

sible for the country's food problems. Notwithstanding MSF's assertions to the contrary, Ethiopia's democrats will never consider this commitment to the small peasant as an act of "collaboration" with the dictatorship.

EVENTS AND VIEWS ■■■■■■■■■■ EVENTS AND VIEWS ■■■■■■■■■■

DOGALI: The Short-lived victory

26 January 1987 marks the 100th anniversary of the battle of DOGALI at which RAS ALULA, one of the greatest generals of 19th century Ethiopia, and at that time governor of the province of HAMASSEN (in present-day ERITRIA) dealt the first blow to Italian colonialist ambitions in Ethiopia.

To understand the historic significance of the victory, one must recall the circumstances that led to the occupation of the Red Sea port of MASSAWA by the Italians on 3 June 1885 amidst protests by the Ethiopian Emperor YOHANNES IV who claimed that the sea was "the natural frontier of Ethiopia".

In 1884, a semi-religious and semi-political rebellion led by Mohammed Ashmit El Mahadi who, incidentally, is the great grandfather of the present Prime Minister of the Sudan, put the Egyptian occupation army in that country in a very precarious situation. The Egyptian commander decided to evacuate its defeated forces to Massawa which at that time was under its administration. This was however only possible if the Emperor of Ethiopia could be persuaded to allow them a safe passage through his country. There were negotiations between Ethiopia, Egypt and Great Britain which led to the signing of a treaty by virtue of which the Emperor accepted to allow the Egyptians to withdraw to Massawa. On the other hand, all the regions evacuated by the Egyptians, specially the BOGOS country (the northern part of present-day Eritrea) together with all the stores, arms and ammunition were ceded to Ethiopia. The treaty was carried out loyally; the Egyptians arrived safely in Massawa and soon with-

drew from the whole region.

It is at this juncture that Italy, a latecomer in the scramble for Africa, occupied the port. This was encouraged by the British who feared that Egypt's evacuation and "Ethiopia's incapacity to hold the place against even one ship of a European Power" would create a 'vacuum' which might be filled by France, Britain's main rival in Africa.

Tension between Ethiopia and Italy rapidly increased and reached a dangerous point when colonial forces seized SA'ATI some 30 km inland from Massawa in order 'to protect the caravan road between the port and the interior'.

RAS ALULA who was responsible for the defense of the northern marches of the empire, decided to launch an attack, arguing as his Emperor, that as far as he was concerned, the sea was the natural frontier of Ethiopia. One argument he put forward to Gerald H. Portal, a British envoy sent by Queen Victoria to mediate between Ethiopia and Italy was not surprising, coming as it did from someone displaying what the envoy called 'fanatical patriotism': "The Italians will come to SA'ATI only if I can go as governor to Rome".

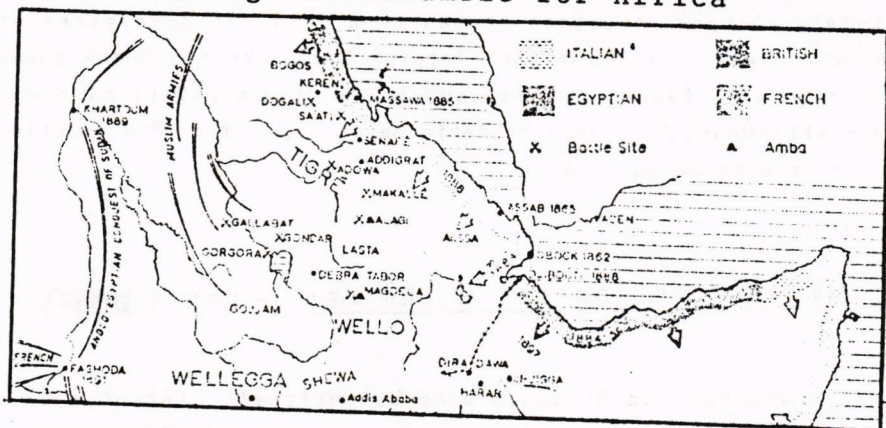
On 25 January the Ras attacked the Italians entrenched in Sa'ati but had to withdraw with very heavy losses. The following day, an Italian reinforcement of about 500 men, which was being sent from Massawa was intercepted by Alula's forces at Dogali and was wiped out almost to a man. Two days later, Sa'ati was evacuated by the Italians.

