



ABYSSINIA: THE EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

DATE: JUNE 10 1940 – NOV 27 1941

| Belligerents | |
|---|---|
|  British Empire |  Italy |
|  Free Ethiopia |  Italian East Africa |
|  Free Belgium | |
|  Belgian Congo | |
|  Free France | |
|  Equatorial Africa | |

The East African Campaign (also known as the Abyssinian Campaign) was fought in East Africa during World War II by Allied forces, mainly from the British Empire, against Axis forces, primarily from Italy of Italian East Africa (Africa Orientale Italiana or AOI), between June 1940 and November 1941. Forces of the British Middle East Command, including units from the United Kingdom and the colonies of British East Africa, British Somaliland, British West Africa, the Indian Empire, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Mandatory Palestine, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and Sudan participated in the campaign. Imperial Ethiopian irregulars, the Free French and the Belgian Force Publique also participated.

PRELUDE: ITALIAN INVASION OF ABYSSINIA: OCT 03 1935 – MAY 05 1936

Located between the Italian territories of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland was the Kingdom of Abyssinia, one of the few independent African countries free of European colonial influence. The first Italian attempt to invade the mineral-rich Abyssinia was in 1896, which resulted in an Italian defeat. As early as 1932 the Italians were violating the Abyssinian borders, constructing a fort at the Walwal oasis and roads wide enough for military maneuvers into Abyssinian territory. Conflict soon broke out. In Nov 1934, a clash between Fitawrari

Shiferaw's troops and Italians at Walwal resulted in 150 Abyssinian and 50 Italian casualties, and the matter was brought to the League of Nations without effective resolution. Italy and Abyssinia each built up their militaries, each foreseeing that a wider future conflict was almost inevitable.

On Oct 3 1935, 100,000 Italian troops and Askari mercenaries headed by Emilio De Bono attacked from Eritrea without declaration of War; General Rodolfo Graziani led a smaller invasion force from Italian Somaliland. Adowa was captured on Oct 6, and Axum nine days later. The League of Nations, although blaming the conflict on the Italians, failed to impose significant sanctions on Italy as punishment. Instead of depriving Italy war-essential goods such as oil, coal, and iron, the League of Nations denied Italy of rather useless items such as camels, mules, donkey, and aluminum. Perhaps the most laughable was aluminum, which Italy was so rich of that the metal was one of Italy's chief exports.

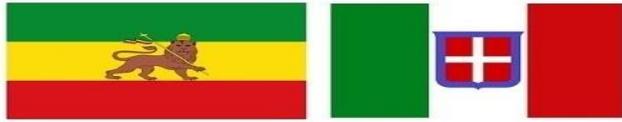
The British attempted to threaten Italy with military action, but the Italians called the bluff; Benito Mussolini knew that the British had no force spare to threaten Italy. The greatest failure by the British was not denying the use of the Suez Canal to the Italians, an act that could greatly complicate the logistics of the invasion. A faction of the League of Nations also attempted to secretly draft a compromise to end the war, which benefited the European colonial powers more so than for the restoration of Abyssinian sovereignty; this compromise was uncovered soon after and met a quick end.



In mid-Dec, Abyssinian King Haile Selassie called for a counterattack against the new Italian commander General Pietro Badoglio, but Italian technological superiority ensured Italy's victory. The Italians employed artillery and chemical weapons that the Abyssinians were ill-prepared to fight against with their pre-WW1 era rifles, spears, and shields. On Mar 31 1936, the Italians defeated the Abyssinians at the Battle of Maychew, the last major battle of the war. On May 2, Haile Selassie exiled from his country, and on May 5 the capital city of Addis Ababa fell. On May 7, Italy officially announced the establishment of Italian East Africa, merging the Italian-held territories of Italian Somaliland, Abyssinia, and Eritrea.

On May 9, with the newly acquired territory in Africa, Mussolini declared King Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy the Emperor of Abyssinia. Marshal Badoglio was given the titles Duke of Addis Ababa and Viceroy of Italian East Africa. At the Vatican, Pope Pius XI congratulated the Italian aggressors on their recent conquest. The League of Nations continued to condemn Italy for its aggression, alienating Italy from the countries of the League. When the League of Nations realized the harm done, it tried to woo Italy back by lifting the trade sanctions in July 1936, but it was too late; Italy would quit the League in the same month.

