbours and I was working together with his father in an institution. The close relationship between our two families had endured in the normal natural spurts even after our retirement.

This time, I had visited the family to condole with them as they buried their son Richie. Richie had been a soldier stationed in Somalia and had met his death by a hail of bullets from a jihadist gun.

He was a fine soldier; his superior officers had said. A very social being, generous and very committed to his faith, the villager's had murmured. No hint of scandal or pride, they added. The village came in full swing to condole with Richie's family. The eulogies were long and sad and all dwelt on the loss of a young fine man.

It must have been Plato, the famous Greek philosopher who had coined the expression; *it is only the dead who have seen the end of the war*. Plato's argument, therefore, acknowledged that human nature is just another ingredient in the recipe for war, along with varying portions of racism and religion, geography and language, and economics and culture.

In other words, war is too complicated for us to prevent. War, to put it in the guilt-free passive tense, just happens and there are a lot of expressions soldiers use to explain death in the combat zone. You could be *"Zapped"*, *"Dinged"*, *"Burned"*, *"Popped"* *"Smoked"* and many more. You could even be *"Wasted"*.

"Wasted" seemed to be an ideal expression as I looked at the young life apparently not yet ready to be enclosed in a coffin. If things were normal, Richie at 22 and standing six feet two inches in his regulation military socks, could ideally have been part of the country's boxing team, a heavyweight definitely, bobbing, grunting, ducking and weaving in a square ring.

If things were normal.

Or he could have been part of the Country's rugby team.

If things were normal

If things were normal. But indeed things are normal, war and conflict are the most common human interactions, statisticians say, we fight more and love less. Things are normal, it is the new normal.

With the eulogies over, the military in its crisp action now took over funeral procedures. Perennially steeped on tradition, the military is a cloistered society, a nation within a nation with a different set of governing codes and a skewed angle of looking at issues. Six pallbearers stepped forward shouldering the national flag-draped

coffin for the final journey to the prepared grave. It was a solemn slow march led by two buglers; with Richie's twelve other colleagues, sombre, holding their weapons in reverse, an outright show of mourning. At the graveside, after appropriate wordings from the military chaplain, the 12 other armed mourners took up position for the final salute to a fallen colleague. Commanded by a sergeant, it involves firing of three volleys from their weapons in the air.

The sergeant, a veteran with a weather-beaten face loudly gave an order to his charge:

"*Detail load!"*

Karakacha! There was the sound of clank of metals on metal as blank bullets were slipped into the firing chamber ready for firing

Another guttural sound from the sergeant and the pallbearers uniformly lifted the rifle to the shoulders.

"*Two, three!"* The sergeant barked and the rifles thundered as the twelve weapons released a volley to the heavens. The sound was unexpected, a surprised murmur rose from the mourners, some villagers took off, a grandmother fell down in a faint. Monkeys chattered from yonder. A dog gave a surprised bark.

"*Detail reload!"* - Another grunt from the leathery face.

Another round of Karachakachaks

"*Hup!"* rifles on shoulder

"*Two! Three!"* – Another bark

"*Reload*"!-another Karachakachaks

"Hup!"- A bark

"Two! Three!"

"*Hup!"*-another grunt; the firing party slowly in a deliberate motion lowered their weapons, their eyes all downcast. The coffin was then honourably lowered as the buglers sounded the last post.

It is only the dead ….

The sound of the buglers playing the last post has become one of the most distinctive sounds in the world. Eerie, symbolic and evocative, since, the First World War, the last post is played every evening in the fighting military units to signal the end of the day. During funerals, it symbolises not merely the end of the day but of this earthly life.

The last post played on.

The sound lifted itself all higher and our souls I imagined went with it. The sound rose and like smoke wafted in into mud walls of the local primary school Richie had attended.

The sound settled briefly, some said later, at the playing field where he had been the star goalkeeper. It lifted and briefly floated at the local church where he had donated some musical instruments for the choir and then it rose, far, far into the air into the heavens where he truly belonged.

And as the last post played on, my mind wandered and I wondered what were Richie's thoughts as life ebbed away, his body contents pouring forth in viscous torrents away from the warrior body as it soaked into the Somalia floor.

What were his thoughts? Were they debating the ethical dilemma? That he had been shot by a people he was trying to improve their livelihood…Is it true that in the long run we do come to hate those who perennially do good to us, that, there is no loathing that any man harbours more intense than towards his benefactor.

And did he embrace the new life …near death experience shows us that there is a sort of indescribable glowing light at the end of the tunnel so enchantingly beautiful that all of us long for, yearn for it and our entire being or is it soul strive to embrace it. Did Richie reach out for this embalming light, going gently into that good night, or like Dylan Thomas, did he fight, rail, no, rage, rage against the dying of the light.

When on our death throes are we too busy dying to think of living?

"*Ash to ash*" the chaplain intoned as the final funeral rites were given and the burial commenced. With that over, the buglers again sounded the reveille. Again in military circles, the reveille is sounded at first light and is normally the first call of the day, in funerals while the last post symbolizes the finals; the reveille is deemed it to

signify the soldier's rebirth into eternal life. It, therefore, has a hopeful sonorous sound.

With the reveille finished, the Sergeant now gave a clear and succinct order, voice raised as I imagined the funeral rites were now over.

"*Shoulder arms!*" - He called out; the weapons came at shoulder level,

"*Present arms*"*!* -The soldiers in unison raised their weapons, slapping the sides loudly, and feet instep giving a final salute to a fallen comrade.

They turned around smartly and marched smartly out on the quick march.

The business of life was life. For Richie, It was all over.

It wasn't over.

I remained glued to the spot with biblical words of that balding genius tent maker and practically the founder of the doctrine we call Christianity. The writer of the epistles, Saint Paul ringing in my ears "*O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?*"

It is only the dead that have seen the end of war.

Awacho Kama (I Say This)

The village chief had summoned me. Though last in the government pecking order, the village chief holds an important position in the location where he has his jurisdiction.

I paid a visit to the chief on a Monday afternoon. My mistake, Monday afternoons are reserved for the weekly village *Baraza*. The *Baraza* are gatherings of the villagers where the chief passes on the government policies and leads a discussion on the various developmental agendas affecting the location.

It is also the time when the chief together with his advisor's dispute and possible settle some knotty village affair which does not warrant official government involvement. The Baraza was in progress when I drove in to the chief's camp. My attempt to drive off and not to be a bother was thwarted when the Chief though busy with the Baraza noticed me and sent an emissary running over insisting that I join the Baraza.

I strolled over to the Baraza which was being held under a *"N'gou"* tree where 500 or so villagers were seated. My intention was to consult the chief later after the baraza. Some villagers were seated on stools, others on cheap plastic seats, some were perched on stones and others sat plain on the bare ground. The chief together with six of his advisors sat facing the crowd. An invisible line separated the men from the women.

I approached from the back intending to perch myself incognito at a stool where a villager had already offered to me. It was not to be, as the chief loudly called out to me making the entire meeting to turn around to see who had the chief's attention.

"Come over! Come to the front and greet your people!"

I walked to the front extending my hand for a handshake with the chief. The chief however grabbed me in a bear hug which surprised me since we had never been that particularly close. With one hand on my shoulder he introduced me to the crowd:

"This is one of our illustrious sons based in the city, who despite his many demanding duties still makes time to pay me a visit whenever he is in the village"

I read mischief in the chief's words, one, it was a subtle way of informing me that despite being what I was in Nairobi- here in the village he still called the shots and two, it was a reminder to the lowly villagers that he had connections with influential people all over, therefore - A man of influence.

"Greet the crowd! Greet your people!" The Chief exhorted me.

I turned around and waved to the crowd

" *Amosou jothurwa!* (I salute you our people!)

"*Warwako!"* (We accept!) The crowd answered in unison.

" *Amosou Kendo*" (Again I salute you)

"*Kendo Warwako!"* (Again we accept).

I sat down on a seat which had miraculously appeared next to the chief. Several cases had appeared to have been dealt with. The chief called on the next case to be sorted out, it involved one Ondiek Wendo and his immediate neighbour over some tree issue.

A bow legged Ondiek stood up- I could not remember the face.

" *Amosou Jothurwa!* He greeted the crowd as tradition demanded. The crowd replied in unison.

" *Awacho kama"* which literally means " I say this "

"You know Opien Olwete as my neighbour -what I'm presenting here to this crowd is a case which is a big bother to me- Early Thursday morning Olwete went over to my farm in "*Dago"* and cut down a tree which at present he is using to erect a house for his new wife"

Ondiek continued with his narration.

I looked around at the crowd. I noticed Ochillo Nyan'g who since my young days had been the village Mole catcher-today he looked bald and weather beaten. My eyes moved over I noticed Owino Johnny who had been my primary school head boy and was now a peasant farmer. He too looked tired and withdrawn with one eye missing probably gorged by a bull or bilharzia or …well anything.

"*Awacho Kama*… His genitals could have been, at this table right now…"

The accusations and counter accusations continued. My eyes roved on, I noticed Opiyo Dete-The professional widow inheritor. I was surprised that he was still alive after his many trysts. I found myself smiling-The term for widow inheritance in the local dialect is "Tero"-so technically this man was a "Tero-rrist"!

"It's a lie! Ask Opino he knows the..."

My eyes roved on I saw Tung Nyuka the village Wag-I had known him as a young boisterous man, but today he looked tired with sunken cheeks. He looked up at me, winked and smiled exposing several missing teeth - I smiled back wondering silently on how tired he had changed. I remember he had been nicknamed as Oyundi; a proverbial bird which always had reasons for not appearing during the planting and weeding seasons but was always the first during the harvest parties.

Tung Nyuka was one such a fellow, but good company nevertheless. My eyes rested on Omito- at first I could not recognize him. He had a shock of grey hair on the head, his cheeks looked shrunken and he had a walking stick in his hand. I gasped, Gideon Omito my desk mate and best friend in 5 years of primary school supported himself with a walking stick!

I averted my gaze. My eyes stopped at Wasuna Ondhudho, a no nonsense man- he had thoroughly whipped me several decades back after finding me defecating in his banana Plantation-I wondered if he

remembered the incident. I noticed Otieno Ogae shuffling to stand up to say something -he like others looked just as tired. No one could believe that this tired old man had been nicknamed "*Bim*" (baboon) for his antics as a goalkeeper in the local secondary school. Oh! The ravages of time… If only he had been born twenty years earlier! - move over Andrei Onana! scamper off! Thiba Courtois…Vamoose Alison Becker, *potea!* Manuel Neuer! *Kaa kando* ! Emilio martinez

"*Awacho kama*…" the accusations continued

My eyes shifted to the women folk. Most of the ladies looked relatively young and unknown to me, possibly women from other locations married in the neighbourhood.

I recognized Angelina, a tough woman who had reportedly slapped his son in law-an un -imaginable offence. I saw Mama O'ngele who had a knack for brewing the best *chang'aa* in the neighbourhood. I noticed Kristina Aloo whose daughter Atieno was once my lover-she looked up-our eyes met, she averted her eyes, I looked away. I idly wondered where Atieno was nowadays, probably at a Baraza in this very moment at another far flung village.

These people looked tired and emaciated, some of them were once my bosom mates, the years had separated us until we became mere acquaintances and I realized now practically strangers. I looked at myself,

overweight, with a distending belly and I suspect a big *derrière*. To them maybe I was the epitome of wealth and health though a touch arrogant.

I again looked at them; these were simple folks with simple demands. They had little interest with the principles of matter, or with Amicus Curiaes or with Neo realism theory or the two natures of Jesus Christ. or the Gaza strip, or Donald trump or Putin whatever.

What they knew was that the cost of fertilizers was too high; that there were no jobs for their offspring after school…that the rains were constantly failing and that a member of parliaments salary at One million shillings was obscenely too much! and I by just a quirk of fate could have been one of them, it was only my luck that now I was lording over them I was actually not better than any of them…There but for the grace of God goes I.

I was retiring in a few years' time and was due to settle back here with them in the village, could I ever again fully fit in with this lot? Won't I permanently suffer from survivor guilt? I now realized that these people were no longer my people the differences between us were too great, greater than that chasm separating Abraham and Lazarus. Yes, there were my people but I was not really one of theirs.

Awacho kama! I have lost my identity.

The Man Who Stole God

Prologue

The Saint Michael Archangel Catholic Church committee based at Gilgil Barracks had requested me to give a historical account of the Church during the official opening and blessing of the barrack's new church. The request was floated to me seeing that I was a catechist's son from the same church in the mid-seventies and therefore was bound to have a ringside view of the activities of the church and the personalities then. Regrettably, I could not physically make it due to the exigencies of duty – a vague and a useful word -being out then on the Somalia front. So instead I drafted this historical commentary consolidating ideas and views from my contemporaries who we grew up with together in the barracks.

My story covers the period of late 1972 to early 1980.

***

The big cream-coloured 'T' shaped rectangular space with blue iron sheets that fifty years back occupied by a church dedicated to Saint Michael the Archangel is now no longer hallowed space. It is now a derelict building, aloof, with gaping doors and windows open to the elements. There were flowers then but none exists now; the few trees around it look bare and unkempt, drooping with a sad forlorn appearance.