Back in Rome, there was a universal cry for 'vengeance' and preparations were made for what was termed a 'punitive expedition'. This in fact was a military build-up for a campaign intended to penetrate further inland and seize parts of Ethiopian territory especially Alula's capital of Asmara and the small town

of Keren further north under the command of another Ethiopian general, Ras Hagos.

Emperor Yohannes, who was well informed of these preparations tried to mobilise the nation. But Negus TEKLE HAIMANOTE of GOJJAME was at war with the Dervishes at the frontier with the Sudan and the Negus of SHEWA, MENELIKE, who was on friendly terms with Italy, preferred to remain 'neutral'. The Emperor marched to challenge the Italians in early 1889 but his attention was soon diverted to the west where the Dervish defeated the armies of Gojjame near lake TANA and were threatening to march on GONDAR and burn the town.

Pressures on Northern Ethiopia during the scramble for Africa



Emperor Yohannes, who hoped to deal a final blow to his enemies in the west before trying to fight the Italians, died at the battle of METTEMA on 11 March 1889. With the succession of the Imperial throne at once claimed by several powerful rivals, the Italians were practically forgotten and advanced to reoccupy Dogali. In fact, when the news of the Emperor's death reached Menelike, he immediately declared himself the 'King of kings of Ethiopia' and in order to discourage the imperial pretensions of MENGESHA YOHANNES, son of the late emperor, he wrote to the king of Italy informing him that he would like Italian soldiers to occupy ASMARA. They did so on 2 August 1889, three months after the signing the treaty of Wochallie by virtue of which Asmara and the territory to the north and east was recognized as an Italian colony. This Italian possession was named 'Eritrea' on 11 January 1890.

During the years that followed, Italy, in violation of the terms of the treaty of Wochallie, advanced further south from its possession of Eritrea and occupied the provinces of AKELE GOUZAIE and SERAIE to the north of the MEREBE River. By 1895, practically the whole of TIGRAY was annexed. This led to the battle of ADWA on 1 March 1896 which saw the defeat of the Italians at the hands of Emperor Menelike's forces. The Ethiopians did not pursue the invading army to the sea. Menelike in a 'conciliatory move' allowed Italy to retain the annexed territories to the north of the Merebe river.

While recognizing his merits in the victory of Adwa, many Ethiopians today blame Menelike for giving away parts of northern Ethiopia in order to divide and weaken his Tigrean rivals. Ras Alula's victory, great as it had been, did not save parts of the country from falling into foreign hands. Barely three years after Dogali, feudal rivalry among Ethiopia's ruling classes, specially Menelike's opportunistic bargains, led to the creation of Eritrea in January 1890■

■ Constitution for a one-man Country ■

Voting was held in Ethiopia's constitutional referendum on 1 February 1987 and according to the government's Constitution Drafting Commission (CDC) the people are said to have exercised their democratic rights in "a disciplined and satisfactory manner" and were now 'ready to share government power.'

In what many Ethiopians see as a futile attempt at credibility the CDC, which is under direct control of Mengistu, came out with seemingly "realistic" figures and announced that 18% of voters had rejected the constitution. Announcing the existence of more than 2 and half million negative votes was no surprise for all those who are acquainted with the dictatorship's propaganda tricks and its untiring attempts to gain some legitimacy in the eyes of the Ethiopian people and the international community. Whether or not this opposition was expressed, Mengistu, in his speech announcing the results, was quick to add that 'since about 81% accepted the draft constitution, the document has the support of the Ethiopian people and has therefore been approved.'