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imagery analysis report

# Recent Ethiopian Airborne Activity (S)

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## RECENT ETHIOPIAN AIRBORNE ACTIVITY (S)

1. (S/WN) Activity that has been observed recently at Ethiopia's major airborne installation indicates that Ethiopia is reestablishing an airborne element within its army. Since mid-December 1981, there has been a significant increase in the level of activity at Bishoftu Army Barracks Harar Meda Airfield [REDACTED], approximately 20 nautical miles southeast of Addis Ababa. This installation, which had been relatively inactive in recent years, has been upgraded by the addition and renovation of several training devices. In addition, a continually increasing number of personnel have been undergoing training at this installation. This report summarizes recent airborne-related activity that has been identified on satellite imagery of this installation.

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2. (S/WN) During the mid-1970s the Ethiopian Army reportedly had one airborne battalion, which was housed at Bishoftu Army Barracks.<sup>1</sup> While a number of airborne training devices, including a jump tower, a swing landing trainer, an aircraft fuselage, and a group of parachute landing fall (PLF) platforms were at this installation, only a low-to-moderate level of activity was observed, and the airborne training devices appeared to be used infrequently. Until recently, the last observation of airborne-related training within this barracks was in early November 1979, when parachute-packing exercises were identified in open areas of the installation over a 2-week period. This activity may have been related to Ethiopia's acquisition during that time of ten CUB (AN-12) aircraft from the USSR. The CUB is a four-engine, medium-transport aircraft that is designed for use in airborne operations. These aircraft were deployed to the adjacent Harar Meda Airfield [REDACTED], and the parachute-packing exercises may have been part of a program of activity that the Ethiopians were conducting in conjunction with the newly-acquired CUB. This facility became less active, and vegetation was observed growing throughout most of the open areas during the subsequent 2 years (Figure 1). On at least one occasion, livestock were observed grazing in the open areas of the installation.

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3. (S/WN) In December 1981 the Ethiopians began to reactivate this installation, and an effort to upgrade and improve the barracks was begun. Five exercise areas that had become completely overgrown with vegetation were cleared and prepared for use, and three new exercise areas were established (Figure 2). Vegetation had also been cleared away from the airborne training devices, including the PLF platforms, the swing landing trainer, and the aircraft fuselage. A second aircraft fuselage was brought into the area in January 1982 for use in airborne training. This fuselage appeared to be a derelict CUB that had been cut into three sections for transport to this installation. The first section was identified in the area on [REDACTED] and the other two sections had arrived by [REDACTED]. These three sections were set up and reassembled during February. A building was constructed next to one of the quonset-shaped barracks within this installation during January. A second building was observed in the initial stages of construction within this facility during March.

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4. (S/WN) The first evidence of an increase in actual airborne training at this installation was the identification of a parachute-packing exercise in mid-January. Twenty-seven parachutes were observed being packed on [redacted] At least 300 people were observed in four separate formations within the facility on the same day. Additional parachute-packing exercises involving between 20 and 75 parachutes were observed from February through mid-April (Figure 3). During this time, a high level of training was observed on virtually every coverage of this installation. In addition to parachute-packing exercises, personnel were observed undergoing various training exercises, including practicing exit procedures from one of the aircraft fuselages, jumping from the PLF platforms, close-order drill, and calisthenics.

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5. (S/WN) No Ethiopian airdrop exercise has yet been observed. On [redacted] however, three CUBs were observed at Aba Tenna-Dejazmatch Yilma Airfield [redacted] at Diredawa in eastern Ethiopia. Three troop formations, each consisting of approximately 50 persons, were in the immediate vicinity of these aircraft. While it is possible that these may have been airborne troops involved in a training exercise, it is also possible that this activity may have been connected with the movement of Ethiopian military forces to the northern province of Eritrea, where government forces were involved in an offensive against insurgent forces.

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**REFERENCES**

**IMAGERY**

(S/WN) All available satellite imagery acquired from [redacted] was used in the preparation of this report.

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**DOCUMENT**

- 1. DIA. DDI-1100-ET-77, *Ground Order of Battle—Ethiopia (U)*, Dec 77 (SECRET, [redacted])  
[redacted]

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(S) Comments and queries regarding this report are welcome. They may be directed to [redacted] Third World Forces Division, Imagery Exploitation Group, NPIC, [redacted]

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