Gazing at the building today gives me a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy and acute nostalgia of what

St Michael had been. The building was my first spiritual home and in no small way made me what I am today.

The fifth battalion The Kenya rifles (5KR) now based in Gilgil barracks cannot claim to have built St. Michaels Archangel Catholic Church. That credit belongs to the seventh battalion (7KR), a unit which - for a yet-to-be-understood quirk of military thinking-had relocated wholesomely from Gilgil in late 1972 to the present location in Nairobi.

It was in December 1972, when I, a young very observant and easily impressionable lower primary lad, settled in Gilgil with my catechist parent who had been posted to the unit from the Kenya Navy in Mombasa.

St Michael's Archangel church then though isolated from the married quarters was by the standards of those days quite impressive, the doors permanently open ever inviting that spiritual soul to walk in and seek solace. The Church like any military establishment (and equipment) seemed to have been built without any stretch of the imagination. A basic building shaped like a "T" and inharmonious furniture where the faithful faced the raised altar. To the right of the Altar was the wooden structure which held the tabernacle with the red glow of a vigil lamp visible, a confirmation that the blessed holy Eucharist was in the tabernacle.

The church then catered for the Gilgil military establishments, the co-located Koelel high school and the

faithful from the national youth service. Gilgil town did not have a Catholic priest then nor was there a church; the faithful then used a class in St Patrick's primary school west of the town for their Sunday spiritual nourishment.

As there was no resident catholic chaplain in Gilgil then, St. Michael though in a military cantonment was considered the mother church for the catholic adherents and catered for the outstations outside Gilgil town. The other outstations then of Gilgil parish were – Kikopey, Eburru, Karunga, support group, Morendat, kwa mbegi and Ndume factory.

The only presiding priest then was reverend father Edward Lalor, a tall overworked Irish priest whose grasp of Kiswahili was admirable. The dedication of this missionary priest could be seen by the energy he dispensed in his priestly duties. On weekdays he taught English (Teacher of English or English teacher?) at Koelel secondary school.

On Saturdays, he administered baptisms, weddings or burial rites at either St Michael's church or any of the outstations. On Sundays, this man of God dispensed mass at St Michael church before heading to a select outstation. Kikopey today is merely a five-minute ride from Gilgil town. In those days, visiting the Kikopey outstation was an all-day affair as the priest's old Volkswagen vehicle carrying us the mass servers and a

catechist could limp and cough through the endless rough terrain for close to two hours before reaching the present Kikopey location. Eburru was even worse, far worse as the hilly terrain tended to sap all energy of the supposedly rugged vehicle.

Other missionary priests later set up base at Gilgil, Leading the pack was Father Lino Zucco, an ambidextrous priest of the Comboni missionary society from Italy who at any given time apart from playing magician to us kids was always tinkering either on his light green Volkswagen engine or doing some form of carpentry work; he is practically the founder of the Gilgil mission and polytechnic.

The other missionary priests then were one Fr. Vulcan Marcello who hailed from Chile in South America and who never adequately failed to grasp the Kiswahili language always struggling to give a homily in broken Kiswahili which we; the youth found amusing no end. There was also another ever-smiling, tall priest who also hailed from Chile and whose name, unsurprisingly was called Santiago. Father Santiago's teeth seemed to be too many for his mouth so probably what we took for a smile was probably a mere facial expression.

Another missionary priest was from Mexico and was named Manuel Vasquez Nolasco who was of short stature with a very priestly mien. Nolasco expired on one Sunday afternoon after his vehicle rolled en route to

Eburru for mass. His remains lie buried at the St Mary's cemetery in Nairobi.

And then there were the military catechists.

The military norms of referring to a senior officer as *Afande* or *sir* was sort of dispensed when junior ranking soldiers were relating to the catechists who are normally warrant officers. The catechists were therefore respectably referred to as *Mwalimu* due to their nature of calling and duties.

It is hard to perfectly pin the terms of service for the Mwalimu; They are catechism teachers, counsellors for the faithful, and religious lesson teachers and are the main link between the Priest and the faithful. I encountered three catechists during my formative years at Gilgil.

There was Mwalimu Paul who had a pleasant long face and a vacuous expression; Mwalimu Paul movements seemed to be conditioned as if programmed by some invisible hands, (robotic as a term was yet to be invented them days). He also had a gift for praying and his prayers from the gravelled voice seemed to float directly to God and beyond. Mwalimu Paul may have been having sinus problems as he sniffed perennially hence always having a white handkerchief in his hands.

And then there was Mwalimu Alexander whose sole reason for existence I suspect was to impart catechism lessons to the youth; A task he took with gusto,

repeatedly ramming the catechism lessons and the catholic dogma and prayers to our teenage throats; should you fail to adequately master the lesson you could have had it hot – Mwalimu or not-. Fifty-plus years later, the catechism lessons fronted by Mwalimu Alexander still stick in my mind. Example:

' Mungu yu Nani?" ….

And our answers followed the programmed diction:

"Mungu ni roho, ni kamili na ukamili wake hauna mpaka".

Mwalimu would then become human and in a very friendly voice dwell on explaining what *Kamili* (Perfection) exactly means.

And then he would stop, glare at us catechumens from the top of his bifocals; I suspect the glare was meant to trigger our rapid access memories as the next moment would get a vocal gear change and in a thundering voice he would call out :

" Sakramenti zote ziko ngapi! Zitaje!"

And our timid voices in the chorus would respond:

" Sakramenti Zote, ziko Saba; ndizo hizi….Ubatiso, kipaimara, ekaristi, kitubio, upako ya wagonjwa, daraja na ndoa…

But then he was also witty, humorous and had a way with the pre-school kids. The dedication of Mwalimu Alexander in imparting the Catechism lessons was a true reflection of a person who had found his calling in life.

And then there was a very lively character in one Mwalimu Joseph.

There are many headdresses for use in the military, Mwalimu Joseph loved the Slouch hat (Or to use modern slang-the Godfather), the slouch hat has big flaps with one side of the flap neatly pinned together and from where a beautiful plume of red, brown and green juts out. So Mwalimu could look comical as he sauntered around the church in his duties the slouch hat at a rakish angle.

He could start prayers by having his eyes darting all over the faithful. Mwalimu Joseph had a squint, so with a fast eye flicker across the pews, every faithful in the church would imagine that Mwalimu had looked at everybody and at nobody in the same instance. After the fast glance, prayer book in hand, Mwalimu Joseph in a parade ground voice, would then bellow:

'*Tuombe!"*

I sometimes felt discomfited by the way Mwalimu Joseph conducted the prayers; it seemed to me as if he was making demands to the almighty or as if he was talking to an equal!

He had a big laugh too, Mwalimu Joseph did, which was always extended in a machine gun staccato of Eh…eh…eh…eh..Eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…eh …eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…eh…!! Ad infinitum.

To me, the laugh was so comical and found myself just like everybody else joining in the laughter.

Being a military church, on some occasions, the military catholic chaplaincy could task an army chaplain to provide spiritual services to the church from the many military formations more so during Easter and Christmas celebrations.

Chaplains who periodically paid St Michael's church a visit were Fr. John Auro – the chief chaplain then based in Langata in Nairobi. Fr Auro must have been in his late seventies and could drive in slowly in an old battered black Volkswagen painted in hearse colours. Fr. Auro's services were generally slow, methodical and faltering; his voice ever straining to carry the message of Christ.

The other military chaplain who also occasionally came to say mass was Fr. Agapius; a bespectacled chain smoker and an avid composer of gospel songs. There was Fr. Peter, an affable priest, but then with stoic indifference to all around him.

Fr Peters's shoes were always pointed sharp, very well polished with soles leaning at an angle as if he was too heavy for the shoes. And then there was Fr. Silas now the Bishop of the Meru diocese and auxiliary bishop of the Kenya Defence Forces.

Neighbouring Koelel high school then was a mixed school and every Sunday, the students could be seen in white shirts and grey khaki short trousers trickling to the

church. The church therefore on Sunday was always full to the brim and the Koelel high school choir was outstanding.

Two unrelated incidences happened in late 1975 and early 76 which somewhat changed entirely the character of St Michaels and by extension the youth of Gilgil barracks. First, in 1975, Koelel high school was converted to be an all-boys school with the girls moved to the now Naivasha girls and the boys in Naivasha relocating to Koelel.

The school management also made a decision that the boys were to have service within the premise of the school and not at St. Michael's church. This decision had an adverse effect on the church, as suddenly the pews became empty every Sunday and the services became hollow without zest as there was no active choir nor crowded faithful to enliven the service.

In December, 1975, Lieutenant Father Peter Kaloki was posted to St. Michael as a parish priest to the Gilgil military units. Witty, bespectacled, pious, chain smoker and rail thin; this young priest brought that rare freshness to the church. Fr. Kaloki, then loved smoking and clearly enjoyed the effort, he could inhale the smoke from the cigarette, sort of chomp the smoke in his mouth, throw his head up before exhaling up to the sky through a rolled tongue.

Though somewhat controversial the young priest had that knack for preaching sometimes being carried away in his preaching becoming almost too explicit. His posting led to the setting up of netball and volleyball pitches within the church precinct which invariably made us youth very active in the weekends.

Under his guidance too, we the youth got involved in doing church concerts and drama and a very talented and vibrant choir emerged from our youthful selves. It got better, in those days, the movie the "*Ten commandments*" was roaring all over the globe, other popular Christian movies trending then were also "*Ben Hurr*", "*Samson and Delilah*" and of course "*Jesus Christ Superstar*" and suddenly this enterprising man of God somehow managed to surprise the faithful with these movies; watching these movies early Saturday evenings remain etched in my memory to this day.

These initiatives and the fact that now a chaplain was permanently in place, worshippers started streaming back to St Michael in a trickle and soon in a deluge as it was relatively easier to engage in other matters spiritual like weddings, baptisms, counselling and daily masses.

The church of Christ progressed.

One Saturday morning, however, Gilgil barracks woke up with something totally unthinkable happening. The church had been broken into and the tabernacle which holds the holy Eucharist- the holy of holies- had

been stolen. The tabernacle holds a special place in the catholic faith; it is considered as the body of Christ under the appearance of bread. It is the bread of life; the food of the soul giving an increase of grace to those who partake in it.

The holy Eucharist, therefore, occupies a pride of place in every Catholic Church and explains why the Catholic faithful genuflect when entering the church- an honour of being in presence of Jesus Christ himself (and Jesus is God). So the loss of the tabernacle which was holding the holy Eucharist was therefore unimaginable. It is like an Infantry unit, losing its fighting colours, only worse, eternally worse.

I was a mass server on Sunday next but anybody who was in St Michael's archangel church will never forget that day. Fr Kaloki's explained to us the shocked faithful the enormity of what had happened and reverted to the basics of the catechism of the Catholic Church.

The priest outlined on the solemn teaching of the catholic church about the holy sacraments defining them as outward rites of inner faith for the Catholic adherents. He then made a special emphasis on the sacrament of the blessed Eucharist explaining that the solemn teaching of the catholic church that:

- That Christ himself exists substantially –body, blood soul and divinity in the holy Eucharist. This is an

unexplainable mystery that the human mind cannot fathom.

- His presence is affected by transubstantiation which is the change of the substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.
- That Christ is wholly present in the bread and wine and that the real presence begins the instant the concentration is completed
- Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is to be worshipped with the supreme worship due to God himself.
- The Holy Eucharist unfailingly points beyond itself to eternal life and it is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and through him to the father in the Holy Spirit.

The man of God then prayed with us for the church of Christ not to be sullied by the unforgivable happening. He begged for forgiveness for what he was about to do.

And then the Lieutenant Reverend Father Peter Joseph Ndambuki Kaloki went the whole hog. He bitterly castigated and cursed the man who had stolen the Eucharist. The priest's lips then dripped with unimaginable curses to the unknown man.

(It had to be a man) he cursed the offspring of the man, he cursed all his undertakings and in the name of God, he cursed and cursed and cursed. We the faithful lapped all this with a feeling of rapt bewilderment.

Finally, the soldier priest maintained an ominous silence, gazing at the space where the tabernacle had been and whispered almost to himself.

"This man stole God"

Life was good. It was the scintillating seventies later merging into the breakdancing eighties, flowers bloomed untended in the countryside, rains were predictable, the sun had discipline, humanity was more accommodating and the environment wholesome.

Life, for sure was good.

If only it could have remained in a permanent state for us the youth. But alas, it could not be so. We grew up; we identified new openings and sought new horizons, we moved on.

We the youth of Gilgil barracks of the seventies and early eighties are now greying and gracefully becoming grandparents but are proud that we have ridden piggy back on technology to maintain our childhood links. Solid links because growing up in a barrack setting gives it that exceptional special flavour.

We are also proud that in a remarkable way we have made a positive impact in every undertaking globally from the academics, sports, government, clergy and the uniformed services. We have a presence on all continents and yes, we do have our own right inside the top decision making organ of the nation- the national cabinet.

