

## Testimony of Jacob Gabriele Leul

Name: Jacob

Surname: Gabriele Leul

Nationality: Ethiopian

Gender: m

Date of imprisonment: after Yekatit 12, February 1937

Camps of imprisonment:

**St. George's Prison**, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, May 1937 – Mai 1938

**Akaki Radio Station**, Akaki, Etiopia, Mai – July 1938

**Nocra**, Eritrean July 1938 – June 1940

**Asmara**, Eritrea, June 1940 – April 1<sup>st</sup> 1941

Source: Command of his Imperial Majesty (Ed.), 1950, Documents on Italian War Crimes submitted to the United Nations War Crimes Commission by the Imperial Ethiopian Government, Vol. 2: Affidavits and published documents, Addis Abeba: Ministry of Justice, p. 14-15: Extract from Affidavit No. 11

*Note: The affidavits were collected after the war from many parts of Ethiopia and each was sworn before a judge or magistrate or public official. In cases where the witness was illiterate his deposition was written down in Amharic and then read over to him before the Judge or official appointed for the purpose. English translations were prepared for submission to the United Nations War Crimes Commission, and these have since been revised and checked with the originals for publication.*

I, the undersigned, name: Jacob Gabriele Leul, age: 35 years, profession: Lieutenant Colonel, address: Addis Ababa, do hereby take oath and say as follows: [...]

(2) After the attempt on Graziani I was taken prisoner. First I had to stay in a police station for three months. They kept me there without water and food for three days and they threatened me during the examinations, saying that they would kill me. There was cruel treatment of other prisoners. They tortured them and beat them. I saw their wounds, and they told me that the Italians used to sprinkle water on them and then they lashed them. I heard cries from other parts of the station when such treatment was going on. We were underfed in that station. We were only given black bread once a day; sometimes we got tea without sugar.

(3) Then from that station I was transferred to St. George's prison. There the treatment was the same and we were given the same food and with the same intervals. We were also given something like warm water under the pretext that it was soup; it was practically undrinkable. The chief of the prison was Marshal Bellissimo of the Carabinieri. This prison used to receive prisoners sent from any department, but especially from the Political Office, as I was myself. A house fit for housing fifty persons was filled up with three hundred. I can show you the department if you want. We were sleeping on each other. Many died because of the conditions in that prison. We were not provided with any blankets or such things; only a few of us were allowed to have a blanket of our own. I was allowed to take fresh air only twice a day immediately outside the building. Our latrine was inside the department, a large tin; and of course that place and the smell of it made the conditions inside still worse.

Almost everybody caught typhus in that prison. The infected persons were not taken to hospital, and every morning we used to find five or six persons who had died during the night, and sometimes even fifteen or so. An Italian doctor, named Janusi, came, however, almost every day to give injections and medicine. That doctor is still alive and is working

here. I stayed in that prison for one year. I also caught typhus and was very sick. I can remember that at one time there were about 1,400 prisoners there.

I was summoned to the Political Office about three times. They put questions to me and acted somewhat like a court; but it was not a proper court. The prisoners did not get any information about the decisions directly; the result became known in other ways. The name of the investigator was Marciano. He knew the Ethiopian language. He had been resident in Ethiopia before the Italian aggression as a merchant.

(4) They sent other persons to Danane; but they kept us, informing us that we should be tried by a proper tribunal and receive our punishment, and they told us that they were sure that the tribunal would sentence us to execution. Then one day we were informed that we should be sent to Danane and they took us from the prison to Kaliti<sup>1</sup> (outside Addis Ababa), a radio station which they had transformed into a concentration camp. I think we were 30 or 40 men sent there at the same time.

We stayed for about two months there. The treatment was about the same, but our relatives were allowed to send us some provisions. We were living in tents inside barbed wire. The carabinieri were in charge also of that camp. When we were there some prisoners were brought from Danane and they told us that they had been promised by the Italians that they would be released. The Italians also told us that we were to be released together with those who came from Danane.

(s) Eventually they released some of them and some of us; but they sent me, together with ten others to Nocra. Among us were two women and two men who had come from Danane and had been promised release. Nocra is an island in the Red Sea about 60 kilometers east of Massawa (Dahlac Islands).

The most difficult thing there was the heat. In the shade the temperature used to go up to 50° C. (122° F.). The Italians used to tell us that it was 10° C. (18 F.) above Massawa. There were deaths every day from sunstroke. They used to force us to work. Except four of us, the prisoners were forced to carry stones, wood, build houses and do other hard labour. We were working in the office. There were about 1.800 prisoners on that island. There were 150 political prisoners among them. The others were sentenced prisoners, some of them ordinary criminals, some of them inhabitants of Eritrea who had revolted against the Italians.

The supply of drinking water was insufficient. Some of the prisoners tried to dig for water, or they drank sea water on the beach, the result being that they fell sick and died. Many died from dysentery. The political prisoners were forced to do hard labour and were flogged when they refused, saying that they could not work like the criminals. When our relatives sent us money the Italians used to give us 15 lire a month from that. With that money we tried to get a little more food. Many prisoners on that island died from malnutrition. A disease called "paludism" spread among the prisoners and they died from that. The doctor was living in Massawa and came to the island very rarely. Among the prisoners there was an Ethiopian veterinary surgeon, D. L. Alema Work. Four of us were allowed to take beds with us to that island; but all the other prisoners were bound to sleep on the bare floor. The treatment of political prisoners and criminals was on the whole the same, but they used to sleep in separate quarters. Once, when the prisoners were going to a certain officer to receive installments of the money sent to them, they were asked to take off their shoes, and when some of them refused because of the hot ground and because they were used to

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<sup>1</sup> Akaki Kaliti Area, Addis Abeba

wearing shoes, some of them were sentenced to be kept in a separate dark cell for two or three months. This Italian was Captain Bartogli, "Residente" of the island and in charge of the prison. I think this man worked under the Governor of Eritrea in Asmara. When Doctor Alema Work gave his orders for the sick prisoners, the Italians used to disregard his directions and forced the people to work. There were also six females on that island; two of them had come with us. They were kept separately, but given the same treatment, food and so on as the others.

After nearly two years on that island I was sent to Asmara and was allowed to live there on the condition that I did not leave the city. There I stayed until, with the approach of the British forces, I was allowed to return to Addis Ababa.