Overall, this invasion by itself was of no greater consequence in terms of world affairs. However, after the invasion, not only was an Anglo-Italian alliance against future German aggression now impossible, this actually drove Italy so far from Britain that she was now considering siding with Germany.



INVASION OF BRITISH SOMALILAND: AUGUST 03 – AUGUST 19, 1940

When Italy declared war on the Allies on Jun 10 1940, the Governor General and Viceroy of Italian East Africa, Amedeo, Duke of Aosta, began planning an invasion of British colonial holdings in East Africa known as British Somaliland. In late Jun 1940, King Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy and the Italian Supreme Command approved the plan for such an invasion. The invasion was to be launched in early Aug 1940, and it was to be led by Lieutenant General Guglielmo Nasi. The invasion was to be conducted by 23 colonial battalions organized into 5 brigades, 3 Blackshirt battalions, and 3 bands of native troops; the force was total about 24,000.

On the British side, recently promoted Brigadier Arthur Reginald Chater led British forces in British Somaliland. He commanded a 4,000-strong force consisted of the Somaliland Camel Corps, the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion King's African Rifles, the 1st Battalion Northern Rhodesian Regiment, the 3/15th Punjab Regiment, and the 1st East African Light Battery. Compared to the Italians, his force critically lacked heavy vehicles and aircraft.