It behoves today, that as St Michaels's church hands over the spiritual responsibilities and a new church now rises to fill the void. It brings in a feeling of cross-pollination of tears and joy at the same time.

To us, the Gilgil teenagers of the seventies, St Michael's church will forever remain in our minds and hearts. But what springs and remains steady in my mind is that this was a church where at one time, mortal man had stolen God.

Postscript

Neat endings are rare in nature, but in the case of the St Michael church a sort of tidy wrap-up is taking place somewhat with a new modern and spacious church to replace St Michael has finally been erected and actively used by the Catholic faithful.

As the normal run of things would dictate, the three catechists within the period have all crossed the bridge to their promised mansions up yonder. The whereabouts of some of the missionary priests are unknown save for reverend father Edward Lalor who despite ailing is back in his hometown in Ireland and continues to proletyse for Christ as a you tube missionary under the banner

"Mission accomplished".

Father Peter Kaloki is no longer a chaplain with the KDF, but is now an arch-bishop with an evangelical church and continues to serve the people of God in his home county. Together with a former Vatican-based Catholic arch Bishop,

Emmanuel Milingo, archbishop Kaloki founded the international married priest's catholic prelature of saints Peter and Paul.

Two years after the stealing of the tabernacle a man on bended knee had approached Father Kaloki in the streets of Nakuru and sought forgiveness and reconciliation for breaking in and doing the sacrilegious act. He begged for the curse to be lifted. The man had been a state guest for 15 months having been convicted for another case of breaking and entering; He was convinced that the tribulations bedevilling him were due to the spiritual curse levelled on him since breaking into St Michael's church.

A few weeks after the breaking in of the church, the tabernacle was found in a ditch a few kilometres from the church. There had been some tampering on the lock presumably to break into the contents of the tabernacle, but the chalice holding the holy host - the holy of holies-was not touched. The tabernacle finally found its rightful place back at the St Michaels Archangel church.

God could not be stolen.

By The Grace Of God

My bad phone call came at about nine o'clock in the morning while I was having my breakfast at my humble abode in Kitengela an hour or so away from Nairobi' s central business district (CBD)

"*Could I speak,"* A female voice asked "*To Col Wuod wuon Thuol"*

(My name is Colonel retired Wuod wuon Thuol formerly an infantry officer with the Kenya Defence Forces)

"*I am Retired Col wuod wuon thuol"* I answered back.

"*Right"* She was suddenly brisk and hesitant, I could understand why.

"*Confirm you are retired Col Wuod wuon Thuol"* She again asked. "*The father to Corporal Kaingu Ngumbao?"*

I said slowly, not wanting to know as my heart beat accelerated

"What has happened?"

"I *am Senior private Thuku, calling from the Defence Memorial hospital. There was an incident on the Somalia front and your son was injured and is now admitted at the intensive care unit and I have been asked to inform you*"

At least he was alive, I numbly thought.

"The *doctors have insisted that you have to come over*" She continued.

"How *is he?*" I asked icily.

"I *would rather you come sir,"* she replied

"But I am asking", I insisted, my voice cracking "How *is he?"*

" He has multiple injuries from enemy action and is presently on life support" She replied, her voice apparently breaking.

"I am one hour away, coming"

"*Yes sir, I think, it might be best"*

I thanked her, not exactly knowing why taking the personal shock with light-headedness and a constricted throat.

He would be alright, I said to myself, intensive care unit means he is getting the best medical care, he should recover, I comforted myself.

I temporarily shut out my thoughts and worked out prosaically on the practicalities of finding my way from the outskirts of Kitengela Township to DFMH.

I drove the fifty kilometres from my residence to the hospital, my head was full of jumbled thoughts, part of me was keen to make it to the hospital and some part of the brain was not keen to reach the hospital afraid of what was in store for me.

I found myself at the gates of the DFMH, From the gate I noticed that the gate was extraordinarily neat with lack of even a scrap of papers on the grounds-the place has a serious regimental Sergeant Major, I thought. I also noticed that the uniforms of the soldiers manning the

gate were also well tailored and crisp well ironed uniforms.

I had retired five years earlier in the rank of Colonel having missed getting the big jump of a brigadiers rank by a whisker or rather by a slip of the tongue and I now mentally attempted to picture myself dressed back in crisp uniform and boots and everything but could not manage to mentally see the picture.

A corporal moved over to my car he wore the lanyard of a gunner, a teeth arm. I greeted him and handed over my veterans' card from the car window as I also introduced myself verbally.

He glanced at me and asked in a bored…way

"Unataka nini"

I detected a note of snippiness in his voice and had I been a civilian then I could not understand and let it pass. I keenly looked at him as I internally went through all the letters of the alphabet; He started fidgeting

"Umeona *hiyo card? imesema mimi ni nani corporal?* "I barked.

Immediately military discipline took over, he snapped to attention and saluted smartly

" Makosa yangu sir!" fungua hiyo gate"

He shouted to his subordinates to open the gate for me.

I did not feel the least bit petty when dealing with the corporal. It's like riding a bicycle, I thought, once you learn you never forget.

'Carry on" I snapped

I walked into the reception centre and was respectfully asked to wait at the senior officer's reception room. Too respectfully I thought. Presently a medic in combat suit but having a white scrub came over to greet me. He was young, his rank was captain and his name on the plate read as Ondego (what was Hippocratic's first name? Most likely it started with the alphabet "O")

With practiced ease he explained to me what had taken place. My son Kaingu Ngumbao who had been deployed in Somalia on Operation Linda Nchi had encountered a IED blast and had been admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the hospital. He led me to the ICU as I followed him, again, keen to be there but then again not keen to be headed there.

A catholic priest and a counsellor joined us.

I had vaguely expected the intensive care facility to have so many bright lights and clanging bustle but that it didn't at least not in that room but I found that it didn't.

The lights were dim, the atmosphere peaceful and the sound levels once my ears adjusted to be just above silence.

Ngumbao lay in high bed with all manner of wires and tubes all over his body; he was naked except for a

strip of sheeting lying over his loins. What was visible on parts of his head had been shaved.

Other evidence of surgery marched across his body like centipedes across his abdomen and chest.

Behind his bed, a bank of screens showed blank rectangular faces, as information from the electrodes fed into the many screens beyond the room. He didn't need an attendant to be permanently with him the doctor said, as they had a means of constantly monitoring him and his reactions.

He was unconscious with his face calm, his head partly turned towards the door as if expecting some visitors. Decompression procedures had been done on half of his skull leading to his head covered largely with a padded dressing which resembled a pillow supporting his head.

Ngumbao Kaingu, my son, 27 years of age: Not expected to live. It had to be faced. To be accepted.

"*Jambo Kijana!*" I called out to him.

It was an expression, I lovingly used when we met each other. His answer always was:

"*Niko Chonjo Buda*"

But this time there was no response from him, he remained inert. I touched his hand which was warm and relaxed, his nails always well-kept and clean. He had a pulse, he had a circulation: His heart beat by electrical stimulus. Air when in and out of his lungs mechanically

through a tube in his throat. Inside his head, the synapses were shutting down.

The medics tactfully moved out giving me space and time with the young man

Where was his soul? I wondered: where was the persistent energetic spirit? Did he know that he was dying?

I did not want to leave the room, a person should not die alone, I thought. After a reasonable time had passed probably about fifteen minutes, I opened the door and inquired from the group which had apparently and patiently stood outside the door. I enquired on what was what developments were expected.

The young doctor replied that they would know when life had ceased and would appear on the machines as a permanent straight line. That is when we would switch off the machines.

"And who authorizes the switching of the machines" I asked.

The doctor fidgeted, but kept quiet for some time before austere answering:

´Death for him will be an infinitesimal moment not a definitive process"

I looked at him, trying to grasp what he was meaning.

The catholic priest deftly grasped my hand and led me to a waiting room at the end of the corridor.

Bathos and Drama, I thought of the priest and doctor. Their everyday lives.

We entered the waiting room and the priest led me to a chair where I sat down. We were not alone, there was a young couple were holding on to each other with the woman sniffing and sobbing at the same time; another case of grief. Their baby, the priest whispered, was also in a precarious situation with the life hanging on by threads.

Just like my son. I thought.

The room was quite, clean well lit and impersonal and as I listened to the mother's slow sobs and thought of the misery that were daily soaked into those walls. Life has a way of kicking one around like football, or so I found. Fate had never dealt me a particularly easy time but that was OK, which was normal. Most people in life took their time to be football, most survived; some didn't.

My son had just been in the right place at the wrong time. A big man in uniform walked in, he was wearing the rank of a major. He smartly saluted me and introduced himself as the commanding officer of my son's unit which was in the peace time location or in the rear. At close quarters, he looked a dull lump of man, thickset, middle aged and humourless, but then his eyes seemed full of ability.

He sat next to me and from him, I garnered exactly of what had happened to my son. A logistic convoy had

been headed to a major base for collection of ration and other necessities; my son was in the lead vehicle of the convoy and the senior soldier on board.

Long story short, the leading troop carrying vehicle in the convoy encountered a IED blasting the 7 ton vehicle up in the air leading to five fatalities and an assortment of injuries. Ngumbao was one of the injured.

An IED is any bomb that is not produced by specialized firms or armament manufacture, but is assembled from materials at hand. It has become a weapon of choice by terrorist groups and armies of the night.

All kinds of methods exist to create explosions of one sort or another, all of which could be described as 'IEDs'. The trial and error method used in making them render them unpredictable but still very deadly.

The key word is 'improvised'. They all work differently because they are all designed differently. Their initiation systems might be electrical, mechanical, chemical, pyrotechnic or a combination of all these. They are actuated by any number of means ranging from physical means, radio, and remote or by electric connection.

Improvised is used to distinguish it from a device constructed by an actual armament manufacture with some manner of default settings.

Improvised devices are harder to stop as they are made in many locations by many different people which also affect the disarming techniques. With an improvised device, you have less information. Each one may be unique – while some techniques are more popular, each designer makes changes that can affect how they operate.

The All shabaab switched to roadside bombs because they were losing too many men in fire fights. The IED is cheap low risk and did not get civilians killed, it is a weapon which can be so unnerving more than any small arms fire can be: random luck

A blast from an IED works like this:

When certain materials –petrol fumes gas or even dust mix in the air in the right proportions they can be detonated. In chemistry this is known as the explosive limit. The flammable material burns in the oxygen, causing an instantaneous and massive heating of the air in the immediate vicinity. The air then expands at a supersonic speed creating a blast wave that moves with the force of something solid

As the blast wave moves away from the immediate source, it fragments any objects on its path including its casing hurtling them outwards.

Blast injuries fall into three categories:

Caused by proximity to the huge pressure of the blast wave –if there any flesh and blood then there is nothing left as the gases move as a solid object when they

hit the chest, the sternum and rib cage are compressed into the spine. The diaphragm is pushed upwards into the guts, squeezing the heart and lungs leading to internal haemorrhaging.

The second wave turns ordinary objects into lethal projectiles splinters like car parts.

The third involves objects thrown away by the blast breaking limbs and cracking open skulls

The last and probably even more fatal are the invisible internal injuries.

He explained my son's injuries in clinical details, a metal bar had pierced his stomach, another one had torn his legs and apparently he had landed on his head leading to massive cerebral bleeding. He had been lifted from the scene of the incident to a reception centre in the combat zone before being lifted to DFMH for further management.

The afternoon stretched out, strange and unreal a kind of time warped limbo. I went again and spent time with Ngumbao but he lay unmoving, oblivious of his dwindling twilight, already subtly not himself. If the English writer Wordworth was right about immortality, it was the sleep and forgetting that were slipping away and the reawakening that lay ahead, and maybe I should be glad for him not grieving.

I thought of him as he had been as how our lives had met.

Ngumbao Kaingu was not my biological son.

But he had forced himself to be my son. This is how it happened:

Nine years earlier I had been appointed the chief recruiting officer for a remote location of the country. I and my recruiting team therefore conducted a gruelling recruiting of young men from the coastal part of the country keen to join the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) my team had picked six young men and much later in the day as we were summing up, the doctor came over and informed me that one of the potential recruits had an underlying medical condition and therefore should not be recruited.

To fill the desired quota, I had to get a replacement recruit so later in the day. I walked out to the gate of the stadium which had been converted for a recruitment centre. There was a big group of hangers, idlers still lazing about at the gate of the stadium waiting for anything to happen.

Immediately, I stepped out of the stadium, a priest in a black cassock bunched his cassock in his right hand and rushed to me bowing down at the same time. *"Mkubwa"* he called out to me "*Kwa neema ya Mungu…*" He left the sentence hanging as he pointed out at an emaciated and listless tall young man who stood aside from the main group of the idlers.

He had no shoes and was dressed in tattered clothes and was holding a big envelope in his hand. I summoned the young man and on questioning him, I realized that he fitted the bill of being a KDF recruit; he had failed to make it to the stadium for recruitment as he had not met the desired weight.

