

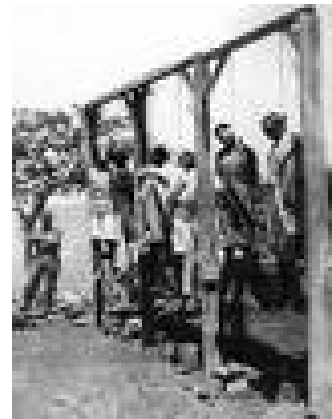
Italian Conquest

The year is 1935 and Mussolini has turned Italy into a power to be reckoned with. According to Mussolini, "war is to man as maternity is to woman". Still, there were other reasons to attack and conquer another country, even if the Age of Imperialism was nearly over. Mussolini was facing stressful affairs at home and felt that a war would divert attention. He also felt he needed to boost the regime's popularity and provide an outlet for over-population in Italy. Ethiopia was a prime target because it was still an independent country, one of only two in Africa. In 1896, neighbors Britain and France assisted Ethiopia in resisting an Italian attack, but they did not want to interfere with Italy in 1936. Ethiopian army was poorly equipped, and any resistance against it would end quickly.

The League of Nations, which was known for its inaction, did nothing to prevent Italy from attacking Ethiopia. One of the major problems for the League of Nations prior to World War II was its inaction to prevent aggression of any kind. This problem existed because many members of the League of Nations were the warring nations themselves. Both Ethiopia and Italy were League members at the time of the war. Two countries that could have figured prominently in the Italian-Ethiopian War, Britain and France did their best to stay away from the War. While each nation owned land neighboring Ethiopia (and long treated Ethiopia as a buffer state), neither nation wanted to get on the bad side of a powerful fascist leader in Mussolini. Britain and France also feared that if they supported Ethiopia and angered Italy, Mussolini could ally with German chancellor Adolf Hitler, which could have had a devastating impact on World War II. The only action the League of Nations took was an oil boycott of Italy, which many countries disobeyed.

On October 3, 1935, Italy attacked Ethiopia without a declaration of war. Four days later, the League of Nations declared Italy an aggressor, but as usual, took no action against the country. Italian troops held back until December of that year, when a border incident in the city of Wal Wal gave Italy its much needed excuse to attack Ethiopia.

An accurate portrayal of the war itself can be conveyed through American journalists. American journalists in Ethiopia were disappointed that the war, which was a one-sided battle the entire way, was boring. Knowing that they needed a good story to put in the paper, journalists delayed their reports and instead said that the Ethiopians were managing to hold off the Italian forces. This created an American sympathizing with Ethiopia, which tarnished the actual events of the war itself. Italy responded to the journalists rendering of the war by saying that the attack was completely necessary, that the Ethiopian government treated its citizens badly and deserved to be attacked (this hasn't been proven true). The inaccurate depiction of the war by American journalists revealed how one-sided the war was in Italy's favor, that the Ethiopian situation was hopeless.



The truth was that Ethiopia was outmatched and outnumbered and it took only a little over 7 months for Italy to achieve victory. Of the estimated 500,000 Italian soldiers Mussolini deployed to Ethiopia, only 1,537 were killed, less than 1% of the military. On May 2, 1936 emperor Haile Selassie went into exile just before Italian forces entered the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. On May 7, Italy officially annexed Ethiopia.

Review Questions

- 1. Why was Ethiopia a prime target in Italy's drive for empire?**
- 2. What was the main reason that Great Britain and France refused to get involved in Ethiopia?**
- 3. What response did the League of Nations take towards Italian aggression in Ethiopia?**