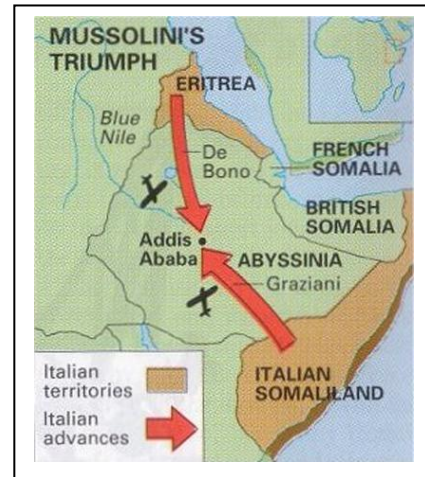


Commemorating and Remembering the 19th February 1937 Italy's War Crimes in Ethiopia

By Ewnetu Sime

For many years, we Ethiopians have celebrated the anniversaries for the nation's fallen heroes and innocent civilian who were massacred during the Italian occupation of 1935-1941, and in particular the 19th of February 1937 was a faithful day. Within few days, Fascist massacre of several thousand Ethiopians in Addis Ababa. The nation chose 19th February as a public holiday to pay respect and have commemorative ceremony in town and cities all over Ethiopia. This ceremony tradition continued in the Ethiopian Diaspora community. Last year as part of commemoration, the Global Alliance for Justice organized Global Public Protest Against newly erected the Graziani Mausoleum at Affile, south of Rome. Similarly several civic organizations also urging to support the protest and to commemorate this date where ever we are. The result was successful; it is expected to be the same or better this year.



In this article, the story of 1935 Italy Fascist aggression in Ethiopia is not described in great detail., But, as we commemorate the 19th February 1937 horrific day a brief history of event must be share to help us to connect to the great spirit of resistance in Ethiopia, and to recognize the significance of sacrifices made by our patriots .

Brief overview of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia:

During the 1935 period, Italy was one of emerging imperial powers in Europe. Mussolini was on power and he was increasingly stressed by the demands of maintaining Italy's colonial empire through bloated military resources. In 1935 he deployed military forces to invade Ethiopia for expansion of colonial territories in Africa. The main reasons for the invasion were, to avenge, to have a source of raw materials, to exploit free labor, etc... Mussolini didn't seem to understand that the Italians aggression was defeated by Ethiopian Patriots in the battle of Adowa in 1896. The first African nation marked a humiliating defeat to European colonizers. Since then, no foreign intruder has ever prevailed over Ethiopia.

On October 1935, Mussolini ordered his Generals to invade Ethiopia from two fronts. One of his Genera'sl army was invading from Eritrea, the northern front. The second General Rodolfo Graziani army was also invading from Italian Somaliland, the "southern front". In addition to its own army, Italy had recruited regiments from the colonial possessions of Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya. The northern front advanced and occupied holy city of Axum. The invading army looted many artifacts including the Obelisk of Axum. Similarly, the southern front began advancing toward capital city of Addis Ababa facing some resistance on its way. Interestingly, the Ethiopian offensive included killing of downed Italian pilot Tito Minniti. It is unfortunate that the Ethiopians force cannot sustain the offensive due to the sophisticated weapons and the use of poison gas by Italian Air Forces. The brutal bombing throughout the country

resulted to death of thousands innocent Ethiopians civilians including demolishing of a field hospital run by the Swedish Red Cross.

The European great power neither Britain nor France not interested to intervene as Mussolini troops marched deep into Ethiopia. After the Italian war machine broke all defense line from both fronts, Italy occupied the capital city Addis Ababa. The notorious General Graziani was installed as a ruler. After seeing the atrocities by Italian army, our patriots started guerrilla warfare, and continued their fight to liberate Ethiopia. By early May 1936, the Emperor had left the country and lived in exile in hope to get the International support. On June 30, 1936, the Emperor gave a remarkable speech before the League of Nations pleading to free Ethiopia from Italian invasion. Although Ethiopia was a member of the League, the League has done nothing to counter the Italian aggression. Nevertheless, the resistance by patriots continued.

The 19th of February 1937 EC (Yekatit 12, 1929 G.C) an unsuccessful attempt was made to assassinate the Italian military commander General R. Graziani by young two Ethiopians (Eritrean origin) by the name of Moges Asgedom and Abriha Debotch. The failure unleashed a reign of terror on city of Addis Ababa residents. A book entitled "Plot to kill Graziani" written by Ian Campbell, page 2 states Italian Fascist massacred scene as follows:

"..... it was the dark face of Fascism that the people of Addis Ababa saw that day, for although within moments it was clear that the crowd of beggars, many aged and blind, posed no threat, they were cut down en masse with machine-gun fires. There then followed throughout the city orgy of murder, bloodlust and mayhem on the part of Blackshirts and Fascist civilians that did not abate for several days, and was so devastating that to this day the dead have never been counted."

In spite of the massacre thousands of Ethiopians, and without any effective allies from International communities, the guerrilla patriots increased the resistance and fought the Italians with antiquated weapons aggressively for five years. During this period WWII war broke out. Britain along their allies declared war on Nazi Germany, and later with Italy. As part of overall war strategy against Italy, the British decided to move behind the Ethiopian Patriots to push the Italians forces from Ethiopia. In 1941EC the Italy armies surrender, and our country independence restored. In summary, the attempt to colonize Ethiopia failed disastrously. The Italian military supremacy certainly did not break the will of the patriotic warriors. We must continue to honor and respect this important day. , Without these brave men and women sacrifices, THERE WOULD BE NO ETHIOPIA today. We owe them to be a united citizen to build a better Ethiopia. This year anniversary mark 77th years since the horror and tragedy occurred.