The priest standing next to me again clasped his hands again as if in prayer and whispered desperately to me again:

"Mkubwa, kwa neema ya mungu"

Roughly translated*: "Boss, by the grace of God"*

My mind went back to the holy scriptures where a tired and almost dying Jesus appears before procurator Pontius Pilate who asks the famous question *Ecce homo!* - behold the man!

I imagined that we were playing a reversed role with the priest playing – Pilate and I in this instance, the Pharisee high priest.

But then unlike Jesus of the bible who played a humble part in those proceedings, this young man, bravely stared at me directly almost non caring, no sign of deference to me, *nada! Zilch! Onge! Gotire! Hakuna!* and yet…and yet…I noticed the priest nudging him hoping that he could make sense of what my nod was capable of changing his life in a very positive way.

Since having been nominated to be a recruiting officer almost everybody deferred to me in word and

deed and naturally, I suspected that it had gotten to my head. For example, in this case, this man of God was almost bending himself double so that I could meet his wish. I suspect he could not have bent further even if the Pope, the Holy Father, his worldly boss was visiting.

The young unkempt man continued looking at me, still indifferently to me and in a way jolting me.

This accursed disrespectful modern generation, I thought the general Zees or whatever.

Out of the goodness of my heart and due to the good priest's effort. I asked him to enter the stadium for a second attempt at recruitment

To a man, the crowd outside the stadium, the layabouts, clapped and cheered loudly.

Ngumbao was recruited into the KDF.

Ngumbao stillness was absolute, as I again paid him a short visit, I would never see him smile again, I thought. Not the gleam of his teeth, or his humour of his life

Every ten minutes or so, a non-military nurse would come into the room and stand silently checking that all the tubes and electrodes were in order still in order. She gave me some brief smiles and commented once that my son was not even aware of my presence and could not be comforted by my presence there.

"It is as much for me as for him" I replied.

She nodded and I continued staying for a couple of hours reflecting about life in general.

After the recruitment, I had forgotten about this young man, after all I had recruited well over one hundred and since they would be soldiers had been handed to the training school; I had no business to follow them on their now military career.

Ngumbao had forcefully inveigled himself into my life; Six months into the training, he had called me just to inquire about my wellbeing.

It was only coincidental that during the recruits pass out, I had been on other duties in the adjoining camp and it was only natural and a matter of course that I had to attend the pass out ceremony since the commander in chief was the guest of honour.

After the ceremony, a smart young and well fed and excited recruit had walked over to thank me profusely for attending his pass out. To his mind, I had been to the pass out ceremony specifically on his account. I had no heart to negate that fact.

When on leave after pass out, I lost a family member and as is expected I was at my home area making burial preparations and was surprised when the new soldier – Ngumbao- appeared and became involved fully in the preparations as a handy man and mirthfully getting a nick name of *Afande* from the villagers.

And as the years went by, he came to be fully accepted as my family member occasionally visiting me

in my Kitengela home when he got breaks from his demanding military duties.

Strength to reflect looking back at that lengthening evening that I gave no thought to the consequences of his soon to come death.

The present was vividly still alive in the silent diminishing hours and all I saw in the future was a perfectly organized funeral with my presence being merely in the peripherals. I would have to look for his girlfriend, I vaguely supposed and his relatives too.

I reflected deeply on my relationship with the soon to be deceased; there was no common blood tie that linked me to him and once done what would remain would only be memories, deep but memories.

With regret I watched the pulse that flickered on his throat. When it was gone I would go back to what was left of my life and would think of him warmly sometimes and remember this night with overall sorrow but no more.

The shadows lengthened and lights came on. I remained in the waiting room and occasionally, the chaplain or counsellor would stroll over and sit me with me together with the young couple.

We waited, at about 2000 hours; the DFMH chairman of the mess committee came over and asked me for dinner in the officer's mess. Despite being hungry, I took a rain check; only veterans can understand my

reason for this. Despite every good intention from serving officers, once out of the system, the dynamics change and you are no longer part of the clan, you are now of another tribe and you do not want to impose yourself on their hospitality.

A cup of coffee and some snacks were hastily scrambled and were brought over to me and the young couple. It was refreshing; the coffee was sweet and bitter at the same time- like life.

My vigil continued; I must have dozed off because I woke up with a start when I heard some scraping of a chair only to realize that it was the chaplain and the counsellor coming to prop me in my night ordeal.

The desperate young parents were still there hollow eyed and entwined and were joined by four other relatives but presently a sombre doctor and a nurse and I suspected other relatives came to fetch them and in the distance I heard the rising wail of the mothers agonized wail. I felt my own tears prickle for her, a stranger, a dead baby, a dying son, a universal uniting misery.

I grieved intensely for Ngumbao then because of the death of this child and realized I was so wrong about the sorrow level. I would miss him very much.

I dozed fitfully; and before day break, the same doctor accompanied by the nurse with the sombre expression came to fetch me in my turn.

I followed them together with the chaplain and the counsellor along the passage to the ICU. There was now stronger natural light in the room this time and more people and the bank of monitoring screens behind the bed had been switched on. Pale greenish lines moved across them, some in regular spams some uncompromisingly straight.

I didn't need to be told, but the young doctor went ahead to explain to me all the same. The straight lines were a summary of the brain activity of Ngumbao. There was no activity at all. Ngumbao was dead, clinically.

Whatever had been in that quite body was there no longer there.

An hour later as the medics moved in to do the last offices, I stumbled back to the waiting room, the chaplain in tow and as if on cue, the Major, the rear battalion commander also crept in. He looked haggard, wearing the same uniform like the day before and faintly smelling of stale sweat. I suspected that he too had kept vigil with me from somewhere. My heart warmed up to these men.

The Major handed me, the military qualification and record form for my son which clearly stated at the bottom that next of Kin was Retired Colonel Wuod Wuon Thuol.

The major also showed me the forms filled before the mission to Somalia where legally, soldiers had to clearly outline the NOK and method of disposal of their remains should they meet their end in the war campaign.

" Ngumbao named you as the as the sole executor, which means all the decisions regarding the disposal of his remains is with you. No preference has been given to his disposal."

The big major pointed out to me.

Ngumbao Kaingu had signed my name as his next of Kin and contacts as the person to be informed in case of any eventuality.

I wept.

I regretted that I should have been more insistent for the young soldier to start a family. More insistent to this orphan to search for his roots, more insistent for this man to identify and embrace more the orphanage that he had been raised at. I should have been more insistent that I get to know better that Catholic priest who by deed had made him what he was.

I'm told that invariably guilt is one of the stages of grief. In my mind, I understand that guilt is rarely rational or even helpful, and I knew it will pass. But, right then, it sat like a stone in the pit of my stomach.

The real trouble with death was that what was left unsaid and knowing that thought was more or less universal regret made it no less sharp.

I wept with depth for this young man who had adopted me, for a man who had willingly changed his religion for me. I wanted to yell and scream at the bloody

injustice of Ngumbao's death and the wickedness of the world and call down the rage of angels.

I stepped out, Nairobi was waking up with the *matatu* vehicles honky tonking in rhythmic cadence as they sought to win over passengers; there were other sound of vehicles as they changed gear on Raila Odinga road climbing the steep incline next to the DFMH as they headed to town and beyond.

I looked up in the eastern sky, towards the horizon where the sun was emerging in a nice orange and yellow hue background.

A jetliner was slowly aligning itself as it unlocked her wheels and start the deceivingly slow descent to the Jomo Kenyatta International airport.

The train from Kisumu chugged in past the tunnel 200 meters from the DFMH gate and snorted loudly.

It snorted again maybe to celebrate the finals of doing the long journey from the western part of the country, maybe to wake up the residents of the Nairobi City, maybe to mourn the loss and waste of a young life, maybe to mourn the loss of a soldier's son.

It snorted again, probably for me.

It was the morning of Christmas day 2020.

I Am the KDF Interrogator!

From January 1992, since the fall of President Siad Barre, Somalia has been a country forgotten by God. Armed factional squabbles, famine, diseases, piracy, floods have been the scourge of the country. For twenty years, Kenya had desisted from marching into Somalia instead choosing to support all the diplomatic efforts and various peace processes. But then the Islamic Jihadists militia group emerged and had perennially been a source of security related incidences in Kenya.

The militia threat had become unbearable with constant border violations with fatal consequences. By July 2011, the attacks and atrocities by the Islamic jihadists had reached alarming levels, causing public discontent as expressed in the national assembly. The print media was also constantly accused the government of laxity in securing the citizenry and country. A political decision was made and the Kenya Defence Forces marched into Somalia invoking Article 51 of the United Nations charter.

Timely Information is imperative for a successful prosecution of war. In active war scenario, information is gathered through eliciting of information from captured enemy combatants and materiel.

This elicitation is also referred to as interrogation.

Interrogation therefore is a war in the shadows, of battles the public will never see or rarely hear about as most of the time it takes place inside a dusty tent or dank cell furnished with little more than a table and a couple of chairs. They are battles won by wiliness, psychology and intellect instead of weaponry.

Armies world over have recruited, trained and maintained teams to question enemy combatants to elicit information they may possess that could help them gain advantage in the war. In the case of KDF now deployed in Somalia, the aim of the interrogation is mainly to gain information and forestall any attacks against the troops on the front and even more importantly forestall terrorist attacks against the nation.

The interrogation room in the field is actually a tent furnished with a straight backed chair where the interrogator sits, a desk separates him from the interrogate, this is also meant to put a psychological distance. Or even more a play upon the interrogative's anticipated reaction to the connotations of superiority and officialdom. A plain table at the interrogator's convenience is however more preferable. An aide taking notes sits behind the interrogate outside his vision, this adds to the overall discomfiture of the interrogate.

I was privileged to have a one on one session with the KDF chief interrogator at the sector 2 headquarters in Somalia. It was an interesting conversation.

If there is an archetype of the modern interrogator, it is Major Umar Al Haji Jehow; the chief interrogator for the Kenya Defence Forces in Somalia. Jehow claims to have had more experience than anyone else in the world in the interrogation of captured Al Shabaab operatives—men, he says, "*Whose hatred of the Kuffar is unbridgeable.*"

Jehow is smartly turned out, with his uniform perfectly fitting his tall lithe frame. He has dark eyes not giving out anything behind them, they resemble, I think to a shark's eyes or a plastic doll. He has a long crooked face that is lean, deeply lined, and concave. His gait is however ungainly, he walks like a *Ngamia*, and he uses his hands a lot when he speaks, as if he is picking the words off a shelf.

His twenty plus years in the KDF has mainly dwelt experimenting with suspected terrorists, cajoling, tricking, hurting, threatening, and spying on them, steadily upping the pressure, looking for cracks at the seams.

Jehow has many things he is not free to discuss, but he is happy to talk about his persuasion methods. He is very proud of his skills, among them an ability to speak Arabic, Italian, French, Pidgin English and all the dialects of the Somali language so fluently that he can adopt a multitude of colloquial flavours.

KDF intelligence had head hunted him to be an interrogator through his warm personality, the mastery

of many languages and his good understanding of both the Bible and the Koran. He loves quoting verses from William Shakespeare and from Homer's Iliad.

The main objective of interrogation is to obtain maximum amount of usable information possible in the least amount of time. The imperative takes a very different meaning especially in active combat situation where time is of essence.

Jehow insists that interrogators have to know what they are doing, the wrong approach can squander a potentially valuable source, and one missed clue could result in unnecessary deaths.

Jehow also has knack for reading the body language and facial expressions of his subjects, and for sensing a lie. He is a skilled actor who could alternately befriend or intimidate a subject, blending these skills with the tricks he had learned over the years for manipulating people, Jehow does not just question his subjects; he orchestrates their emotional surrender.

It is hard to picture this pleasant smart man as a tough interrogator but then, charm has always been as important to interrogation work as toughness or cruelty—perhaps more important. Jehow admits that it is only in rare instances did he use force to extract information from his subjects; in most cases it wasn't necessary.

"*People change when they get are captured,*" Jehow says. "*They may be heroes outside, but inside they change. The conditions are different. People are afraid of the unknown. They are afraid of being tortured, of being held for a long time. Try to see what it is like to sit with a hood over your head for four hours, when you are hungry and tired and afraid, when you are isolated from everything and have no clue what is going on.*"

When the captive believes that anything could happen—torture, execution, indefinite imprisonment, even the persecution of his loved ones—the interrogator can go to work.

No matter who he is before his arrest, his sense of self will blur in custody. Isolation, fear, and deprivation force a man to retreat, to reorient himself, and to reorder his priorities.

For most men, Jehow says, the hierarchy of loyalty under stress is first self, secondly comes the group; family is third and finally friends. In other words, even the most dedicated Al Shabaab terrorist (with very rare exceptions), when pushed hard enough, will act to preserve and protect himself at the expense of anyone or anything else.

"*There's an old Arab saying,*" Jehow says. "'*Let one hundred mothers cry, but not my mother—but better my mother than me.*'"

With older men the priorities shift slightly. In middle age the family often overtakes the group (the cause) to

become the second most important loyalty. Young men tend to be fiercely committed and ambitious, but older men—even men with deeply held convictions, men admired and emulated by their followers—tend to have loves and obligations that count for more.

