

# Ethiopia Smolders



**BANDIT-BAITING:** Italians punish some Ethiopian criminals by public ridicule and poking them with bayonets

**A**S ONE of the few foreigners permitted to go beyond the "No Trespassing" sign hung out by Italy over her new empire, my recent five months' tour of Ethiopia convinced me that the vast amounts of material and men required to maintain Italian domination are costing Mussolini dearly. Italian taxpayers are bearing single-handed the cost of the most expensive colonial enterprise in modern times.

Italy's financial and human resources are being heavily drained, not only by a vast road-building program in the conquered kingdom, but particularly by the efforts of 200,000 men who compose the fascist expeditionary force to pacify a warlike population of 9,000,000 natives in a territory larger than France and Italy combined.

In Addis Ababa, Rodolfo Graziani, Italian Viceroy, resigns, packs his trunks, and prepares to depart. Ill health is ending his Ethiopian career—ill health caused by wounds received last winter when embittered natives hurled hand grenades at him, only two weeks after he had declared that all Ethiopia was securely under Italian control.



**NATIVES DEMONSTRATE** almost daily before Italy's bank in Addis Ababa demanding silver, not paper lire

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Appearances are deceptive. Northern Ethiopia, where massacres of Italian garrisons are now reported, looked like a haven of peace when I motorcycled through there. On the main highway, khaki-uniformed Italian road-builders swung their spades, while their guns, stacked near by, were used mainly to hang their garments on. But I noticed that in the native villages only women, children, and old men were about; and, though I was feasted royally by my Italian hosts, my suggestion to go wild boar hunting in the thickets just a few miles outside camp was always hurriedly, though courteously, sidestepped.

When I reached Dessie, two-thirds of the way to Addis Ababa, orders came from Viceroy Graziani that I was not to continue to the capital without an escort of two trucks, four machine guns, an officer, and sixty white troops. I had entered the military zone. Instead of leisurely surveying the new Roman conquest, as I had anticipated, I found myself on the way to army headquarters at Addis Ababa as the only neutral observer of a war to which no foreign correspondents had been invited.

Haile Selassie, former emperor, has fled into exile. Leading native princes have been captured and executed. But hostilities never have ceased. The mountainous, arid, unexplored southwest affords excellent protection to rebel bands against Italian aircraft. Caproni bombers vainly seek out isolated villages suspected of giving aid to Ethiopian warriors, and drop warnings in the shape of shiny, conical explosives. Yet these daily airplane patrols cannot fathom the mysteries of the jungle and its hiding places for arms and ammunition.

My experience on flights with Italian officers persuades me that those in the air are in greater danger than the rebel tribes they seek to frighten. During the dry season, the extreme heat of the mid-day causes air pockets which toss the huge tri-motored machines about like paper kites. Loss of control has led to a high number of casualties. Severe storms during the rainy season bring another hazard: forced landings in hostile country.

At one Italian military outpost, the first sight to greet us on the jungle clearing that served as a landing-field was the wreckage of three Capronis—all that remained of General Locatelli's ill-fated scouting expedition. The planes, carrying ten high officials and twenty soldiers, had been forced down near a village. At night, while all were asleep inside the bombers, confident that the natives were harmless, several hundred Ethiopians machine-gunned the planes. All the Italians were killed, except a priest and a minor officer.

At Dembi Dolo, where we landed on a clearing burned out of the thicket, the Italian commandant was comfortably installed in a brick house that had been abandoned by Swedish-American missionaries. On our two-hour journey by mule to the "residence," we passed smiling Negroes who waved greetings. Unlike the Galla and Amhari people, whose lands were ravaged in the Italo-Ethiopian

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lands were ravaged in the Italo-Ethiopian war, these natives had had no unhappy contacts with white men. They welcomed the Italians in simple faith as successors to their Swedish teachers, the only Europeans they had ever known.

But even these friendly natives were no real protection to the handful of Italian officers who were trying to control the region without any line of communication with Addis Ababa except by radio and airplane. They had mistakenly organized the sturdiest young Negroes into military units called *bandi*. The mere offer of a modern rifle was inducement enough to bring twice as many volunteers as could be trained and equipped. An Ethiopian cannot win a wife without owning a lance, but with one modern rifle he can acquire several brides—and he usually does.