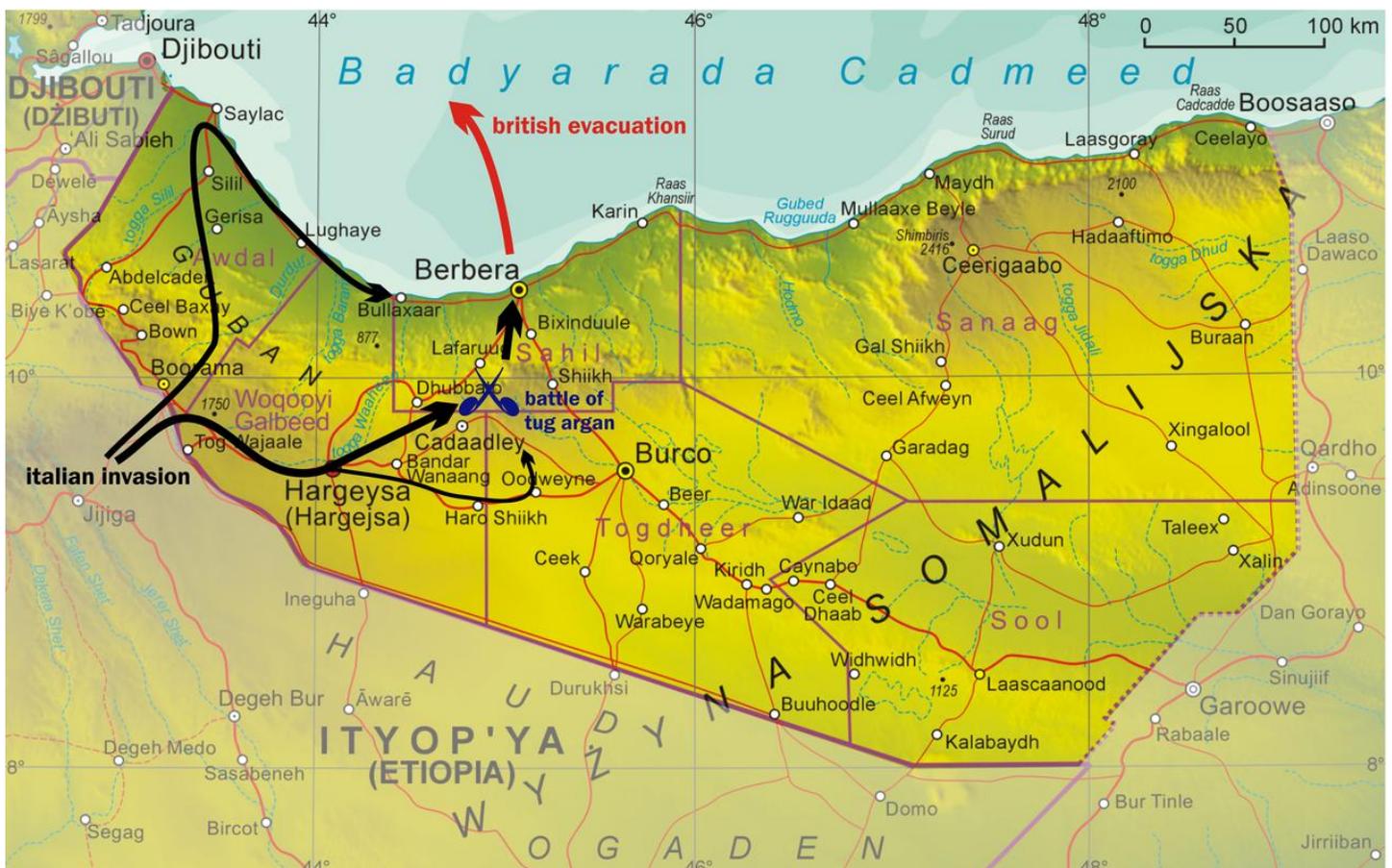


The invasion began on Aug 3 1940. The Italians advanced in three columns, each marching toward the port of Zeila, the Hargeisa-Adadlek region, and the Odweina-Burao region. Zeila was taken by Italian Lieutenant General Bertoldi's troops on Aug 5; this prevented any reinforcements from coming in from French Somaliland to the west. In the center, Italian Lieutenant General Carlo De Simone passed through the rough mountain terrain to Hargeisa; although initially held up by the British Camel Corps and Northern Rhodesia Regiment troops, light tanks pushed back the defense line by Aug 5, allowing the Italians to advance again on Aug 7. The eastern Italian column headed by Brigadier General Bertello reached Odweina on Aug 6, and then turned northwest toward the village of Adadle.

On Aug 7, the 1/2nd Punjab Regiment arrived from Aden to reinforce the defense. On the following day, troops of the 2nd Battalion Black Watch arrived as well. Meanwhile, Commander-in-Chief Middle East Command, General Archibald Wavell, ordered a battalion of infantry plus artillery pieces to march toward Berbera, the capital of British Somaliland, but they would not arrive in time.

By Aug 10, most of the British defenders were pushed back behind the Tug Argan pass. On Aug 11, Major General Reade Godwin-Austen arrived in Berbera and took over the command from Brigadier Chater. On the same day that Godwin-Austen arrived, an Italian brigade attacked one of the six defended hills overlooking the only road to Berbera and captured it, incurring heavy casualties as they fought off a company of the 3rd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment that defended the hill. Two counterattacks were launched in an attempt for the British to re-capture the hill, but both of them failed. Meanwhile, Italians attempted to take two more hills, but they were thwarted as well. On Aug 12, Italian troops attacked all five hills held by British and Commonwealth troops, taking key positions and destroying two of the very few artillery pieces that the British had. Heavy fighting continued as the Italians continued to assert pressure on the British positions, but no strategically important positions changed hands.

On Aug 14, Godwin-Austen recommended to Cairo that the forces under his command should be given the order to withdraw from the Tug Argan pass region and fall back into the city of Berbera. The recommendation was accepted and the withdraw order was given the following day. Late on Aug 15, the Italians took Observation Hill. After nightfall, the British withdrawal from the Tug Argan pass region began, with units of the Black Watch, 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion King's African Rifles, and 1/2nd Punjab Regiment forming the rearguard at Barkasan.