Age frays idealism, slackens zeal, and cools ferocity. Abstractions lose ground to wife, children, and grandchildren. Jehow says.

The key is to find a man's weak point and exploit it.

"Are *there rules to this game?"* I ask Jehow.

He quotes verbatim off head:

"Article 3 of the Geneva conventions is very explicit and forbids violence to life and person , in particular murder of all kinds , mutilation, cruel treatment and torture.it also bars outrages upon personal dignity , in particular humiliating and degrading treatment"

"*Are there a set of approaches spelt out by AMISOM to make your customers talk?*" I ask him.

He shakes his head "*Not AMISOM,*" He says, *"We use the KDF manual which is explicit in the subject of torture"*. He continues *"The use of force, mental torture, threat, insults, or exposure to unpleasant and inhumane treatment of any kind is prohibited by law and is neither authorised nor condoned by the Kenya Government"* Jehow says and adds that " *Every interrogator learns that by rote."*

"What would you consider your major challenges?" I ask him

"In essence the tension between doing what is right and doing what is expedient is fundamental to the work of interrogation. The pressure to get a prisoner to talk is often acute, a life and death issue. We don't risk our lives like soldiers in the infantry but meet the enemy in the closest possible quarters. We smell their breath while they look at us in the eye and lie. That experience is extremely stressful" Jehow says.

For Jehow, the three critical ingredients of that process are preparation, investigation, and theatre. Preparing a subject for interrogation means softening him up. Ideally, he has been captured after an engagement with the KDF or other AMISOM contingents or allies in the theatre.

He has been roughly handled, bound, hooded and kept waiting in discomfort, perhaps naked in a hot below ground room, forced to sit in an uncomfortable position. He may be kept awake for days prior to questioning, isolated and ill-fed. He may be unsure where he is, what time of day it is, how long he has been or will be held. If he is wounded, as Jehow points out, pain medication may be still missing.

After an appropriate time has passed and the captive is believed to be holding critical information, Jehow conveniently appears with a thick "dummy file" when little is known, to make it appear that the interrogator knows more than he does. Nothing rattles a captive more than to be confronted with a fact he thought was secret or

obscure is all in the public domain. It makes the interrogator seem powerful, all-knowing.

A man's sense of importance is wounded, and he is slower to lie, because he thinks he might be caught at it. There are many ways that scraps of information, gathered from other interrogate or other associates. Those scraps might be as simple as knowing the names of a man's siblings or key associates or a word or phrase that has special meaning to his group. Uncovering privileged details diminishes the aura of a compartmentalised society.

Jehow's experiences as an interrogator has led him to penetrate the various branches of the Al Shabaab, unravelling its shared language, culture, history, customs, plans, and pecking order, can diminish its hold on even the staunchest believer. Suspicion that a trusted comrade has betrayed the group—or the subject himself—undermines the sense of a secretly shared purpose and destiny.

Armed with a few critical details, Jehow as a skilled interrogator can make a subject doubt the value of information he has been determined to withhold. It is one thing to suffer in order to protect a secret, quite another to cling to a secret that is already out. This is how a Jehow breaches Al Shabaab defences.

Jehow believes that the most important skill which puts him in good stead during interrogations knows the Somalis sub- clan language and customs.

Jehow emphasises that the typical Somali is easily moved by words than by ideas and more moved by ideas than by logic, which means that to counter the AS propaganda there must be a way of getting into the decision making process of the lowly foot soldier.

His devotion to the clan is boundless therefore Jehow has mastered the art of playing one clan or sub clan against the other. The clan is supreme in the Somali culture hence the famous saying in the language: when a mountain falls on you, the clan will lift it off you. Woe betides anybody whose clan falls on him. You are doomed as there will be no one to lift the clan off you.

"*I try to create the impression that I use his mother tongue even better than he does,*" Jehow says. "*No accent, no mistaken syntax. I speak to him like his best friend speaks to him. I might ask him a question about a certain word or sentence or expression, how it is used in his sub-clan, and then demonstrate that I know more about it than he does. This embarrasses him very much.*"

Once a prisoner starts to talk, rapid follow-up is needed to sort fact from fiction, so that the interrogator knows whether his subject is being cooperative or evasive, and can respond accordingly.

Senior members of the Al Shabab and foreign fighters are particularly a tough group to prise information from because they have been totally brainwashed in their thinking and are religious extremists. They ponder in their own private space, performing a kind of self-hypnosis.

They tend to live in an ascetic manner, and to look down on anybody not following their brand of extremist faith. They tend to be physically and mentally strong, and not to be influenced by material things—by either the incentives or the disincentives offered by the interrogator.

Often the rightness of their cause trumps all else, so they can commit any outrage—lie, cheat, steals, betray, kill—without remorse. Yet under sufficient duress, Jehow says, most men eventually break—most, but not all. Some cannot be broken.

"*They are very rare,*" he says, "*but in some cases the more aggressive you get, and the worse things get, the more these men will withdraw into their own world, until you cannot reach them. This has been very common with the captured foreign militants especially from Chechnya*"

Jehow remembers a particular case, two foreign fighters suspected to have been from Chechnya had been captured and there was information suggesting that two men were IED experts and had been in the process of assembling one for a major impending attack. They were

tough men, very difficult to intimidate or pressure, and so far neither man had admitted anything under questioning. Jehow worked them over individually for hours.

With each man he would start off by asking friendly questions and then grow angrier and angrier, accusing the subject of withholding something. Neither man budged.

"Are there any particular challenges in interrogating the Somali personality?

"The typical AS fanatic is quite a handful to interrogate as they normally retreat into Islamic fatalism that sometimes is impossible to reverse. They surrender to Allah and refuse to utter anything other than Koranic quotes and divine supplications. And then, they don't fear death, if anything they yearn for it."

There are other methods of keeping a prisoner confused and off balance, such as rapidly firing questions at him, cutting off his responses in mid-sentence, asking the same questions over and over in different order, and what is also called the "Silent" technique, in which the interrogator says nothing to the source, but looks him squarely in the eye, preferably with a slight smile on his face. The source will become nervous, begin to shift around in his chair, cross and re-cross his legs, and look away.

When the interrogator is ready to break silence, he may do so with some quite nonchalant questions such as:

'You planned this operation a long time, didn't you? Was it your idea?'"

From the interrogation training manual, Jehow asserts, has various techniques in place brought into play to break down a interrogate. Easily the most famous routine is "Good Cop/Bad Cop," This involves one interrogator becoming the captive's persecutor and the other his friend. Americans manuals have dubbed it "Matt and Jim"

A lesser-known but equally effective technique is "Pride and Ego," in which the "Ego Down" part involves repeatedly asking questions that the interrogator knows the subject cannot answer. The subject is continually berated or threatened ("How could you not know the answer to that?") and accused of withholding, until, at long last, he is asked a simple question that he can answer.

"A jug of wine, a loaf of bread and you beside me singing in the wilderness – oh! Wilderness is paradise enough!

Jehow suddenly hums from the famous Arabian poet Ommar Khayam

A skilful interrogator knows which approach will best suit his subject; and just as he expertly applies stress, he continually opens up these avenues of escape or

release. This means understanding what, at heart, is stopping a subject from cooperating. If it is ego, that calls for one method. If it is fear of reprisal or of getting into deeper trouble, another method might work best.

For most captives a major incentive to keep quiet is simply pride. Their manhood is being tested, not just their loyalty and conviction. Allowing the subject to save face lowers the cost of capitulation, so an artful interrogator will offer persuasive rationales for giving in: others already have, or the information is already known.

Drugs, if administered with the subject's knowledge, are helpful in this regard. If a subject believes that a particular drug or "truth serum" renders him helpless, he is off the hook. He cannot be held accountable for giving in.

"Torture has been claimed to be the fastest and accurate manner of persuasion? I ask, Jehow. Do you practice it?"

Major Jehow lights a cigarette, shakes his head as he takes time to answer and quotes William Shakespeare:

"Our fears in Banquo Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature Reigns that which would be fear'd: 'tis much he dares; and, to that dauntless temper of his mind, He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour to act in safety".

Torture is repulsive, he finally says after the famous quote from the bard. It is deliberate cruelty, a crude and ancient tool of political oppression. It is the classic shortcut for a lazy or incompetent interrogator. Torturing

people doesn't fit my moral compass at all, Jehow denies, it is plain wrong and inhuman. I have a conscience my friend, he hastily adds as he takes a big smoke. He continues" *Torture or even physical coercion is not only illegal and immoral it is also ineffective and besides you can't trust information gained by torture because interrogates will say anything to stop the pain."*

But then, I press on, there are other enhanced methods as pointed out by one USA secretary of state? You remember at Al Gharib prison?

Jehow keeps quite for some time and nods that he has heard of some interrogation methods which fall just short of actual torture. They have been called "torture lites". Jehow adds, these include sleep deprivation, exposure to heat or cold, the use of drugs to cause confusion, rough treatment like shoving, or shaking, forcing a prisoner to stand for days at a time or to sit in uncomfortable positions, and playing on his fears for himself and his family.

Although excruciating for the victim, these tactics generally leave no permanent marks and do no lasting physical harm. Dealing with some headstrong Al Shabaab can be very infuriating and draining.

"*Under these circumstances,*" I ask, "*do you honestly think it was wrong to even threaten torture?*" I press on.

Jehow admits that uncooperative AS captive can weigh very lightly against the lives of our own men.

There are very few who, faced with a reluctant captive, would not in certain circumstances reach for the whip or something else.

"We don't do that here. It is not in our training pamphlets." Jehow insists and starts humming the words:

"Before that sudden journey, no one is wiser in thought than he needs to be, in considering that, before his departure, what will be adjudged to his soul, of good or evil, after his death day."

It is called Bede's death song. He informs me.

"What about the use of Drugs? Do you resort to them? "I ask eagerly.

Jehow is in his familiar element here. *"Experimenting with drugs during interrogations has long been conducted in earlier wars with heroin and psychedelic mushrooms, neither of which reliably delivered up the secrets of men's souls. Drugs such as marijuana, alcohol, and sodium pentothal can lower inhibitions, but they do not erase deep-seated convictions. And the more powerful the drug, the less reliable the testimony. I don't believe in the use of drugs though, they are expensive and we lack the right structures to use them here in the Somali theatre"* He says *"Drugs probably may help, but then they are only as effective as the interrogator."*Jehow adds

"**Let's carve him as a dish fit for the gods,Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds**;

He quotes Shakespeare.

"Is there any particular interrogation that stands out to you and why?" I ask

Jehow suddenly brightens up and leans forward.

"I had a long and interesting chat with the official Al Shabaab executioner and I admit it was interesting listening to this man". Jehow says, "*for one the executioner admitted that he had a terminal condition. So in his words, he had nothing to fear or hide."*

He says, "*AS leadership normally orders the execution of any suspected apostates, AMISOM spies and drug dealers. The method of execution is the traditional and time honoured manner of using a sword which has been weighted by wielding iron weightage on the blunt end for a clean sweep. But despite that it is not uncommon for the clean sweep to fail, and the executioner is forced to make two or more swings before the head is severed off from the body*."

Jehow smiles, coughs as he lights another cigarette.

The execution is normally held at the AS headquarters at Jilib on a Friday after the midday prayers. The walking dead man is normally sent from prison to hospital 12 or so hours before the execution.

The person would then "donate" several pints of blood leaving the execution candidate with just enough blood to keep them alive until the execution. They are also heavily sedated, so much that the prisoner would not put up any resistance when being lead to his death.

The blindfolded condemned man dressed in white is led with hands tied on the back and is then made to kneel with the head facing Mecca and his neck made to stick out just long enough for it to get chopped off.

In rare cases beheaded corpses are placed on a crucifix for three days as an extra deterrent.

Jehow continues with his macabre explanation saying that that the official executioner who is 42 years is proud of his skills and that he had already trained his 22 year old son to take over.

I keep quite spell bound as Jehow continues puffing his cigarette. I ask him a final question:

Are you afraid that the AS might one day capture you?

"No" he briskly answers. *"I will always be a step ahead. I will be dead before they get me."*

He gives me a lopsided grin as he winks.

"What do you mean?" I ask him

He smiles and loudly quotes Percy Byrsshey Shelley-Ozymandias:

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said – "Two vast and trunk less legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,

The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Musings of The Point Man

Even in a windy Somalia night, Crickets chirp and locusts sound their soft, muffled buzzing as 36 desert boots of number 16 platoon of Echo Company of 7 MIB trudge through the night to lay an ambush against the Al Shabaab.

The Platoon is on African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) mandate to sanitise Somalia from the AS extremist Islamic group and the warm but windy early evening of February was part of the mandate. The distance to be covered by the platoon was a mere twelve kilometres from our base on a location intelligence had reasons to believe was a common route used by the Islamic militants for the collection of their logistics.

I was the point man of the platoon leading the human snake of 36. We shuffled rather than walked on account of the heavy weights hunkering us down. After a two -hour march, the platoon understandably was sorely tried by humping the heavy but necessary load through the hot night terrain.

