

ETHIOPIAN AIRPOWER:  
FROM INCEPTION TO VICTORY IN THE OGADEN WAR

By

SCOTT A. SCHAEFER

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2012

© 2012 Scott A. Schaefer

To my extraordinary wife, Annelie

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project could not have been accomplished without the assistance of the Association of Former Members of the Ethiopian Air Force (AMFEA). I am indebted to this organization for providing me access to Ethiopian pilots who actually participated in the Ogaden War and whose oral testimony was vital to the completion of this thesis.

Additionally, I would like to thank my thesis committee for their continuous guidance and support throughout the process. My desire to study the Horn of Africa region and specifically Ethiopia was initially inspired by Dr. Terje Ostebo. His Norwegian brand of enthusiasm and instruction were memorable. Dr. Luise White was instrumental in helping me narrow down the topic to Ethiopian airpower and the Ogaden War. Finally, the encouragement and friendship of Dr. Sue O'Brien provided the much needed motivation to see this project to completion.

Lastly, I cannot imagine finishing this thesis without the patience, love, and unending support of my entire family. Their sacrifices were greater than my own.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	6
LIST OF FIGURES.....	7
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	8
ABSTRACT .....	9
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	11
2 METHODOLOGY .....	14
3 POLITICAL BACKGROUND / HISTORY .....	20
Ethiopian History.....	22
Modern History of Somalia.....	25
4 HISTORY OF THE ETHIOPIAN AIR FORCE .....	28
5 ARMING THE OGADEN.....	34
Ethiopia.....	34
Somalia.....	45
6 PRELUDE TO THE WAR .....	48
7 THE OGADEN WAR OF 1977-78.....	51
8 CONCLUSION: WHY THE ETHIOPIANS WON THE OGADEN WAR .....	84
APPENDIX: TRANSFERS OF MAJOR CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS 1953-1980 .....	88
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	90
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	96

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
A-1 Transfers Of Major Conventional Weapons 1953-1980.....	89

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
3-1 Map of Ogaden Region .....	20
4-1 Ethiopian Roundel .....	28
5-1 F-5E Training Class, Williams AFB, AZ .....	44
7-1 Colonel Berhanu.....	60
7-2 Brigadier General Ashenafi .....	70
7-3 Brigadier General Legesse.....	79

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFB	Air Force Base
AMFEA	Association of Former Members of the Ethiopian Air Force
DIA	Defense Installations Agreement
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
MAAG	Military Air Advisory Group
MDAA	Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement
MEISON	All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement
MIG	Mikoyan-Gurevich
MTT	Mobile Training Team
NFD	Northern Frontier District
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLF	Ogaden Liberation Front
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
POW	Prisoner of War
U.N.	United Nations
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

ETHIOPIAN AIRPOWER:  
FROM INCEPTION TO VICTORY IN THE OGADEN WAR

By

Scott A. Schaefer

December 2012

Chair: Susan M. O'Brien  
Major: History

Historians have provided numerous explanations as to why Ethiopia defeated Somalia in the Ogaden War of 1977-1978. These assertions include: Ethiopia's large population advantage; Somalia's inability to fight a long, protracted war; and the massive influx of Soviet weapons and advisors at the midpoint of the conflict. Although these factors were influential in shifting the momentum in favor of Ethiopia, another factor has often been either marginalized or completely omitted: the dominant role of the Ethiopian Air Force.

This examination of airpower in the Ogaden War initially focuses on the development and evolution of the Ethiopian Air Force, especially in the post World War II era. The United States played a significant role in the modernization of Emperor Haile Selassie's Air Force by providing advanced aircraft and equipment to counteract Soviet assistance in Somalia. The Northrop F-5A and F-5E aircraft were proven superior to the Soviet MiGs and played a pivotal role in all of the major battles in the Ogaden War. Additionally, the high quality of training and heroic actions of Ethiopian pilots would far surpass that of their Somali counterparts, allowing the Ethiopians to ultimately gain air superiority, a key to overall victory.

This thesis focuses on the recreation of the Ogaden War from the point of view of the Ethiopian pilots who actually participated in the conflict. Through interviews and oral testimony, this unique and original perspective highlights the important role played by the Ethiopian Air Force that has been largely absent from historical records. While these recollections are not without bias or agenda, they do provide a fresh and compelling narrative that demonstrates how through a combination of aircraft, training, and bravery, the Ethiopian Air Force was able to secure victory over Somalia in the Ogaden War.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

While the Horn of Africa typically conjures images of poverty, famine, and underdevelopment, perhaps the most significant challenge the region has faced in the second half of the twentieth century is the persistent political instability and ethnic tension that have transformed Northeast Africa into a hotbed of recurring violence and warfare. At the center of this unresolved animosity are the region's two key actors: Ethiopia and Somalia. Fueled by zealous nationalism and religious discord, these neighbors have maintained a contentious relationship which continues into the present day. Additionally, due to its geo-political and strategic importance, foreign powers have repeatedly interfered in the region, which has only served to intensify the hostility.

