



Ethiopia: Shammas into Dirt

During the past weeks thousands upon thousands of Ethiopian warriors have marched past their Emperor in Addis Ahaba before going off to the front and thousands upon thousands more will probably do so in the weeks to come. What made last week's march-by notable were the facts that the Minister of War, grizzled Ras Mulu Getta, was personally leading 100,000 troops to war, and that those near the reviewing stand heard their sad-eyed little Emperor deliver his most moving campaign speech to date.

One chief, followed by his own band of delirious drummers, was bitterly disgraced when his mule suddenly shied in front of the royal stand and sent the rocketing Ras sprawling on the ground. Proudest of the warriors was General Machacha's chief adjutant who went cantering by on a donkey, magnificently arrayed in stiff shirt, dinner jacket, crossed cartridge belt. To these and their followers bushy whiskered little Power of Tnnity cried: "It is not the Emperor who wants war but the Italians who are pushing the fight. We will all die one day, either by typhus or pneumonia, but it is much better to die for your country.

"The Italians will try to repulse you with machine guns. They have machine guns but we have God on our side.

"We urge you not to fight in the traditional old way of massing against the enemy. Guard against hot-headedness, because if the enemy discovers you in angry groups he will burn you as wood in a blaze. . . . If you see an airplane, leave the open spaces and hide in the forest. All soldiers with good guns should then shoot at the plane When fighting begins you will be within range of the Italian guns. Divest yourselves of shields and spears, because they will form a brilliant target.

"Do not wash your shammas.* Allow them to become dirty and therefore less visible. When we have defeated the invader you may again take up your shields and don clean clothes.

"Comrades I shall be with you on the battlefield to shed my blood freely with yours in defense of our common fatherland. We shall accept no such peace terms as those France proposes. I shall die with you if necessary rather than submit to such humiliation."

Railway Bargain At Awash last week, at the edge of the spidery railroad bridge crossing the Awash River, a Swiss machine gun expert named Whittlely was working like mad to protect the only railway in Ethiopia at its most vulnerable point. For this purpose he had at his disposal a carload of Swiss anti-aircraft machine guns of the latest model, all the ammunition he required, and a thousand black soldiers who were the worst shots Expert Whittlely had ever seen. Finally he figured out a system to offset his gun crews' miserable marksmanship.

RAS TAFARI LIVES AND REIGNS!

Because of the steep slopes on either side of the railway line any Italian plane attempting to bomb the bridge must fly low directly overhead. Whittley arranged his guns in star-shaped formation with sights screwed tight and set for an imaginary point just above the centre of the bridge. Providing the Ethiopian soldiers remembered where the triggers were at the right moment, they were sure to pink any plane that entered the field of fire.

The official name of the only railway in Ethiopia is Compagnie du Chemin de Fer Franco-Ethiopien de Djibouti à Addis Ababa. Between magnificent modern stations at either end of the line stretch 494 miles of rough, single-track narrow-gauge roadbed over which a collection of ramshackle second-hand French rolling stock normally makes bi-weekly trips. One of the few pieces of equipment which can compare in splendor with the two terminals is Emperor Haile Selassie's white private car. Because natives along the barren right-of-way are in the habit of prying up steel rails to beat into swords and spearheads, ordinary trains travel only about 10 m.p.h., take three full days to make the trip. Pride of the line is the Addis Ababa Flyer, a weekly express that in the dry season covers the 494 miles in 36 hours. Nothing moves at night.

In 1894 France persuaded suspicious Emperor Menelik to let her build an Ethiopian railroad. Not till 1917 was the last spike driven. Since then the road has carried 75% of Ethiopia's foreign trade, and in 1933 returned a profit of 200 francs per transported ton to its French investors, who then owned 20,000 out of 34,000 shares. Part of Pierre Laval's deal with Benito Mussolini last January was the sale of 2,500 French shares of railroad stock to the Italian Government.

Early this month France quietly did her best to make sure that there would be no bombing of her road by moving 200 white and colonial troops into Dire Dawa, biggest town along the line, as a railway guard. Britain, which already had a heavily armed force at the British legation at Addis Ababa, warned Rome that because of the number of foreigners at Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa, any attempt to cut the railroad to Djibouti and the outside world would be considered an unfriendly act. Heeding all this, Italy last week was reported to have offered to spare the railroad if Emperor Haile Selassie would remove all troops and munitions from Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. The King of Kings was supposed to have turned down this proposal on the ground that he needed his troops in those two towns to protect foreigners from his civilian subjects. Next offer was to spare the road if Ethiopia promised to transport no munitions on it. Haile Selassie appeared to leap at this idea. Since the League lifted its arms embargo against Ethiopia, guns and ammunition have been coming into the black empire, not by way of the railroad from Djibouti but by motor truck to Harar 125 miles from the British Somaliland border.

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