Each one of us carried a weapon; at least eight magazines and rounds to fill them. Each of us also carried on our webbings three days packed weight of serving's factory made Meals Ready to Eat (MRE). Soldiers including me hate the MRE, it tastes like cardboard soaked in mud giving you energy without filling you up.

I am the platoon point man for this mission. *Pointie* leads a group of solders headed in a compass direction in a single file. It is the most reviled and feared position because conventional wisdom and statistics from earlier campaigns and particularly in the Somalia theatre indicate that the life expectancy of the pointies is normally shorter. A platoon pointie, therefore, is normally balloted for under the Sergeants direction with the unlucky soldier therefore ruefully taking over the advance.

In the last twelve-foot patrols, I have volunteered six times to be the platoon point man. No big justifiable reason for my love for this position but probably is to me a search for identity and a call for acceptance from the platoon and probably also a conscious tempting of fate. It could also be an unconscious wish for early death. Three tours in Somalia have sharpened my pointie skills and unlike the other members of the platoon my sixth senses are perennially at heightened alert.

We plod on under my very deliberate speed, lifting my feet gingerly before putting it down, one foot after another and the crocodile chain follows my example, total silence save for the lifting a lowering of feet and the sand lifting off and falling under the platoon's relentless march. Weapons cocked and held at the ready position, safety catches on and the index finger extended as per training over the trigger guard.

If there is an Al Shabaab sniper out in the front training his rifle on me, he would likely see a well-built, very black man a year or two over twenty, a sweaty face formed from thick slabs of flesh and a thick nose; a regulation style moustache under a regulation helmet and very cold eyes. Unlikely but if the AS sniper rifle has an X-ray scope, he could see a very philosophical brain, a brainwashed Catholic mind and overly a very austere character.

If the Al Shabbab Sniper could see into my future where would my horoscope point out in the next five years? Less aggressive probably as the demands of age catching up, more accommodating feelings as fatherhood emerged, totally subdued under the famous oral castration from the well-oiled and practised tongue of Eve?

Suddenly I stop, as I feel rather than see that am being watched from somewhere yonder and slowly go down on my torso, almost mechanically, the platoon follows suit and immediately the silence of the Somali night is heard. The platoon commander, a Lieutenant crawls forward to my position; I am not sure what is his full name is but since he reported to the platoon from the college he was instantly identified as a serious officer since about him clung that unmistakable aura of know-how, the strength of character and ability which constitutes authority. The platoon fondly calls him "Prit"

I don't know the etymology of the name but somehow it fits him. Prit looks and is built like a product of a loving relation between a warthog and a monkey. He is short, stout and ugly but still full of wry humour. He reaches me and scans the forward environment with the platoon long-range night vision special scope.

I noticed that his scanning of the forward direction is practised and spot-on, moving the entire head and not the eyes as in-experienced officers are wont to do

He nods at me, "Tusonge," he whispers "Let's *move on, ni Ngiri tu hatua kama mia Moja*… (It is a mere Warthog one hundred metres ahead.")

I smile, remembering his build. I tap once the shoulder of the soldier behind me to convey the message back. It should take another 10 minutes or so before I receive the double-tap from the last person in the crocodile chain. A tap that signifies that message received and we should therefore move forward

As I wait for the double-tap to signal our forward movement; the Catholic article of faith suddenly runs in my mind:

I believe in God the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, his son our lord, the only begotten son of God, borne of the father before all ages. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the lord, the giver of life who proceeds from the father and son and who with the father and son is worshipped adored and glorified. Three persons in one God;

The three divine persons that form the super being are supposedly all equal in all things because each is God, each is infinitely perfect, each distinct from one another.

The idea of God not being independent and having other spiritual beings that are equal to God and having the same powers is the main point of diversion between the Christian faith and the Islamic faith.

Islam is very strictly monotheistic with one of the early suras in the Koran makes this clear: *There is one God, the eternal God. He did not procreate, and neither was he procreated. There is no partner unto him* the worst sin in Islam is *shirk,* which is the suggestion that God has partners in his divinity.

For Muslims, the idea that God consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit looks perilously close to *shirk.* They regard Jesus as a great prophet, but reject the idea that he was the son of God. Muslims accept Christians and Jews as *ahl ul-kitab,* people of the book, which means that they recognize that Christian and Jewish scriptures were earlier revelations from God.

They believe, however, that some parts of these scriptures became corrupted over time, and that Islam is the original monotheistic religion. For Muslims, the Koran is the final and perfect Divine scripture.

Whereas differences in opinion are understandable in matters of faith; the extremist Islamic groups especially the Al Shabaab are overdoing it.

They want to monopolise God.

The Jihadists have labelled the rest of humanity not following the Islamic faith as *Kuffars- Unbelievers*. Who must be therefore be forced to be converted to follow the Muslim faith under the pain of torture and death.

Social media footage has shown AS killing with appalling nonchalance; holding an assault rifle to the victim's head before squeezing the trigger sending the body brutally toppling down; a scene almost reminiscent of an abattoir. Other videos paraded in the social media also show the casual beheadings of victims considered apostates or Kuffars with the overall aim to terrorize the local opponents and the international community to follow the call of their warped version of Islam.

These atrocious videos posted on social media work as the AMISOM soldiers biggest fear in the Somali theatre is not death from the enemy's bullet, which might be fast and painless but being caught alive and made a prisoner of war.

My personal worry on the war front, however, is the quality of torture that Islamists may inflict on me –A very Committed Christian and many devious methods designed to make me denounce my Catholic faith.

It has been said that the extreme Jihadists - and AS falls in this bracket - have four levels of loathing; They do hate the Christians and Jews with passion, but their hatred fails to go that deep, because after all these two groups are also believers in the one true God and thus, with the Islamists are *"people of the book"*. The only shortcoming of the Christian and the Jew alike is that they have yet to recognize and accept the last testament, the Koran.

Hated above the Christians and the Jews are the atheists and idolaters, who have no god but only, carved idols. It explains why the extremist Muslims will or will never tolerate the religions from the eastern part of the globe, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hindu, Zoroastrianism and even African traditional religion and the rest. It also explains why communism cannot be tolerated by extreme Muslims. There is no place in *Janah* for an idolater.

The third higher level of loathing by the Islamists goes even deeper. It is bestowed to the moderate Muslim. The moderates are hated because they do not ascribe to the murderous tendencies of the Jihadists and explain why the Jihadists perennially strive to seek to topple every Western-friendly Muslim government by exploding bombs in their marketplaces and killing fellow innocent Muslims.

But the highest of all loathing is reserved for the apostate, this is the Muslim who abandons or denounces Islam, a Jihadist, who recants the faith of his fathers. For such a fellow, forgiveness is out of the question and only death waits.

Three persons, One in Three; Three in One. one God. Deep.

Talking of persons, my thoughts veered to my village of Koru and to Kalandide; Kalandide was the village idiot. He was tall, with a shock of dirty and unkempt hair and loitered within the village totally naked. Good-hearted Villagers and passers-by would occasionally give him food donations which he normally grabbed and gobbled without any sign of appreciation or acknowledgement to the benefactor. Periodically, Kalandide would burst into bouts of mirthy laughter lasting several hours. Another time, he would wail and weep for hours on end without any reason.

One morning the stiffened body of Kalandide was found in the outskirts of the village. It became a big issue of concern to the village when the pastor of the local church had emphatically declined to conduct funeral services for Kalandide arguing that the fallen mad villager was not worthy for the church to hold a funeral service as him as he was not a "person". A missionary and white Catholic priest heard of this argument and conducted the funeral mass attended by

the biggest group of mourners ever witnessed in Koru village.

What then is a person? Was Kalandide a person? I wondered deeply.

Am also reminded of a baptism conducted in the mid-19 Century by Bishop Hannington of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to his first black converts in Uganda. Reportedly he made the following statements prior to the Baptism:

"I hereby baptise you, hoping that my effort is not going to be wasted because I do assume that you are a human being, a person with a soul and hoping against hope that you are not a monkey".

The two taps arrived and I slowly stood up, adjusted my weapon and stepped out, the Crocodile sluggishly shuffled forward.

And as I walked, my thoughts wandered about my faith. Would I denounce my faith under torture? Is it reasonable to accept pain instead of making a verbal declaration that does not reach the heart? Why should the extremists believe that a forced faith is binding in Heaven?

Should I desert my faith and face the resultant eternal damnation of my soul? Why should God make me suffer for eternity for a moment of discretion, shouldn't the punishment be equal to the crime or for the

spiritual matter to the sin and shouldn't God as wise as he is, take all these factors into consideration?

And why should the Jihadists invoke pain for one to be converted? And why should I fear pain? Can one describe the pain? Do the lower animals suffer pain as much as we humankind?

I suspect the man is far more sensitive to pain than the lower animals, partly probably because the keenness of human pain is due in great part to its rationality, the lower animals probably suffer in the passing instant; it does not link up with what is gone and what is to come and is not tortured by the thought that it is a course of grief to others.

We humankind maybe suffer intensely from the memory of what is past and from the anticipation of what is before us and just maybe from the very longing for the end of the engulfing misery. Maybe too, our pain is much deeper and sharp gushing from perceived feelings of self-pity, and maybe too from the reflection of the indifference or hostility of the people about us.

And then I wondered too about my soul, was it really immortal as my catechism classes were wont to say, does it not exist by itself? And if it did, does that mean it did not exist by itself before? Will it be immortal and bound to last forever?

I suspect that the soul must exist before it knows itself; it must know itself before it can love itself. A case

of self-knowledge and self-love. Properties that may only exist in an eternal love we humankind call God

The Crocodile marched on. Grindingly slowly like the windmills of the gods.

There was a sudden burst of staccato machine-gun fire and the thump! Thump! Thump! of mortar shells landing a distance away. We had instinctively dropped down, our weapons at the ready.

The burst of fire continued for about ten minutes, it sounded as if an attack had been launched by the AS to one of the AMISOM bases. Our radio crackled and I heard the platoon commander mumbling in the handset. He must have been talking to the company Commander in the base camp. Finally, he straightened himself and muttered:

"Pass the word," The Lieutenant whispered" *Pass the word across; we continue with our mission, that was an attack against the Ugandans at their Tawakal base"*

"The attack has been unsuccessful and the enemy has been beaten off" The Commander whispered again "

"We take off in ten minutes time" The whisper went down the line AS has been a resolute enemy to AMISOM every other time coming up with some ingenuity that conveys the astuteness of its leadership, the use of unconventional actions and the refusal to follow conventions. He has been a ruthless customer. Ruthless and devoted to the cause because he thinks, he believes,

he is devoted to a cause much larger than himself. He is fighting for Allah, for God.

It is now two o'clock early morning, a cold wind blows from the Indian Ocean, it is also much darker as a cloud now covers the moon. The stars are visible as they twinkle high up in heaven as they have done since creation.

I hasten to tighten my gears as I wait for the two taps on my shoulder to signal our forward shuffle again. As I wait, the last stanza of the article of the catholic faith rings again in my ears:

I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the confession and the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

I shall keep the faith.

Therapy for The Veteran

War takes many shapes and sizes, and the field of battle can be found both within and without; sometimes the real fight starts after the battle. A soldier may think that once he is out of enemy direct action, like in my case, out of Somalia then the war is assumed over. But then we sometimes carry the war home through Post Traumatic Stress disorder. (PTSD).

In medical science PTSD is not exactly a new concept-post World War II it had been diagnosed as shell shock. After the Vietnam war, the American military had dubbed it "The Thousand-yard stare".

PTSD is what remains after experiencing a traumatic and uncommon human experience. The shame, horror, fear experienced in such an event comes to haunt a person for a lifetime with each time being just as traumatic and devastating as the first time. Indeed, it can be even worse than the first time, because relieving it makes a person live in a constant state fear and dread that gets amplified across the years. It is the major unseen wounds of war.

As my tour of duty ended in Somalia, the KDF leadership fully aware of the probable mental imbalances from combat had organised for several debriefing sessions to ease the re-entry back to peacetime locations of the forces involved in the Somalia campaign. These

involved long sessions by a team of psychiatrists and trauma counsellors.

The group debriefs apparently worked for a big fraction of the combatants leaving them completely healed and achieving what medical science has called the post traumatic growth.

But then some combatants felt that despite the positive move by the KDF command, soldiers felt that something was still amiss; This was the cultural angle which stipulated that after the experiences from combat and deadly activities a traditional cultural cleansing ceremony was necessary away from the foreign – they called it the mzungu (White man) version.

They rightly argued that the mzungu version of cleansing failed to acknowledge one's own multiple identities and their meanings. Along with one's gender, and the various ethnic cultural and social class identities.

There was also the question of how each ethnic community is wrapped subconsciously in its cultural identity and the culture binds one in almost everything done and yet we are seldom aware of its subtle constraint. Trauma, they added, just like guilt and healing is individual and affects one in a very particular way.