Ethiopia, as the largest and most populous nation in the Horn, is remarkably unique in comparison to its neighbors. The Christian majority has maintained political hegemony in the state, despite the fact that it is surrounded in all directions by Muslim regimes. The highlands possess some of the continent's most fertile soil for agricultural utilization; however, its people are historically underfed. Additionally, Ethiopia successfully resisted European colonization in the late nineteenth century and is widely considered the longest surviving independent state on the African continent. The population in Ethiopia, however, is not homogenous; instead, it includes ethnic Somalis, Eritreans, and Tigreans, which has produced continuous internal and external conflict and war. One such war occurred in the Ogaden region of Eastern Ethiopia from July 1977 until March 1978; its outcome would determine the political, military, and economic future of the region as a whole.

Eventually, the Ethiopians defeated the Somalis during the Ogaden War, regaining all previously lost territory and emerging as a “modern” military force, within the African context. Yet, how and why were the Ethiopians successful? Such a straightforward question produces a myriad of responses that are neither simple nor consensual. Some scholars argue that demographics were the key ingredient, as Ethiopia maintained a population advantage ten times as large as Somalia. Others claim that the Ogaden War was simply a war of attrition and the Somalis could only sustain six months of conflict due to their limited resources and stockpiles. Finally, the importance of Soviet involvement, including supplying weapons and advisors, is also considered a significant factor in Ethiopia’s victory. These arguments, along with others, have made the examination and analysis of the Ogaden war both complex and challenging.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to propose another justification for Ethiopian success: the superiority and dominance of the Ethiopian Air Force. The creation and evolution of the Ethiopian Air Force into a powerful branch of the Imperial Armed Forces literally changed the way Africans conducted war. Armed with technologically advanced aircraft supplied by the United States, the Ethiopian Air Force played a vital role in all the major battles of the war. Additionally, the superior training received by the Ethiopians became readily apparent by their aerial dominance, which led to the eventual collapse of the Somali Air Corps. Without an opposing airpower, the Ethiopians could support ground

---

<sup>1</sup> Differing justifications for this question can be found in: Gebru Tareke, “The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2000), 635-667; Brigadier Joseph K. Knaisserry, “The Ogaden War: An Analysis of Its Causes and Its Impact on the Regional Peace on the Horn of Africa,” Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA (1997); Kenneth G. Weiss, “The Soviet Involvement in the Ogaden War,” Institute of Naval Studies, Professional Paper 269 (February 1980); Marina Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982); Donna R. Jackson, *Jimmy Carter and the Horn of Africa: Cold War Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007).

operations, bomb enemy targets, and sustain troop movements throughout the region unimpeded. Finally, the heroic actions of the Air Force pilots and the dedication of its support personnel were symbolic of a nation determined to achieve victory and represented a modern form of warfare, previously unknown in Africa. Although airpower alone did not win the Ogaden War, its importance is often overlooked as a key to military victory for the Ethiopians.

The fact that Ethiopian airpower's role in the Ogaden War has been historically marginalized is quite understandable. Expectations that the Air Force would serve as a decisive factor in the conflict were low, most likely due to its small size and unproven track record. Airpower had never played a dominant role in African warfare prior to the Ethio-Somali War. Additionally, there is an overall lack of information on the actions and achievements of the Ethiopian pilots during this war. Combined with the significant amount of misinformation, this has made scholarly examination extremely difficult. Hopefully, this project will communicate a fresh, new narrative on the Ogaden War revealed through the eyes and voices of the Ethiopian pilots.

## CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

A description of the research process and methods provide an interesting preface to the overall purpose of the thesis: the analysis of the significant role played by the Ethiopian Air Force in the Ogaden War. In addition to highlighting the inherent difficulties associated with scholarly research on Africa, it outlines an alternate path to uncovering important historical information about Africa, one that relies on actual testimonies of African participants in historical events. Like any research project, this process included academic highs and lows, and it was not clear from the outset whether an original scholarly contribution could be achieved within the limited time frame available. However, through perseverance in pursuing leads and securing interviews with senior Ethiopian officers from California to Washington, D.C., many important discoveries were uncovered, producing watershed moments essential to the successful completion of the thesis.

I selected the Ogaden War as the focal point of my research because it encapsulated multiple personal interests including: warfare and violence in the Horn of Africa; international diplomacy; Soviet intervention on the continent; and perhaps most importantly, African airpower. Additionally, as I embarked on this project, I quickly realized that there was sparse information written about the history of the Ethiopian Air Force in English and this became a secondary goal of my research, although much more work is still required. Initially, this paper was intended to recreate the war through third person primary source analysis such as diplomatic cables and international mass media publications. Unfortunately, these methods tended to shift the focus of the research outside the African continent. Therefore, in an effort to provide an African

perspective of the Ogaden War, a different means of uncovering data was necessary to provide a unique and indigenous interpretation of this historical event.

