



Was the Abyssinian campaign a great victory for Italy?

Abyssinia had been an independent country for many centuries. It was the only African nation to successfully resist European invasion in the nineteenth century. It took the Italians nine months to defeat the Abyssinians.

On 2 May 1936, a special train left the Abyssinian capital for the port of Djibouti. On board were Haile Selassie and the Abyssinian royal family, heading for England. They left behind a nation torn apart by war, many of its towns and villages destroyed.

Abyssinia, Eritrea and Somaliland became known as Italian East Africa. Mussolini proclaimed that the Italians had won "the greatest colonial war in history". How accurate was this view?

The Italians demonstrated their military skills, deploying everything from armoured vehicles to mustard gas, and they won the war. Many Italians shared Mussolini's pride, though there was a cost in soldiers' lives.

However, the international community were astonished by Mussolini's aggressive behaviour. The League of Nations imposed economic sanctions upon Italy. Some historians argue that the impact of these sanctions meant the war was a failure for Mussolini. Others argue the sanctions were not so effective because not all countries supported them and because vital supplies such as oil were not included. The fact that the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy (in a half-hearted way) encouraged Italy to look for other international allies - such as Hitler's Germany.



HEROES & VILLAINS

Mussolini & Abyssinia > Victory for Italy?

Examine these sources to find out more:



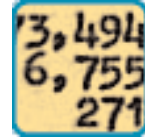
Film of the anniversary of Italian victory, 1937



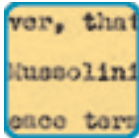
Italian film on the Abyssinian war, 1936



British despatch on Italian people's opinions, 1935



Figures showing effects of trade sanctions, 1936



British report from Naples, 1936