The suggestion held sway and accepting that the (KDF) has a full complement of the Kenyan tribes within its rank and file set up. The different ethnic groups, the face of Kenya- have wholeheartedly embraced each other

deep and particularly in the Somali theatre. A kind of oneness in diversity, with the cultural differences subsumed as a more common objective of staying alive was the most important factor.

Each ethnic and religious community was facilitated to seek its particular method to seek its own version to self-cleanse and hopefully get peace of mind and healing and eventual closure.

Old is treasure, is wisdom, is history, is culture. Suddenly old benevolent soldiers grey haired and nearly time expired though of lower ranks took centre stage in conducting individual tribal after battle cleansing ceremonies.

That done, we were then demobilised and found our way back to our villages.

It failed to work for me. Part of the reason, I think it failed to work was the feeling of the lost comradery. One major aspect of active combat situations is boredom. There are lengthy periods of doing nothing and simply waiting so we while away the times with talk.

So when the tour of duty ends and you report back to your former peacetime environment, it is like losing part of you. So the veteran finds himself back at home confused, lonely, and depressed. He misses his military band of brothers, worries about them and actually misses the high and excitement of combat once he is out of it. It becomes very telling, if like me, he is single. No

peacetime activities actually fill the yearning in him and he sinks down into a deeper depression.

The combat vet has seen witnessed death at first hand, maybe of his friends and definitely of the enemy and sometimes of non-combatants. He has been in places and has seen things that few people have witnessed so no one fully understands him. He keeps it all inside because telling some civilian friend or relative who was never there will sort of be unwise as he the civilian would never fully grasp the overall situation. The only ones who can understand are other combat veterans.

Following the demobilization, we had a long break of 60 days and I settled in my Nakuru home just relaxing and thinking of the way forward. Barely a week into the break, my house in Nakuru started to feel like a cell, I became increasingly alone with my thoughts and feelings. Within the military setup, there had always been people and events to keep me occupied; now I was alone and there was nothing.

Anger, guilt and shame mixed with boredom started creeping in and drinking of alcohol just began to make sense. It became my escape mechanism. I slowly found myself becoming more indulgent into drinking and increasingly becoming better at hydrating to minimize the effects thereafter.

As my drinking binges continued, my emotional defences lowered guilt and shame meta sized into anger.

Anger at myself, anger at Somalia, anger at Al shabaab, anger at the military, anger at life, anger at God.

And then the nightmares began and persisted and the daily dose of alcohol seemed incapable of keeping them away from me. I stayed in bed late, waking up sometime well after mid-day, dressing in the previous day's clothes and sauntering to the wines and spirits shop to revive my ever drooping spirits. I became violent with the patrons of every drinking joint. It reached a head when a civilian asked me a stupid question.

"Did you ever kill anybody in Somalia?"

What answer did he expect? If I said yes, would it make me be labelled as a cold blooded killer? If I answered in the negative, would I be fair to my fellow soldiers who killed while as part of their sworn duties?

He got the answer he deserved, I brought my left hand up which perfectly connected at that angle between the ears and neck. He went down in slow motion and stayed down. His friends swarmed me, my hands worked like piston against them; giving as much as they gave but finally the numbers were in their favour and found myself in the ground being worked on.

I later found myself in a ward, bruised, and battered, a fractured left arm and having lost hearing on the left ear. My release from hospital and back to the military was tied to my seeking psychological intervention and was

directed to see a retired officer who was now a part time psychiatric consultant for the KDF.

Grey thatched, Col (Rtd) Dr. Alex Omoro, a psychiatrist now consulted part time for the military. He wore a maroon bow tie (Who wears a bow tie in daylight hours?) he seemed eccentric who apparently may have caught a touch of madness from his patients.

He started his session by introducing himself and stressed in his many years as a therapist and service in the KDF in his younger days. He then burst out in a guffaw of loud laughing which left me in consternation. The laughing bout lasted for about a full minute. Finally, he gave me a long look leaving me fidgeting and started his therapy.

“Do you ever worry about dying?” he asked by way of introduction.

“Yes,” I said, “all the time, but I’m not obsessive about it.”

He hummed the famous patriotic song “ Tawala Kenya Tawala! as he made notes on in a spiral bound notebook. perhaps he thought that he should be more be the one deciding if I was obsessed or not.

“Would you describe yourself as a normal person?” he asked. What should I say? I wondered. I didn’t think I was that normal, but then again, I was hardly abnormal either.

‘Pretty normal,” I said. “I have two eyes and two ears which is normal”

“If you think you are that normal,” He countered me “Why did you come to see me?” He fixed me with a stare.

I almost walked out, but I found myself answering.

“Well Since my war experience in Somalia I don’t feel that well and my close friend and partner asked me to pay you a visit.”

‘” Aha! “He nodded and asked me to describe what my experience post Somalia was. He leaned back on his chair, interlaced his hands in his ample middle and gestured to me to narrate my feelings post Somalia.

I loved explaining my case to anybody having the time to listen. I talked for about 15 minutes while he remained silent only occasionally opening his left eye as a signal that he was listening and for me to go on with my narration.

“My traumatic experiences in the Somali combat zone run deep”

I told him and continued.

“I witnessed death at first hand, death of colleagues and mass death of the Islamic combatants. I handled human remains, I experienced savagery, I lived in fear, prolonged fear and I experienced the extremes of weather and I questioned my faith. I also have amazingly powerful flash backs and unstoppable thoughts; I can’t bear any loud sound or light; I feel comfortable alone in

a darkened room away from the family. I can't watch television I find the programmes extremely violent. I did also find hate."

I finally concluded.

"Trauma is a ubiquitous human experience and particularly so for a soldier who has been in combat. Post-traumatic stress disorder is biology. It is the body's involuntary physical reaction as we relive the intense fear of a life-threatening event and the scalding emotional responses that follow: terror and a debilitating sense of helplessness. PTSD manifests as malfunctions in the way emotion systems learn and remember, It is a natural reaction to unnatural events. He mentioned when I finished my narration.

We then drew a contract which outlined how we would conduct our sessions which was to last six weeks. "Describe your parents, starting with your father" He asked me.

"But they are both dead" I told him.

"It does not affect your description," he muttered. "Describe your parents" he repeated.

"Now Daktari, what has that got to do with my present problem?

" Two things first- here in my clinic, we don't discuss problems only issues and two your description of your parents will assist me in making a reasoned analysis of your mental state"

I had never thought of giving a description of my parents but then I tried.

"Did you cry when your parents died?" He asked

"I cried bucketful of tears when they died especially for my father."

"So you never loved your mother as much as your father?" He asked.

I answered him in a clearly frustrated manner.

"Are you easily frustrated?" he persisted

"Since Somalia, yes"

"I think my questions would frustrate anybody, including me. But you see sometimes how you handle the death of a loved one affects in so many number of ways especially when you fail to get over it. the doctor said "a lot of disorders are grief related"

"But I don't have a disorder," I said

"No" He made another note in his book.

"What do you mean by saying no in the context of my question?" I asked.

"What context do you think I made the answer?"

He asked after keenly looking at me.

I kept quiet.

After an unreasonable period of silence, he went on asking me questions for about an hour and I found myself liking him as the session progressed. He had me talking of so many things I couldn't have imagined, dreams, my own death, children, soldiering, my commanders, war,

faith even my feelings when I first fired a shot at an advancing enemy combatant.

"Right," That will do the therapist said at length.

"So do you think am normal?" I asked him.

"Do you think you are abnormal?" He counter asked me.

I kept quiet.

He summarised my long explanations:

- Questioning of faith with a bias towards suicidal thoughts, a feeling of numbness and accelerated end of time thoughts.

  Replays of the various traumatic incidents, constantly relieving them at the expense of other demanding life issues. A feeling of never ending battles in the mind.
- Nightmares and attendant insomnia. It's hard to concentrate on anything, because your senses are swarming on everything around you: sights, sounds, touch, are all highly sensitized.
- Emotional dis-regulation. A feeling of being alienated, of incapable of being understood, a social anxiety disorder. Avoiding eye contacts, in extreme cases, anthrophobia.
- Embracing Alcohol for escapism.
- We kept silent for about five minutes, looking at each other.

We finally fixed timings for another session of therapy in a weeks' time.

I religiously trooped to the therapist weekly for the next six weeks and I found myself having a generally changed view of life and society. Dr Omoro finally declared that I was to be terminated, an expression which caused a jolt of fear in me until I realised it was a term in counselling where the doctor feels that the counselee has shown a marked improvement and has a mental positive shift which translates to a noticeable behaviour change.

But he was wrong, the road to recovery for war stress injury is long and twisted. It is deep and meant to face the past and winning of the future.

You take an absolute liking of the men you are serving with together; you can say almost a feeling of love. You talk of anything and everything, we came to know each other so well where they come from, how their lives were, long periods of boredom and select few moments of adrenaline draining periods of excessive combat action are the hall marks of the situation in the Somalia theatre.

So we have so much time to share our thoughts, hopes, fears, it is difficult thing to describe, the friendship between soldiers who have seen enemy action together. There is nothing that crops up- doesn't matter what it is that you couldn't discuss with each other one way or the other. We confided in each other it made us a team.

I left Nakuru to visit my folks back at the village in Koru

So despite my having vanquished my personal demons I had brought over from Somalia, it was not enough and to be allowed to fully fit in with the oganda- the people. I had to undergo a cleansing ceremony, my paternal uncle had intimated. Specifically, a traditional baptism of some sort to make the society accept me back.in its own way, it was a harrowing ordeal.

But first, a short lesson in Luo culture and terminologies are in order.

In the Luo culture and indeed in the African culture, a person's fate is intertwined in a very practical way. An infraction on one has a direct effect on the other. I am, because we are mentality. So your infraction though negligible and to you could be having a big impact top the rest of the community who get affected simply by the fact that you are one of their own,

In Luo cosmology, the ancestral spirits are called "juogi" which consists of a conglomeration of family, home, village, and elemental spirits and are the cosmic guardians of the community. Juogi are vested in the well-being of a Luo person both living and in the afterlife, through reincarnation or passing on certain skills and abilities.

Ancestral spirits brought blessings to the people- the oganda- and mete appropriate punishment to the few

who deviate from the cultural norms, through *chira*. *Chira*, broadly, is any act violating cultural norms and are the immediate consequences of cultural transgression. Where norms and laws are not observed then the juogi are obligated to send their enforcers, otherwise known as *chira,* to bring back order in the social system. *chira* are the ''a*skaris*" of *juogi.*

Chira presented as illnesses that were tough to cure, or had no cure at all. A person afflicted of *chira* lacked appetite for foods favoured by *juogi*, showed dryness of skin even with hydration and miniaturisation, and exhibited an excessive need to sunbathe at sunrise and sunset. Some cases manifested as stubborn skin diseases bearing pus and/or blood, infertility and, in many cases, led to death.

But then not all hope was lost, each transgression or taboo had a specific cleansing regimen. Minor transgressions were handled by the drinking of herbal concoctions known as *'manyasi.* Major ones were handled by *ajuoga* through specific *misango* or sacrifice which usually was a domestic animal. The sacrifice is deemed to the person and the community it of bad spirits linked to the transgressive act.

In Luo culture, one of the major transgressions for example was that a man was not allowed under any circumstances to see his mother-in-law's nakedness, not even viewing her corpse. The spilling of human blood,

whether intentional or by accident, or even if it was an enemy is also a major transgression and would automatically provoke *chira.* It is believed that the once blood is split the spirit of the dead is bound to come back to haunt and punish their killer and then in some form the entire community. Major transgressions required elaborate cleansing ceremonies. *Misango,* animal sacrifice, was officiated by *ajuoga,* to cleanse not just the person, but the clan and indeed the larger community.

The sacrifice of a black animal be it a goat, cow, sheep, or chicken is preferred as angry spirits cannot stand black animals and will immediately be exorcised from a person. A black sheep is however highly preferred over other animals. The use of a black goat is however frowned upon as it is believed that a particularly stubborn spirit might leave but still return through dreams to make more demands to the community.

I had been in harm's way in Somalia, the entire community knew that. I must have been involved in the spilling of enemy blood, the entire society knew that though never asked directly, but then they also knew, that is some form of another I had brought or witnessed violence which through me could have adverse effects to my entire community.

It was imperative that I had to be cleansed.

So under the direction of my maternal uncle, assisted by a paternal uncle, cousin and my elder brother, I had to

undergo the cleansing rituals. A traditional witchdoctor called *Ajuoga* normally conducts the ritual. In my case, the *Ajuoga* and his assistant had been specifically been imported from Tarime in Tanzania and said to be an old hand in the successful transference of evil spirits; he looked as old as Methuselah. An advance payment dubbed *Pesa bungu* which literary means money for his going to the forest to fetch the various herbs for the cleansing. It was also interesting that his payment was to be done using plain hardware coins, no currency notes, no M-Pesa and of course no cheques.

We had assembled outside the gate of my home at midnight; it was a moonless cold night. The unlucky very black ram was in place almost invisible in the darkness– I was the main celebrant in the ceremony and I looked, I suspect, as if I was to face an Al Shabaab firing squad.