Although numerous secondary sources on the Ogaden War were readily available, the search for original primary sources was a challenge. Anxious to uncover something useful, I often sat in front of the computer and performed “garbage searches”. This method entailed typing key words into search engines in the hope of revealing some new information or idea that might warrant additional research. These searches frequently directed me to YouTube, which maintains a large variety of Ethiopian Air Force videos. After watching numerous videos, I began to read the comments posted below the footage in an effort to comprehend how these videos were received. These comments mirrored the ethnic divide of the region and were split between Ethiopian pride and Somali condemnation.

One comment, however, caught my attention. It claimed that Brigadier General Legesse Teferra was a true Ethiopian hero and provided a link to a website describing a 2008 banquet in honor of his accomplishments. An article on the website written by the Association of Former Members of the Ethiopian Air Force (AMFEA) organizing committee detailed the event and provided a list of prominent members in attendance. A quick search of AMFEA led me to their site, which produced the long awaited thesis epiphany: a paper based on the recreation of the Ogaden War through the eyes of former Ethiopian pilots and Air Force leaders. The AMFEA website provided a description of the organization, a brief history of the Air Force, and most importantly, contact information. If some pilots who flew in the Ogaden War were living in the United

States, perhaps they would be willing to participate in interviews to discuss their role in the regional conflict.

My enthusiasm prompted an immediate email to a generic address with my personal information, proposed research, and a request to be introduced to former pilots who were involved in the Ogaden War. Their initial response was encouraging and explained that my request would be forwarded to their leadership for consideration. At this point the waiting game began. I tried to remain productive by gathering data on military equipment supplied and employed during the conflict, as well as researching the important battles that occurred between July 1977 and March 1978. During this period I remained optimistically hopeful that these pilots would be willing to entertain my request, if only out of professional military courtesy to a fellow pilot.

My patience was finally rewarded when I received a phone call from Brigadier General Tsegaye Habtie Yimer, one of the association's key members. He explained to me that there were numerous pilots located in Washington, D.C. who had flown in the Ogaden War, including himself. Unfortunately, he also informed me that Brigadier General Legesse would be unable to meet with me due to a medical condition. Additionally, he showed hesitancy in assisting my work, mainly because an Ethiopian Air Force history was already in the works by an Ethiopian author, presumably in Amharic. Regardless of this setback, I reassured General Tsegaye of my academic intentions and left open the possibility of meeting with him sometime in the future.

Not abandoning the idea for my research, I attempted to utilize social media sites such as Facebook to contact additional Ethiopian pilots who now resided in the United States. Unfortunately, this method proved ineffective. I did learn, however, that there

were over 250,000 ethnic Ethiopians living in the Washington, D.C. metro area. A few weeks later, I visited the Africa Center for Strategic Studies located at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. While there, I again attempted to schedule a meeting with General Tsegaye, even if only on a social level. Unfortunately, his schedule did not allow for such a visit. Disappointed, I realized that these men had important work and family commitments that I had to respect. On my final night in Washington, I received a phone call from Captain Yohannes Wondafrash, the public relations representative from the association, who informed me that he would try to assist me in any way possible to set up appointments with some of the senior members of AMFEA.

Two individuals that I was anxious to meet were Colonel Berhanu Kebede and Brigadier General Ashenafi Gebere Tsadik. Colonel Berhanu was the F-5A Squadron Commander during the Ogaden War, while General Ashenafi had multiple kills in the F-5E and flew alongside General Legesse. After multiple attempts, I was finally able to talk to Colonel Berhanu. His initial response was also apprehensive, primarily because he also envisioned writing a book about the Ethiopian Air Force. It should be noted that much of the information I received concerning the Ethiopian Air Force and the F-5As during the Ogaden War were a direct result of the input I received from Colonel Berhanu. Again after explaining my academic motives, I finally received permission from Colonel Berhanu to conduct a personal interview in Santa Clarita, California. In true Ethiopian hospitality, Colonel Berhanu invited me into his home and discussed the history of the Ethiopian Air Force and the Ogaden War for an entire day. I believe that this meeting was another important milestone in my research. Not only had I received

valuable information, but I felt that a barrier had been overcome and I now had the support of these Ethiopian pilots.