**BIG-GAME HUNT** in the market place of Addis Ababa. Below: The best restaurant in the capital is so crowded that five sittings are necessary at each meal

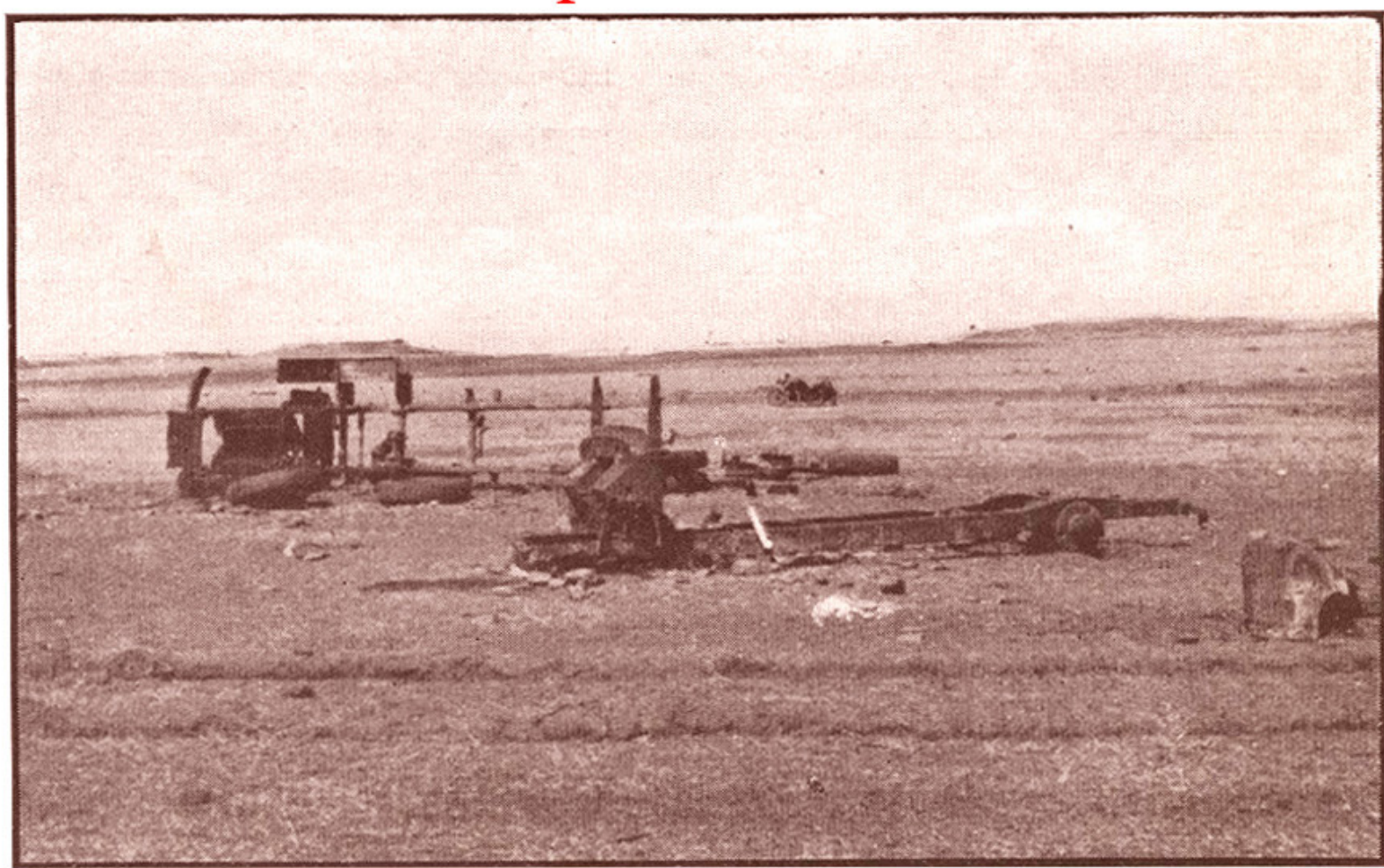


During the frequent wedding celebrations that ensued, the *bandi* imbibed so much honey-beer—the native hooch—that they began shooting their new guns not only at one another, but, in the same festive spirit, at the Italians! By the time we arrived, the Italians were wondering how to recover the rifles.

Another amusing, yet pertinent, incident occurred at Gambela, near the Anglo-Sudan border. The five Italian officers commanding the garrison there had intended to rely on their 50 Askari—Negro troops from Italian Libya—to protect them. But on the day I arrived, the commandant discovered that his soldiers, after admiring the Sudanese beauties bathing in a near-by river all day, were stealing away from sentry duty to join them at night. He then decided that a less vulnerable line of defense was necessary. Summoning the natives, he opened an impressive-looking coffer containing 5000 silver thalers, and distributed them to his new neighbors. Thus he solved the problems of love and military tactics.

Without any rain-proof airports in all these strategic positions, and with

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**STUCK IN THE MUD:** These skeletons of Italian army trucks are part of a convoy which met such a fate. Ethiopian roads are impassable most of the year

no roads in this region, the Italians, during the wet season from May to October, have no way of controlling the vast territory. When the heavy rains began, only Addis Ababa and Asmara had hard-ground airports. Elsewhere, the hastily-cleared fields became bogs too dangerous for use by heavy Caproni planes.