Even as the fighting was going on at Tug Argan, the British Royal Navy had already been evacuating civilians from Berbera. As the Italian troops marched closer to the city, the evacuation of military personnel began. In general, the Italians chose not to interfere with the evacuation operations as a political measure; Italy had only just joined the war against Britain and the government in Rome was unsure whether or not a peace would be reached in the near future. By Aug 17, Italian troops reached Bulhar, about 64 kilometers west of Berbera, but were held up by naval bombardment from HMS Ceres. On the same day, the rearguard position set up at Barkasan was attacked in late morning, which resisted the attackers until after dark when they fell back into Berbera. Most of the British troops were aboard ships for evacuation by Aug 18, while HMAS Hobart and a number of other smaller vessels remained behind to collect stragglers and those who remained behind to destroy vehicles, fuel stores, and other things that could be of use to the Italians if captured. On Aug 19, all British ships and personnel departed from Berbera. About 7,000 people were evacuated. The Camel Corps was disbanded, a decision made by the troops of the unit with British approval; its members disappeared into the population with their weapons.

During the invasion, the British and Commonwealth forces suffered 250 to 260 casualties (38 killed), and Italian casualty figures were reported to be somewhere between 200 and 1,000. Additionally, about 2,000 Somali irregular troops, fighting under both banners (though more famously under the Italian banner), were killed or wounded.

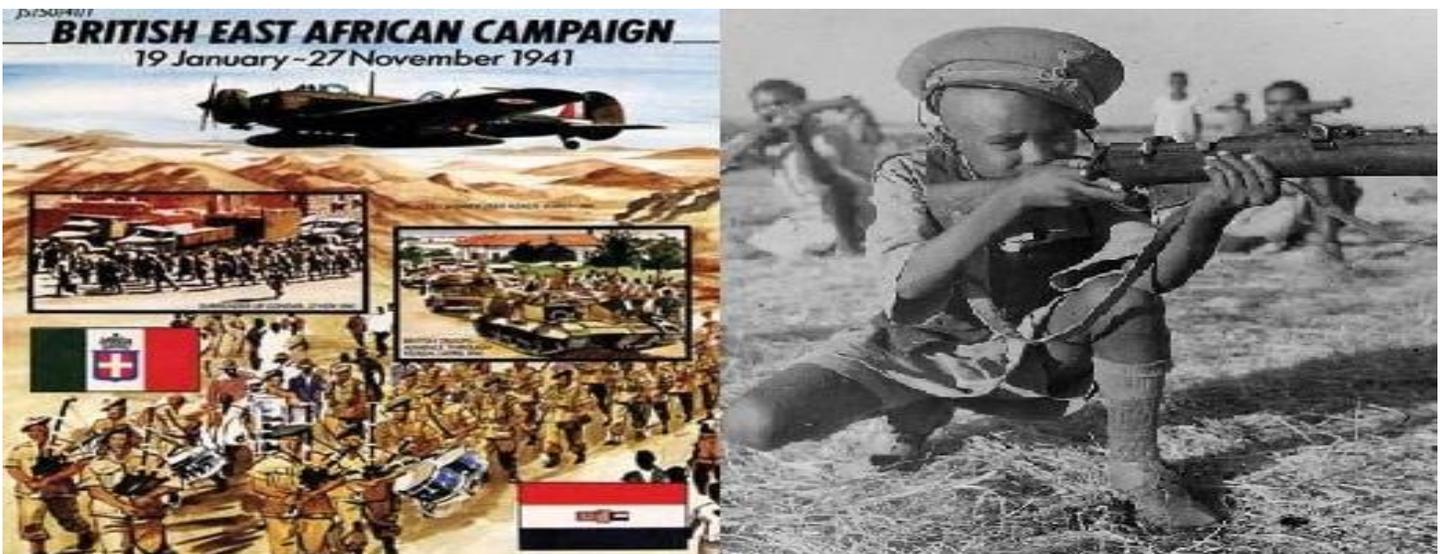


THE AFTERMATH

Berbera later became a submarine base of the Italian Red Sea Flotilla. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, citing the low casualty figures, criticized the defenders for having abandoned Berbera prematurely without putting in enough effort to defend it, leading to the first British possession to be captured by enemy forces. Wavell, defending his decision, noted that his forces at British Somaliland were facing overwhelming Italian forces, and that the orderly withdraw in such circumstances with minimal casualty figures was a something of a feat.