Following my trip to California, additional interviews occurred in rapid succession in Washington, D.C. Meetings with both General Ashenafi and General Tsegaye proved invaluable, providing key insights into flight training and aerial combat. I felt as if these gentlemen were finally beginning to open up to me and talk freely about their past experiences. Additionally, the encounters became more social. I began to conduct interviews over Ethiopian food at local restaurants and General Ashenafi was gracious enough to bring several personal photographs to our meeting. Finally, I met with Captain Yohannes Wondafrash and Captain Behailu Tekle, also at an Ethiopian restaurant, during my last visit to Washington. It was through my conversations with these men that the primary motivations of these former Ethiopian pilots were revealed to me.

The rationale for granting me access to the pilots who flew in the Ogaden War was not surprising. First, these men were concerned about the “inaccurate” historical representations of the Ogaden War, particularly the role of the Ethiopian Air Force. Much of the data utilized in scholarly research has been provided by the Somalis, and these Ethiopians wanted their side of the story told. Obviously, their Ethiopian perspective may also be laden with bias and exaggeration, both of which are valid concerns to a scholar. However, in this case it is perfectly acceptable. This paper was never intended to be an unbiased view of the war; instead, its primary purpose was to provide an alternate explanation, as seen through the Ethiopian Air Force lens.

Additionally, I became instantly aware of the pride and camaraderie that these former pilots still exhibited. They all reminisced with fondness about the duty of defending their homeland from the cockpits of their aircraft. They all remember the greatness that once was the Ethiopian Air Force. And most importantly, they all desire to see their service rebuilt into a premier African Air Force again, preferably through the assistance of and partnership with the United States.

Although this concludes my overview of the research process, I hope that it adequately represents the important role of oral history and testimony, as well as the development of personal relationships of trust, in African historiography. As far as I can tell, such an endeavor has never been accomplished with regard to the Ogaden War, which I feel is the thesis' most significant contribution to academia. Although I recognize that I will always be considered an "outsider" to this group of pilots due to my ethnicity, our shared knowledge and expertise of aviation created a foundation of trust and familiarity that made this experience so memorable. I feel extremely fortunate to have created a bond of friendship with these Ethiopians and hope that this relationship will endure well into the future.

### CHAPTER 3 POLITICAL BACKGROUND / HISTORY

The Horn of Africa is located in the northeast portion of the continent and contains some of the most inhospitable land in the world. In fact, the Ogaden region has often been described as a barren wasteland. Ethnic and religious conflict permeates the region and has led to periods of instability and unrest, especially between Ethiopia and its neighbors: Somalia and Eritrea. Why, therefore, has this relatively small corner of the globe garnered such international attention, especially in the post World War II era?

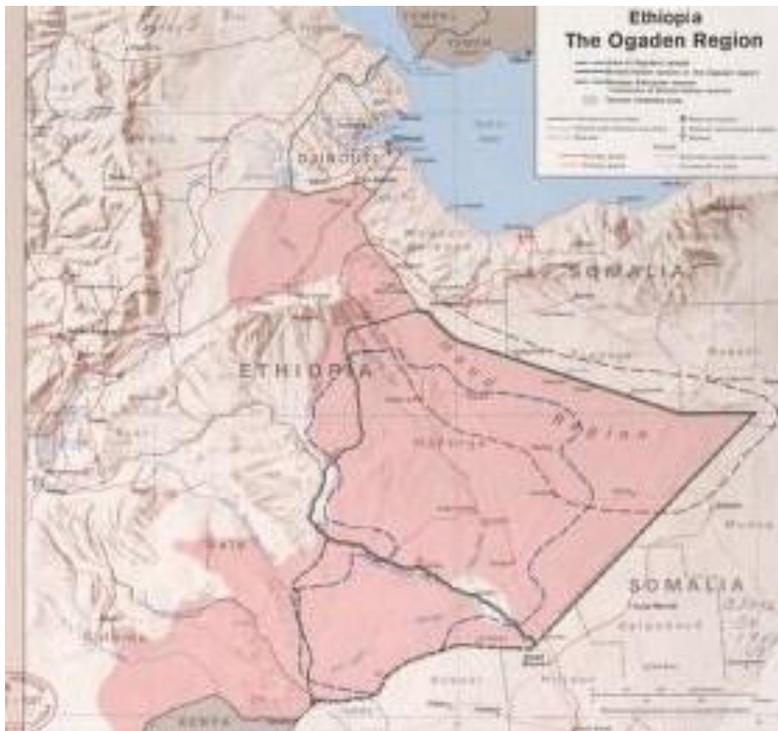


Figure 3-1. Map of the Ogaden Region<sup>1</sup>

Numerous explanations are available, but geo-political and strategic considerations were the primary impetus for superpower intervention during the Cold

---

<sup>1</sup> "Ethiopia, the Ogaden Region," (Central Intelligence Agency, 1980), *Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division* website, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/gmd:@field%28NUMBER+@band%28g8332o+ct002909%29%29>, accessed on 20 November 2012.

