

An Open Letter to Harry Yuan, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Amos Sawyer, Boima Fahnbulleh, and Others

By Tarloh Munah Quiwonkpa

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It has been 20 years since I lost my friend and husband, General Thomas Quiwonkpa on that unforgettable day in Monrovia, Liberia (1985). Many people may be wondering why it has taken me this long to break my silence. Yes, it has taken me this long for many reasons. The most obvious reason was to reflect on the events before and after the death of my husband and to reconstruct my life as a widow and a single mother.

I wish to extend my personal condolences to all those who lost their loved ones during the 14 years of the senseless Liberian civil war. I am profoundly touched by their loss and pray that Liberians will change their culture of violence to peace for the betterment of the country and its people. In addition to the loss of my husband, many members of my family died during the civil war in Liberia. Liberians of all persuasions should come together in brotherly and sisterly love to rebuild our nation; a new Liberia that builds on our common bonds at the same time respecting our diversity. Every Liberian has a unique role to play in the rebuilding of the new nation, where collective interest is weighted more than individualism. The new Liberia must be built on equity, justice, respect, inclusion, transparency, accountability and religious tolerance.

One of the primary reasons for this open letter is to help bring final closure to the emotion and agony surrounding the death of General Thomas Quiwonkpa. As I have reflected on my husband's death, I still have many unanswered questions. I have waited for 20 years for the people who were closed to my husband, including his best friend, Harry Yuan, whom he considered his brother, to tell me the untold story about his death. Harry Yuan, I am told, was with Thomas during his final hour. Harry and the others whom I will name later have not spoken nor call me to give me their side of what went wrong. My 20 year-old son continues to ask me about information surrounding his father's death. I am interested in knowing what went wrong. What was his last statement? What was his demeanor at the point of death? What happened to his belongings and documents? How did others that went with him escape and he did not? Why hasn't anyone come forward to provide answers to these questions to his family?

The last memory I have of my late husband was when he walked out of our Silver Spring, Maryland home, accompanied by Harry Yuan in 1985. Harry Yuan suggested that Larmah Quiwonkpa (Thomas's sister), Yormie, and I relocate to the Twin Cities and reside with Miss Joanne Toweh. It later became clear to others, and me that Harry Yuan along with some external forces have recommended to Thomas that he topples the Doe government. Harry Yuan used the fraudulent 1985 presidential election in which Samuel Doe was declared winner, and the incident in which Doe ordered the beating of Thomas's mother to convince him that he should overthrow the Doe regime. Following Harry Yuan's explanation to Thomas about the manner in which "Samuel Doe ordered his soldiers to beat Ma Mango" (Thomas' mother), Thomas was convinced that it was necessary to remove Samuel Doe from power. Yes, Thomas Quiwonkpa was independent and capable of making his own decisions, but let us remember that persuasion is a powerful tool, particularly when the persuasion is coming from a confidant and best friend. I was hesitant to let my husband leave our residence but Harry Yuan looked at

me and said “Tarloh, I will be your eyes, your ears, and your nose and I will do exactly what you will like to see as though you were there in Sierra Leone.” Since the death of my husband in 1985, Harry Yuan has avoided me for 20 years. I need answers to these critical questions from Harry Yuan or anyone that was connected to this trip that led to my husband’s gruesome death. Answers to these questions will be helpful for his children understanding, and perhaps enable them to accept and deal with the circumstances surrounding their father’s death. Equally so, it will bring final closure of his death to me as well as the rest of the Quiwonkpa family.

Several attempts have been made over the years to contact Harry Yuan, but I have been unsuccessful. I am not sure if I have done anything wrong to Harry Yuan to avoid me all these years. It will be prudent for a closed family friend to at least call and sympathize with the family of a deceased friend after his death. Over the years, there have been theories and allegations surrounding Quiwonkpa’s death. Some people believed that General Thomas Quiwonkpa was betrayed by closed confidant or confidants or was set-up by other powerful parties. Some even believed that his association with some Liberians with different ideological points of view angered the external supporters, which caused them to remove the support system put in place for his rescue when needed. This support system was never made available to him when he needed to be rescued.

I do not know all the facts of the matter. However, what I do know is that Harry Yuan, Amos Sawyer, Archie Williams, H. Boima Fahnbulleh, Jr., Joe Wylie, Tom Kamara, Harry A. Greaves, Jr., Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and several others have not explained to any of my family or me what actually went wrong during the mishaps that led to the capture and murder of General Thomas Quiwonkpa. They have not sent me words of condolence for 20 years. Now, some of these same people are running for elected offices in Monrovia or rallying around certain potential leaders. Some are masquerading as the true leaders of Liberia and spewing solutions to our country’s problems. Yet, they have failed in their moral responsibilities to at least soothe a widow and her family in crisis. For me, they lack the moral authority to find just solutions to Liberia’s problems because they have failed to show kindness towards a widow whose husband died fighting their battle. They have not done the decent thing – admitting their roles in the death of my husband. I am now convinced they used my husband solely for their personal/selfish aims.

I wonder why these people call themselves patriots? They have not sent a word of condolence nor asked about the conditions of General Quiwonkpa’s children namely Kou, Deddeh, Gonkama, Jeleth, and Yormie. I wish that these people could have the decency to contact me with any information regarding these questions in this open letter. The answers to these questions will bring closure to the death of my husband, General Thomas Quiwonkpa. I am not bitter nor holding anyone responsible for the death of my husband, but simply attempting to uncover the facts and ascertain clarification of allegations and theories surrounding the failed attempted coup which led to his gruesome death in 1985.

Sincerely,

Signed: Tarloh Munah Quiwonkpa

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