Only a quarter of the main highway from Asmara to the capital has been paved with rain-resistant asphalt. The Italian road-builders—the first white men to do manual labor in Africa—worked 12 hours a day, including Sunday, to insure through communications before the rains set in; yet it was beyond their powers to pave 2000 miles of projected highways in a single dry season.

**O**N MY WAY back to Asmara by motorcycle, during the “little rains” that precede the summer torrents, the roads were already rivers of mud. Between Debra Sina and Dessie the road was blocked by a column of 3000 supply trucks, stuck in the mud for five days. Neither chains nor wooden supports could free the wheels. Only after twenty soldiers were harnessed like mules to each truck were some of them dislodged. Sixty trucks were never pushed out, and today their skeletons remain there, embedded in the quagmire.

It is therefore not surprising that bands of hostile tribesmen have taken advantage



**HAILE SELASSIE'S LAST STAND:** This rare picture, captured by the Italians, shows the Emperor manning a machine gun before he fled into exile in May, 1936



**A REMINDER** that Ethiopia is still unconquered. Forced to land, these three Italian bombers were burned and their crews were killed by hostile tribesmen

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of the havoc caused by broken lines of communication during the rainy season of hostile tribesmen have taken advantage of the havoc caused by broken lines of communication during the rainy season to strike back at the Italians. But if the difficulties of "pacification" are as formidable during the second year of the Italian regime in Ethiopia as they were in the first, all the obstacles are not topography and climate.

In dealing with the natives the Italians often disregard primitive folkways. In their haste to confront the world with the picture of a fascist Ethiopia, they have not sufficiently studied the subjects of their experiment. Sometimes the story has been an Ethiopian version of *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*.

The policy of buying off Ethiopian princes with pensions (at times amounting to 20,000 lire monthly) or with deluxe Fiat limousines and trips to Italy has been a mistake. For every native prince who is on the Italian pay roll, a score of minor chieftains are disgruntled because they receive too little or no share of the booty. In resentment, these chieftains have turned against Italy. Since history began, the normal occupation of most Ethiopian men has been warfare or brigandage, just as agriculture and marketing are the women's province. Never before were the rewards of daring so tempting: strange European food and drink, brilliant uniforms, new and powerful guns and ammunition.

Not all the guns and ammunition are won by fighting. Rifles and cartridges of Italian make frequently get to the natives by peaceful means: when troops or road laborers barter them secretly for chickens, leopard or monkey skins, or souvenirs. Often the tribesmen will accept no other currency.

Paper lire have no significance for them, and the silver thalers coined by Rome are so obviously lacking in metallic content that the natives spurn them. While I was in Addis Ababa, demonstrations against Italian currency by Ethiopian tradesmen outside the gates of the branch of the Banco di Roma were an almost daily occurrence, usually ending only after the Askari guard fired into the mob.

It is doubtful whether the Italian regime made much headway in 1936-37 in winning over the population by means of its widely-advertised medical, educational, and agricultural reforms. This aid went principally to Galla Negroes, slaves for centuries to the Ethiopian ruling caste. The Gallas accepted the medicine for themselves and for their cattle—when it tasted good. Little Galla boys donned black shirts, shouldered wooden muskets, and marched in squadrons of "Young Fascists" before the Italian newsreel cameras.

**B**UT WHEN the Italians meted out public punishment to many of the tribesmen for pilfering, friends and relatives of these tribesmen often turned to their former masters, still hiding in the brush, for sympathy and also plans for revenge.

In practicing certain types of chastise-

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ment, the Italians have run counter to native sensibilities. The penalty of death was usual for almost any crime under the old regime, and was accepted stoically by the accused and his tribe. Prisons were unknown. Expecting to be hailed as merciful, the Italians made theft punishable, not with death, but with public flogging or forced labor. But to the native, death is preferable to being held up to the ridicule of his fellow man, who is accustomed to regard corporal punishment or hard work as a lasting disgrace.

Even more resentment was stirred up through Italian efforts to exact the death penalty for what no Ethiopian could bring himself to consider a crime—failure to give up arms after surrendering to the conquerors. The reaction against that decree was so widespread it could not be enforced.

To deprive an Ethiopian of his lance or rifle is to wrest his manhood and good name from him. When the Italians tried to do so, thousands of otherwise docile natives fled into the waste lands to form part of the rebel bands which have already succeeded in driving Viceroy Graziani back to Rome. From those hiding places they spread terror wherever the soldier-laborers from Italy are struggling, against tremendous odds, to build a new empire for their imperial Duce.

—*Ernst Wiese*

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