War. With the oil rich Persian Gulf just across the Red Sea, both the United States and the Soviet Union were in search of military bases on the periphery of the Middle East.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the important Straights of Bab-el-Mandeb are in the immediate vicinity of the region and are an important chokepoint for passage from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> The strategic importance of the Horn of Africa was aptly summarized by J. Bowyer Bell in 1973 as, "...not the presence of copper deposits, the fate of democracy, or the future of the Ethiopian monarchy; it is simple geography."<sup>4</sup> These motivations led to a competition between the United States and Soviet Union on the Horn of Africa, which produced a limited arms race in northeast Africa following World War II.

To fully comprehend the acrimony between Ethiopia and Somalia prevalent during the Ogaden War, one must understand the social and political history of the region. Previously home to great kingdoms like the Aksum Empire, this area of Africa had experienced epochs of great expansion and wealth. Conversely, it has also played host to numerous foreign invasions and subjugation throughout its history. For the purpose of this paper, however, we will only review the modern history of Ethiopia and Somalia from the latter portion of the nineteenth century and the imposition of European colonization.

---

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia 1953-1991* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 16-20.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Schwab, *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics, and Society* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1985), 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, *The Horn of Africa: Strategic Magnet in the Seventies* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1973), 8-9, as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 15.

## Ethiopian History

Ethiopia's modern history is one filled with foreign intervention and interference. This contact has been both positive and negative, although always having an important impact on the shaping and development of the state. Throughout this period of Ethiopia's history, the region has been dominated by the rule of strong, individual personalities. Such prominent leaders include famous names such as Yohannes IV, Menelik II, and Haile Selassie; all of whom were former Ethiopian Emperors. Additionally, following the 1974 Revolution, the Derg Regime seized power and eventually Mengistu Haile Mariam took his turn as the autocratic government head. While these leaders governed Ethiopia differently, they all recognized the importance of modernization, especially within the military, to solidify their power.

As colonization affected the entire African continent in the late nineteenth century, it was during the reign of Yohannes IV in 1885 that the Italians initially established themselves on the coastal region of modern day Eritrea.<sup>5</sup> This event symbolizes the genesis of foreign interference and intervention in modern Ethiopia, initially manifested by the Europeans, only to be supplanted later by the Cold War superpowers. Overconfident with military superiority, the Italians pushed farther inland towards the Tigre region, but were met with fierce resistance by the Ethiopian army and eventually defeated.<sup>6</sup> The Italians, however, would remain in Eritrea, establishing colonial rule in the region from 1889 to 1941.

Yohannes was replaced by Menelik II in 1887 and attempted to compromise with the Italians through a number of diplomatic treaties, but he was eventually faced with

---

<sup>5</sup> Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 83.

<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 54-55.

the same situation as his predecessor: Italian invasion. On 1 March 1896, Ethiopia soundly defeated the Italians at Adwa, allowing the state to maintain their autonomy. Ethiopia has long been celebrated as one of only two states in all of Africa, along with Liberia, to maintain its sovereignty during the infamous “Scramble for Africa”. Ethiopians take great pride in this fact and the victory at the end of the nineteenth century speaks volumes to Ethiopian military determination at the time. Menelik utilized this period of strength by significantly expanding his territory to roughly the size of present day Ethiopia. Additionally, he was amicable with most of the colonial powers, allowing cooperative projects such as the construction of the Djibouti to Addis Ababa railroad with the French and facilitating improvements to the state’s infrastructure.<sup>7</sup>

Italy would eventually prevail in conquering Ethiopia, although not for another four decades. Haile Selassie ascended to the Ethiopian throne in 1930, after serving for years as Regent. His efforts to modernize the state were cut short by the Italian invasion in 1934-35, which overpowered the Ethiopians through airpower and poison gas.<sup>8</sup> In May 1936, the Emperor was forced to flee the country and would remain in Britain until the end of the war. In the post World War II era, the Americans supplanted the British as the dominant Western power committed to “developing” Ethiopia. As a result of a United Nations resolution in December 1950, the enlarged national boundaries of Ethiopia were internationally recognized by the victorious allies, which included the Ogaden region in the east.

---

<sup>7</sup> E.S. Pankhurst, “The Beginning of Modern Transport in Ethiopia: The Franco-Ethiopian Railway and Its History,” *Ethiopia Observer*, I, No. 1 (1958), pp. 376-390, as referenced in Hess, *Ethiopia*, 60.

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Hess, *Ethiopia*, 66.

These expanded boundaries also included Eritrea, which was originally federated under Ethiopia. Although Eritrea maintained some levels of autonomy, its defense, foreign affairs, currency, and trade fell under the jurisdiction of Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup> However, on 14 November 1962, Haile Selassie annexed Eritrea and incorporated the territory into the Ethiopian state. Almost immediately, opposition forces were generated, beginning with the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), only to be supplanted later by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). These opposition groups engaged in almost continuous hostilities with the Ethiopian government for more than thirty years, which weakened the Ethiopian military through attrition. It also provided an opportunity for the Somalis to open a "second front" in the Ogaden region in the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout this period in history, Ethiopia's relationship with the United States was strengthened considerably, although the specific economic, political, and military assistance programs provided will be discussed later.