INVASION OF ITALIAN EAST AFRICA

In East Africa, the earlier picture of conquering Italian troops was no longer seen in early 1941. Although the Italian Viceroy Duke Aosta had taken Sudan, Kenya, and British Somaliland early, by this time the Italian troops were demoralized from their countrymen's losses in North Africa. Aosta withdrew his advanced positions and consolidated his forces within Italian East Africa on a defensive stance. The British had broken Italian communication codes, and with that advantage in hand, an offensive was launched from Sudan and Kenya with a mixed force of Indian, Abyssinian, Sudanese, Nigerian, Ghanaian, and South African troops, both regular and irregular. From Sudan, the Commonwealth 4th and 5th Indian Divisions marched into Eritrea on Jan 19 1941 under the direction of Lieutenant General William Platt; Italian forces at Eritrea had already retreated toward Agordat two days earlier. From Kenya, Lieutenant General Alan Cunningham launched his offensive on Feb 11. Major Orde Wingate (of later Chindit fame in Burma), played a role in leading Abyssinian irregulars in this campaign, conducting sabotage and intelligence missions behind Italian lines in the Gojjam Province.



On Jan 19 1941, the Indian 4th and 5th Divisions of the Sudan force attacked Agordat under the field command of Major General Lewis Heath. The Indian 4th Division took the northern road via Keru and the Indian 5th Division the southern via Barentu. After Agordat was captured, Italian forces made their stand at Keren, 60 miles east of Agordat. For ten days British forces assaulted Keren, but the Italian defense held, causing heavy casualties on both sides. On Mar 1, Platt was joined by four battalions including Indian, Senegalese, and French troops, bolstering his number to 13,000. The Italians were doing the same, however, with their numbers grown to 23,000. Platt resumed his attack on Mar 14, and was finally able to take Keren on Mar 27. Both sides continued to suffer heavy casualties until the last day of the battle.



As the Indian 5th Division marched toward the Eritrean capital of Asmara, the city was declared an open city on Apr 1 to avoid destruction. Unlike Asmara, however, Massawa was not to be given up as easily for its strategic importance. Italian Admiral Bonnetti, the officer in charge of the forces there, prepared his 10,000 men and 100 vehicles for a stand, but the front lines fell quickly and the remaining troops were demoralized. Massawa was taken on Apr 8. During this campaign, Admiral Bonnetti's seven destroyers were all sunk by British surface and air units; his submarines escaped, returning to Italy by sailing around the southern tip of Africa. With the port of Massawa secured and the Italian navy driven out of the Red Sea, the British secured a reliable supply route to their war efforts in Africa. After Massawa, the Sudan force pushed southwards. The mountain keep of Amba Alagi fell on May 14, allowing the Sudan force to connect with the Kenya force which had already captured Addis Ababa.





While the Sudan force fought fiercely in the north, the southern Kenya force had a relatively easier time in the south. It captured Mogadishu, the capital of Italian Somaliland, on Feb 25. On Mar 16, Cunningham carried out the first successful landing operation in WW2 by landing two Sikh battalions of the Indian Army on the beach near Berbera in British Somaliland; the Italian force of 60 men surrendered after being overwhelmed by the amphibious assault. The next major target, the Abyssinian capital of Addis Ababa, was captured by Cunningham's troops on Apr 6. After the arrival of the Sudan force from the north, the remaining Italian troops were surrounded. On May 5, Emperor of Abyssinia Haile Selassie, previously exiled by Italian troops in 1936, returned to Addis Ababa under the escort of Wingate's troops.

On May 16, Duke Aosta formally surrendered although Italian resistance lasted until Nov 27 under General Nasi based in Gondar in Begemder Province. After that, Italian guerrilla forces continued to fight until Italy's surrender in 1943.



MEMOIR '44

M'44 SCENARIOS FOR THE EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

The East African Campaign includes 18 standard scenarios. These scenarios chronicle the major engagements of the East African campaign, and include only the best available in the Scenarios from the Front (SFTF) files section on the DoW website, as well as 2 official scenarios by Richard Borg and jdrommel.

