

Italian Eritrea

Contributor: [C. Peter Chen](#)

ww2dbaseIn 1889, Italy, which already had commercial presence in the port of Assab, seized the northern coastal region of Abyssinia as the African nation experienced a power struggle after the death of Emperor Yohannes IV. In the following year, Italy established its first colony, Italian Eritrea. Emperor Menelik II, who rose from the strife as Abyssinia's next leader, signed the Wuchale Treaty with Italy recognizing Italian interests in Eritrea.

ww2dbaseItalian interest in Italian Eritrea, as was in the nearby Italian Somaliland to the southeast, generally revolved around the strategically-positioned ports near the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which led to the Suez Canal from the south. Beyond the expected infrastructure projects such as roads and railways, Italian colonial administration also established schools, hospitals, and other modern facilities for both Italians as well as the colonial population. Since the underlying motive of the Italians was not humanitarian, amidst the modernization local cultures were suppressed and punishment for those who opposed the colonization was often harsh.

ww2dbaseIn Oct 1935, Italian Eritrea hosted staging points for Italian troops during Second Italo-Abyssinian War. At the conclusion of the victorious campaign, the newly gained Abyssinian territories were merged with both Italian Eritrea and Italian Somaliland to form a new entity, Italian East Africa (Italian: *Africa Orientale Italiana*), in Jun 1936, with the capital at Mogadishu in the former Italian Somaliland. In 1940, Italian troops invaded and took control of British Somaliland, expanding the borders of Italian East Africa. In 1941, British troops embarked on a campaign of their own, restoring Abyssinian independence and taking control of the remainder of Italian East Africa. A small-scale Italian-sponsored guerrilla war across the former Italian East Africa would last until 1943.

ww2dbaseAfter 1943, the former Italian Eritrea came under British control. In 1951, United Nations Resolution 390A(V) set the path for Ethiopia to annex Eritrea, and in 1962 Eritrea officially became a province of Ethiopia. This annexation was bitterly opposed by Eritrean nationalists, and a war of independence would be fought in in Eritrea until it finally became an independent nation in 1991.

Note: We hope that visitor conversations at WW2DB will be constructive and thought-provoking. Please refrain from using strong language. HTML tags are not allowed. Your IP address will be tracked even if you remain anonymous. WW2DB site administrators reserve the right to moderate, censor, and/or remove any comment. All comment submissions will become the property of WW2DB.

Search WW2DB & Partner Sites