The final portion of Ethiopian political history prior to the Ogaden War occurred in 1974. Haile Selassie's enduring rule came to an end on 12 September 1974, when a group of military officers and non-commissioned officers seized power in a revolutionary coup. Discontented with the corruption, inefficiency, and disregard of the welfare of Ethiopians, the group deposed Haile Selassie, imprisoned him in mid-September, and immediately established the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), also known as the Derg.<sup>10</sup> This radical new form of government was initially "rule by committee" and espoused a Soviet style of scientific socialism. Initially the Derg introduced radical social and economic changes, including nationalized land reform, but

---

<sup>9</sup> Bereket Habte Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 58-59.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel S. Papp, "The Soviet Union and Cuba in Ethiopia," *Current History*, 76: 445 (1979: March), 110.

eventually transitioned into more oppressive tactics with the rise in power of Mengistu Haile Mariam. Mengistu orchestrated mass executions of political opponents, known as the “Red Terror”, and efficiently purged the senior leaders of the Ethiopian armed forces.<sup>11</sup> This period is significant because it provided an additional explanation for Ethiopian instability in 1977 and exposed the vulnerability of the state to foreign invasion.

### **Modern History of Somalia**

The modern history of Somalia will not be examined as in-depth as Ethiopia’s, but it is important to understanding the impetus of Somali irredentism and hostility toward foreigners, especially their neighbors to the west. While European colonization was unable to infiltrate Ethiopia, the same cannot be said of Somalia. In the late nineteenth century, the British, French, and Italians all had interest in Somali territory, mostly to support their trade networks and ports. Through the Conference of Berlin in 1884, Somalia was divided into five distinct regions: British Somaliland to the north, Italian Somaliland to the south, French controlled Djibouti, the Ogaden, and the Northern Frontier District in present day Kenya.<sup>12</sup> These five regions are represented by the five pointed star on the Somali national flag and their reincorporation into Somalia proper has been a primary motivator of Somali politics since its independence.

It should be noted that Somalia has long been identified by its clan demography and its devotion to Islam, which have created both unity and division among the

---

<sup>11</sup> There exists contradictory evidence about the extent of the military purges committed by the Derg. The general consensus; however, is that the Air Force was the least affected of all the military branches, most likely due to its size and non-political nature.

<sup>12</sup> M.I. Egal, “The Partitioning of Somalia and the Politics of Destruction,” *Somalilandpress* website, <http://somalilandpress.com/the-partition-of-somalia-and-the-politics-of-destruction-25597>, accessed on 18 July 2012.

population. To fully understand the dominance of Islam, one need not look beyond the fact that the country is comprised of 99.9% Muslims as of 2012.<sup>13</sup> During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, otherwise known as the “Mad Mullah”, organized fierce resistance to British, Italian, and Ethiopian imperialism through the “holy war” struggles against the Christians. The Dervishes were successful at times and even controlled a large portion of the Ogaden region in the early part of the century, although the Europeans and Ethiopians eventually prevailed.

During World War II, the Italians took the offensive in Somalia and gained control of British Somaliland, which included the Ogaden. This victory, however, would be short-lived and seven months later in 1941, the British defeated the Italians, at which time they assumed administrative control over the entire region as a protectorate, with the exception of French Somaliland. After the Allied victory in World War II, Somalia reverted back to its original colonial boundaries, including the return of the Italians under U.N. supervision, although the Ogaden was now controlled by the Ethiopians. These colonial boundaries and administrations would remain until the granting of Somali independence in 1960.<sup>14</sup>

Initially, the British considered consolidating all ethnic Somali people into one united state, however, the United Nations eventually agreed to the creation of the Republic of Somalia by combining British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland during the summer of 1960.<sup>15</sup> The regions of French Somaliland (Djibouti), the NFD, and the

---

<sup>13</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Notes,” *U.S. Department of State* website, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2863.htm>, accessed on 22 September 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa: The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35-41.

<sup>15</sup> Marina Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 20-25.

Ogaden would not be included. The United States was influential in this decision which solidified the dominance of Ethiopia and Haile Selassie in the Horn of Africa.

Reunification of ethnic Somalis and reclaiming “lost territory” would become constant themes in the political rhetoric of the new republic. Somali irredentism grew in both size and fervor among the ethnically and religiously homogenous population. Rhetoric turned to violence in 1969, when General Siad Barre seized control of the government from the newly elected Somali Youth League via military coup. The coup turned to revolution and by November 1969, Barre had firmly established a Marxist dictatorship in Somalia. Originally from the Ogaden, Barre attempted to limit the power of the clans by unifying the state under socialist ideology, nationalism, and violent suppression of the opposition. Although Barre made several attempts to regain lost territory, his regime waited for the opportunity to achieve its primary goal of “liberating” the Ogaden.