No campaign rules are included; not all M'44 players have access to the Campaign books. Instead, simply tally up the number of medals won in each scenario after playing both sides. A medal tally table for all scenarios is included below.

These scenarios include 3 different armies. Although optional, it is suggested that you use the unofficial Battle of Nations rules when playing the sides of these armies.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>BoN 6</p> <p>Belgium - Belgian Army</p>  <p>Tactical Withdrawal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When a Belgian unit is attacked in a Close Assault and sustains no casualties, but does retreat, the enemy unit may not Take Ground or Armour Overrun into the vacated hex. | <p>BoN 22</p> <p>South Africa - South African Army</p>  <p>Stiff Upper Lip</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Same as BCF [Nations 5]. <p>Voorwarts Mars!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any South African infantry unit that Takes Ground after a successful Close Assault may move one extra hex. Terrain Movement restrictions still apply. |
| <p>BoN 15</p> <p>India - British Indian Army</p>  <p>Stiff Upper Lip</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Same as BCF [Nations 5]. <p>Indian Tenacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When any Indian unit is attacked and sustains no casualties, but is forced to retreat, it may ignore all flags. <p>Gurkhas</p> <p>Indian/Nepalese Infantry Units marked with a Gurkha badge apply these rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unit may ignore 1 flag.• When in terrain that ignores a flag, may ignore 2 flags instead.• Unit at full strength in Close Assault battles at +1 dice.• Unit may move 2 hexes to combat into Close Assault. | |

THE EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN 1940-41

[1. JUL 15: Battle of Moyale](#)

[2. AUG 11 – AUG 15: Battle of Tug Argan](#)

[3. NOV 06: Gallabat & Metemma **](#)

[4. DEC 16: Raid on El Wak](#)

[5. JAN 02: French Cavalry's Charge](#)

[6. JAN 21: Battle of Agordat](#)

[7. FEB 05 – FEB 08: Battle of Keren](#)

[8. FEB 19 – FEB 21: Battle of Cub-Cub](#)

[9. MAR 11: Capture of Asosa](#)

[10. MAR 22: Gambela](#)

[11. APR 08: Storm on Massawa](#)

[12. APR 15: Bortan River – Action 1](#)

[13. APR 24: Bortan River – Action 2](#)

[14. MAY 01 – MAY 18: Amba Alagi](#)

[15. JUN 08: Bortan River – Action 3](#)

[16. JUN 09: Mogi Pass](#)

[17. JUL 03: The Fall of Sano **](#)

[18. NOV 13 – NOV 27: Gondar – Last Stand in East Africa](#)

** Scenario notes

1. Gallabat & Metemma: all infantry are the 10th Indian Brigade. If you wish, use the Battle of Nations rules (see card above).

2. The Fall of Sano: "Mort Subite" means "Sudden Death". If the Allied player wins by Sudden Death score the full 6 medals.

There are a grand total of 211 medals for the 18 standard scenarios.

| SCENARIO (+ total medal count) | P1 | P2 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Battle of Moyale (12) | | |
| 2. Battle of Tug Argan (12) | | |
| 3. Gallabat & Metemma (8) | | |
| 4. Raid on El Wak (10) | | |
| 5. French Cavalry's Charge (10) | | |
| 6. Battle of Agordat (12) | | |
| 7. Battle of Keren (13) | | |
| 8. Battle of Cub-Cub (12) | | |
| 9. Capture of Asosa (10) | | |
| 10. Gambela (12) | | |
| 11. Storm on Massawa (12) | | |
| 12. Bortan River – Action 1 (12) | | |
| 13. Bortan River – Action 2 (12) | | |
| 14. Amba Alagi (12) | | |
| 15. Bortan River – Action 3 (12) | | |
| 16. Mogi Pass (12) | | |
| 17. The Fall of Sano (12) | | |
| 18. Gondar – Last Stand E. Africa (16) | | |
| TOTAL MEDAL TALLY | /211 | /211 |

Acknowledgments to the authors of the scenarios that make up this East African Campaign compilation:

Richard Borg

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This East African Campaign booklet was compiled by [Semba](#)