"*Lonyri sirith!*"- (Get off your clothes and be nude) Old Methuselah ordered from a voice stained from years of tobacco chewing.

"*Tim piyo" fanya haraka*" This was from one of the uncles, the situation had suddenly taken in some solemn and macabre setting. An unprintable voice started building way below my navel and erupted out of my throat which sounded like anything.

"^&%$$#*&^%$#@#%^$* " "

As my clothes fell off, the cold hit me and I involuntarily gasped

"Jesus!"

My uncle who in the best of times is a church elder admonished me as he pushed me about

"Don't utter strange names in this solemn occasion-*Mijinga!"*

The sacrificial ram was then placed with the head on the ground and the feet extended upwards, in an instant it was held sideways with one of the old men held the ram by the horns and the other assistant by the feet a sharp knife found myself in my hand and I was asked to slash open the neck of the ram, I decapitated it and the gushing blood sprayed on my body, "*Chikri"* Jump-Methuselah ordered. I stepped over the ram while it was making the dying dance and immediately was given a smelly concoction named *manyasi* to gobble in one gulp. I was then directed to walk stark naked to my house without looking back. It could have been comical, if it was not serious, I mean, walking stark naked with my dongle swaying all out for about 50 meters.

I reached the house and found a plastic basin full of water with various concoctions of tree barks, roots and green leaves floating in the cold water. I gulped two cupful of the evil smelling concoction and took a quick bath from the remaining water in the basin right there in the sitting room as I had been advised. My stomach heaved – I suspect it was due to the manyasi. I rushed to the toilet where both ends opened in a gush. I stayed in

the toilet for about an hour. After the long hour, I managed to crawl out of the outhouse, not wholly conscious, inertia pervading, angry but helplessly passive, nothing coordinating, no strength, no will.

I made way to my bedroom and slept a solid six hours. The sleep of the dead.

Waking up at about ten in the morning, the sun was already high, Lake Victoria simmered in the distantce. I found my night cleansing party enjoying the local brew *busaa* under the mango tree with their conversations sort of stilted without any discernible direction. I learnt that the innards of the sacrificial ram had been consumed in situ and the remaining parts including my old clothes burned to cinder and the remains buried deep. No comment was made on my returning. Old Methuselah together with his aide had taken leave in the dead of the night on a boda boda and headed back to where they came from. It was as if nothing had happened. But something had happened; I had changed, I was free.

In me, delicate changes were going on the subtle adjustments of a mind that had for some time felt itself threatened but could not fully localise the threat, the hidden wariness towards all things and all people, a certain suspension of sensibility. I felt relieved of a weight, some in-describable changes I was calm and I felt it deep in me as I felt a change in me. Like a person who had won something at considerable cost the nightmares

finally ceased. The ghosts had finally been subdued and my social interactions with the village and kinsmen was now deemed to be finally restored.

The Ghosts of Somalia had finally been silenced.

At Ease

Even before I was fully awake, I knew that it was my last day as the commander of sector 2. My flight back to peacetime location had arrived in the late evening before, I had at midnight handed over the reins of leadership to a newly promoted commander and I was destined to head from the mission area and back to the peace time location and in a month or so to a very deserved retirement.

To be sure, I was in a bad mood as I had keenly expected to move one up the promotion ladder and be a two-star general. It was not to be, a few days earlier a despatch from the headquarters in Nairobi had announced major changes within the KDF which included several promotions, postings and appointments. It was a big disappointment for the dispatch had not included my promotion and my position as sector commander had a replacement which in effect meant that due to my age and run out date I was destined for the military scrap heap.

Colonel Matiku's case was even more telling, he too had not been promoted, but what rubbed the pain in was the fact that the new Sector commander, my replacement, was actually junior to him in service. Much junior and secondly he was to remain in place to be a sounding board again for the new sector commander.

I understood why since the major changes announcement, he had been in a foul mood and very curt with his subordinates.

I understood.

I did not exactly fear the retirement, because sooner or later, it was bound to happen. What I feared most though, was the re-entrance back to the civilian world and the reintegration back to the village. I approached those thoughts with foreboding.

My fears, I suspect, were justified. At 58 I was too young to start a new career and too old to learn a new one. Not exactly an old dog; but then too not exactly a yelping puppy.

If you have served for thirty years plus in the uniformed services, there is always the risk that you've become institutionalized. You've practically forgotten to think independently because the disciplined service has a narrow and regulated way of doing things. You are used to getting orders to perform even the smallest tasks and your positive initiatives is completely submerged.

Another problem with longer serving career militaries is what I always call "cerebral atrophy". The army tells you a million times not to think and then one day, before you even became aware of, your brain has shut down. That you seek so much approbation for even doing a task which a civilian would normally not even

consider noteworthy; like a pet dog given an order to fetch.

I was now destined to be a civilian.

Getting accepted in the civilian circles also has its drawbacks, for one, the social and cultural differences are massive for a long serving former military officer. Unconsciously while we in the military tend to be very earnest and devoted to duty, we also tend to be proud, unconsciously swear more, and aren't necessarily the politest people in the world. And as senior ranks we also have adopted some airs which a future civilian employer may not appreciate these behavioural traits.

Compared to my contemporaries who after leaving school were absorbed in the government or other civilian pursuits, I am light years ahead of them in travel, life experiences and emergency response abilities; to the point that they cannot relate or assimilate the things, but then I am 20 years behind them in civilian employment experience position and industry knowledge. I suspect that I will perennially feel like a fish out of water among my new peers.

I am also light years behind in many social aspects of life- especially in what is so commonly referred to as emotional quotient. I tend to think overly big and typically military always have a rich man’s solution to every perceived problem. The civilian counterparts probably from their relatively low earning power

compared to that of a soldier have a more nuanced approach to issues, which sincerely brings more viable results, agonizingly slow but generally sure. The soldier in us demands quick fit solutions. Instant coffee demands and a microwave mentality.

Even though I was an operations and strategic planner, I may not fully fit in a civilian undertaking as the military skills and the manner of execution do not translate well into the civilian sector. If anything, I didn't develop those skills running a bank or factory. Most employers seem to want someone with relevant job experiences in the fields they are hiring, not those with those skills outside of their professions.

The civilian sector doesn't recognize our experience and training as an asset to develop. So from my experience I know that one of the common hurdles veterans face is the difficulty in translating their military skills and experiences into the language and requirements of civilian job descriptions. Military roles often involve specialized training and responsibilities that may not have a clear civilian counterpart. This makes it challenging for veterans to effectively showcase their qualifications and find suitable employment opportunities.

Another obstacle faced by some veterans is the adjustment to a different work culture in the civilian world. The military has its own unique structure,

hierarchy, and set of expectations, which can differ significantly from those in civilian workplaces. Veterans may find it challenging to adapt to a more informal work environment or different management styles.

Mental health concerns are also a reality for some veterans during their transition. The experiences of military service, including exposure to combat, can leave lasting emotional and psychological impacts. Some veterans may struggle with conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or a state of permanent anxiety, which can affect their overall well-being and job performance.

History proves that professional senior military men have trouble running civilian enterprises, because a military man is used to being a dictator in his military job. You see, the professional soldier is educated in an institution that creates the idea that an officer in the army is better than the private, corporal, sergeant, and anybody below him in rank and that rank equals knowledge. So when he becomes a chief executive of a civilian enterprise, it becomes very hard to get out of his mind that he is way above everybody else in intelligence, in character, and everything. He is particularly hard on the civilians, considering them well below him in inferiority when, in fact, they may well be his equals and even maybe better.

It gets worse, the military environment has conditioned the veteran to adopt a certain mind fix which sometimes has destructive undertones as you join the civilian world. A case in point A general acceptance of alcohol within the military as a source of cohesiveness and secondly a grounded belief that the longer time at work adds to more positive contribution and value. I will need to be weaned off that mentality. Another common fallacy in the military is that being seen to be busy and present for work automatically equates to higher productivity or value especially in staff appointments.

There is also an underlying false notion of correlating the military rank with potential especially when transitioning to civilian roles. The rigid hierarchical structure in the military doesn't always translate to success in the civilian careers, where adaptability and diverse skills are valued over hierarchical authority. No need to say it but the ability to run fast, shout loudly and lots of press ups should only equate to leadership ability in the cadets corps.

And then there were bound to be challenges in the domestic front.

It is bound to be dramatic. An idealised version would be I the provider would now be permanently at home and helping around the house and the farm with the deep involvements in village activities especially the

church and constant cozy and friendly banter with members of the immediate family.

That is the ideal version.

Today, I am the GOC, with a personal driver, a personal aide and a retinue of officers at my beck and call, a reputation to behold and the next day I will be a nobody at home.I am likely like most men to carry to my retirement my military identity with my job. my spouse will never be adequately well prepared for the soldier's husband almost permanent presence in the home. I am likely to end up to be an intruder in my own home complicating their previous satisfactory existence. Familial tension is bound to occur as I would likely start to budge in the routine which the wife had been running and the net effect would be unending conflicts in the home.

But then she too, I realised as a long serving military wife has also become institutionalised and cannot effectively fit into the women *chamas* outside the military cycles.

I suspected that I was overthinking and I let my thoughts settle at that. I glanced at the team I was leaving behind in Dhobley and I found myself reminded of the words of Napoleon Bonaparte that in order to have good soldiers, a country must always be at war.

Well, maybe the short rotund young general had his reasons for making such a wild statement… a

confirmation probably that his ego and several military successes were tied to the experiences garnered from blood, sweat, fears and vomit of his countrymen.

But then sincerely how do you make a warrior?

There has never been a substitute for the ordeal of battle. If you are fully and well trained –weapons, strategy, military science, phases of war, logistics, propaganda and all those other things soldiers are trained in the classrooms and field come to nought if you have not dipped your toe in river of combat then you are at best a ceremonial soldier, a barrack soldier, an arm chair strategist, a scholar.

I have seen the KDF in pre and post deployment in Somalia; I see a major transformation has taken place with now KDF soldiers I detect a stronger air of competence about them. Finally, they seem as warriors not scholars and ironically, we have to thank in some sense to Al shabaab for that.

The helicopter lifted itself up and the several officers who had lined up to escort me, including my replacement snapped the perfect salutes. I returned the salute. I noticed that the RSM's salute stayed much longer quivering than for the rest; I tried hard not to make much of that. It was interesting that I had joined the military five years after the RSM and was again leaving on retirement much earlier than him. That is the military for you.

It was time to go.

The helicopters, YYs, eternally the old faithfull's, had two pilots in the ranks of majors and two Captains, faces I had never encountered before in my military life, they looked young and efficient and I thought that it was not fair that they flew the vintage YY. Not fair at all, they seemed to be having the energy and zest for a more delicate flying machine. I arrested my over thinking as the pilots worked cranked the chopper engines to motion.

It struck me that, yet again, that we have never had a better army. The men and women in the KDF uniform look serious, and skilled, bold and uncomplaining and from the experience forged out of the Somalia theatre the breed of "yes sir men" have slowly disappeared, they have learnt in the hard way the cogs of mission command.

My gaze rested on the outgoing G -1, now proudly wearing the llieutenant colonels rank as the board which failed to promote me had promoted him after my recommendation. I was happy for him, my eyes dwelt on the rest, I looked at the G-2 with his crooked smile, I had recommended him too for promotion, too bad, they never considered him…what the *Wazees* see is different from what we, lesser generals see. My eyes rested on the playboy but very effective G-4 –the lover of gonads, a worthy promotion material, but not yet.

I looked at the commander of the Special Forces, tall, lithe, fit, strong, ready for anything.

Kenyans back at home can stand at ease.

The pilot turned the helicopter on, its pumping crescendo increased as it disciplined the Dhobley air to submission rising slowly under a cloud of dust as it expertly turned its noise in the air to face Liboi and Dadaab and Garrissa and Nairobi and to my retirement and eventually my fading away.

Isn't that what old soldiers are meant to do?

Jambo, Mama Tina! I said inwardly, your deadbeat husband is coming home for good.

Notes

- A Bouquet of the Noble Hadith by Assad Nimer Busool
- A History of the world through Islamic eyes by Tamim Ansary
- Ataturk by Patrick Kinross
- God - a Human History by Reza Aslan
- Heaven on Earth: a journey through sharia law by Sadakat Kadri
- Iran: Empire of the Mind by Michael Axworthy
- Kenyatta's country by Richard Cox
- Lost Scriptures: the Books that did not make it into the New Testament by BD Ehrman
- Misquoting Jesus by BD Ehrman
- Misquoting Muhammad by JAC Brown
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- No God but God - the origins, evolution and future of Islam by Reza Aslan
- Operation Linda Nchi – An official account by KDF
- Refuting ISIS by Muhammad al Yaqoubi
- The First Muslim by Lesley Hazleton
- The Haj by Leon Uris
- The Historical Figure of Jesus by EP Sanders
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- The Ottoman Centuries by Patrick Kinross
- The war after Armageddon by Ralph Peters
- The political incorrect guide to Islam by Robert Spencer
- War Story by Steven Elliot
- War heroes by Allan Zullo
- Zealot: the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth by Reza Aslan