## CHAPTER 4 HISTORY OF THE ETHIOPIAN AIR FORCE<sup>1</sup>



Figure 4-1. Ethiopian Roundel

To better understand the important role played by Ethiopian airpower during the Ogaden War, a thorough examination of the history and evolution of the Ethiopian Air Force is required. Surprisingly, scholarly publications on this topic are scarce, particularly in English, and the subject presents an opportunity for continued research and study. While the Ethiopian government was heavily reliant on foreign assistance to create and modernize the Imperial Air Force, its success can be greatly attributed to the vision and determination of Emperor Haile Selassie. Heavily influenced by the Italian invasion, Haile Selassie's perseverance and understanding of the importance of training allowed the Ethiopian Air Force to rapidly achieve a high level of proficiency and skill. This modernization would greatly affect the outcome of the Ogaden War.

---

<sup>1</sup> A significant portion of this section was compiled from information received in an interview with Colonel Berhanu Kebede conducted by the author in Santa Clarita, CA, on 23 September 2012. Col. Berhanu is contemplating writing a book on the subject and much of this information is credited to him. Additionally, the former pilots mentioned in this paper are referred to by their present rank, not by their rank during the Ogaden War.

The dominant role of the Ethiopian Air Force during the Ogaden War was not the product of a massive arrival of Soviet weapons and equipment, nor was it achieved through a mad scramble to train newly recruited pilots. Instead, the Ethiopian Air Force has a rich history dating back to the beginnings of aviation and has constantly attempted to modernize its combat air forces throughout the twentieth century. Undoubtedly, the United States was a major reason for the increased prominence and prestige of the Ethiopian Air Force after World War II, but other nations and individuals were also integral to the modernization process, most notably the Swedish and the French.

As early as 1929, the Ethiopians showed a moderate interest in aviation and were curious about its military applications. On 18 August 1929, Ethiopia received its first Potez 25 A2 airplane. A French two-seat, single-engine biplane, the Potez was primarily used for military purposes like bombing and reconnaissance missions.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, the Ethiopians would receive six Potez 25s, a Junkers W33, and a few transport aircraft. The fledgling Air Force was originally commanded by Frenchman Andre Maillet, who delivered the first aircraft, but was later replaced by Paul Corriger, another Frenchman.<sup>3</sup> The Ethiopian Air Force would evolve slowly during this period and it was not until the mid 1930s, that Emperor Haile Selassie attempted a rapid transformation through the assistance of African American pilot John C. Robinson.

Colonel Robinson, also known as the “Brown Condor”, assumed command of the Ethiopian Air Force in August 1935. At this time he inherited approximately five Potez

---

<sup>2</sup> “History of the Ethiopian Air Force,” *Association of Former Members of the Ethiopian Air Force* website, <http://formerethiopianairforce.org/history.html>, accessed on 24 July 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

aircraft, a Junker, two British Moths, and a Beechcraft L17.<sup>4</sup> His primary goals were to increase the number of aircraft in the Ethiopian inventory and to make these aircraft combat ready by installing guns and bomb racks. He was also successful in attaining additional German aircraft, the Junkers JU-52, for the purpose of transporting personnel and equipment throughout Ethiopia. Although the Ethiopian Air Force was reliant on foreign pilots, the Emperor was insistent on training black, Ethiopian pilots for service in his Air Force. Colonel Robinson created his own training program and graduated six Ethiopian pilots prior to the outbreak of war. By late 1935 or early 1936, the Ethiopian Air Force size had doubled to approximately 24 aircraft.<sup>5</sup>

The Italian invasion and subsequent occupation of Ethiopia was particularly important to the future development of the Air Force. Robinson had successfully created the first integrated Air Force and was the only American to serve in combat during the Italian invasion.<sup>6</sup> Other noteworthy foreign pilots also participated in the war, including Swedish Count Gustaf von Rosen. The brash Von Rosen volunteered his services to the Emperor in 1935 and flew resupply missions during the conflict. Perhaps the most important outcome of the Italian-Ethiopian war was Emperor Haile Selassie's recognition of the unlimited potential of airpower in warfare. The Italians were able to easily circumvent the mountainous terrain, which had so long protected Ethiopians from external forces. Additionally, the bombing of population centers and the use of "new weapons" like mustard gas left an indelible impression on the Emperor.

---

<sup>4</sup> Phillip Thomas Tucker, *Father of the Tuskegee Airmen, John C. Robinson* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2012), 103.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-109.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

Following the liberation of Ethiopia by the British and Haile Selassie's return from exile in 1941, the Emperor was determined to create an independent Ethiopian Air Force, capable of defending the skies and producing hegemony in the Horn of Africa region. In 1944, the Imperial Air Force was headquartered at Addis Ababa, but eventually transitioned to their main facility in Debre Zeit, also known as Harar Meda Air Base. It was in Debre Zeit, that the Ethiopian Air Force created a ground school for training mechanics or technicians and a flight school for training pilots, both run by Swedish expatriates. The Ethiopian government bought six Swedish trainers: the Saab Safir 91. Initially, three of these aircraft were utilized for training purposes, although these early aircraft were not even equipped with radios. Eventually, the Safirs were improved upon, as deliveries of subsequent generations were received by Ethiopia. The Safirs were flown in Ethiopia from 1944 until 1958. Student pilots would initially receive 200 hours of flight instruction, along with ample ground training, prior to being awarded wings. Upon completion of this training the new pilots transitioned to another Swedish aircraft, the Saab B-17, a single-engine tail-dragger and medium range bomber, equipped with both bomb racks and machine guns.

After World War II, the Ethiopians also received war era British fighters called the Fairey Firefly. A propeller driven tail dragger mostly employed to accomplish the mission of ground attack. Acquisition of these aircraft allowed the Ethiopian Air Force to create two separate and distinct units, a B-17 bomber squadron and a Firefly fighter squadron. Both aircraft were tail-draggers, noted for extremely challenging flight and ground characteristics. Tail-wheel aircraft are highly susceptible to ground-looping and the Ethiopians were determined to find a runway-like environment without the hazards

associated with an active aerodrome to conduct their training. In Jijiga the Ethiopians used open fields to allow pilots to learn the delicate handling characteristics of these aircraft. When maintaining aircraft control became precarious, the pilots could relax the controls and allow the tail-dragger to settle down safely in the fields. This probably saved numerous aircraft during the training process and allowed the pilots to gain confidence.

Colonel Robinson remained in command of the Ethiopian Air Force during the initial stage of this period, although it was not without confrontation. After the war, von Rosen was commissioned as a Major in the Ethiopian Air Force, only to be outranked by Colonel Robinson. Embodied with a somewhat racist attitude, it was rumored that von Rosen refused to fly an American Douglas C-47 to Addis as Robinson's copilot. In response, Robinson simply flew the aircraft back to Ethiopia solo. Upon their return to Ethiopia, a fight ensued and Robinson apparently broke von Rosen's jaw. Von Rosen formally complained and threatened to withdraw Swedish support to the Ethiopian Air Force. As a result, Robinson was detained for a few days and eventually resigned as the Air Force Commander to alleviate Emperor Haile Selassie's diplomatic conundrum.<sup>7</sup>

The Ethiopian Air Force would continue to function with two squadrons operating out of Debre Zeit until the annexation of Eritrea in 1962, when Asmara Air Base was opened as a second major Air Force installation. Asmara contained the majority of the operational aircraft, while Debre Zeit became the center of training. With a "basic" Air Force established, Haile Selassie was still not content. He sought to dramatically

---

<sup>7</sup> T. Simmons, "The Brown Condor," *Race and History: News and Views Website*, [http://www.raceandhistory.com/cgi-bin/forum/webbbs\\_config.pl/noframes/read/1376](http://www.raceandhistory.com/cgi-bin/forum/webbbs_config.pl/noframes/read/1376), accessed on 14 September 2012.

modernize his aerial forces through the assistance of an emergent superpower, the United States.

## CHAPTER 5 ARMING THE OGA DEN

The modern military history in the Horn of Africa begins at the conclusion of the Second World War. Initially, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union was intent on improving the military capabilities of any African state. As mentioned previously, their goals were strategic in nature, although the Soviet Union was normally willing to lend support to nations with similar ideological convictions. In fact, the United States tried to forestall modernizing their new Ethiopian ally numerous times, but eventually fell victim to Haile Selassie's request for weapons and training for defensive purposes. However, the strategic requirement for military bases near the Persian Gulf eventually prevailed, beginning a Cold War arms race in Northeast Africa.

### **Ethiopia**

The first round of formal agreements between the United States and Ethiopia occurred in 1953 after years of negotiations. The Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (MDAA) and the Defense Installations Agreement (DIA) were signed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May and were basically viewed as an "arms for access" resolution.<sup>1</sup> Both sides, however, received what they desired. The U.S. would be granted access to Ethiopian military bases, while in exchange agreeing to arm and train Ethiopian forces. Although the United States acted as a somewhat reluctant partner – resistant to establishing close ties with Haile Selassie's regime – the U.S. successfully negotiated among other things a twenty-five year lease of Kagnew Station in Asmara. In return Haile Selassie received a commitment to train three Ethiopian Army divisions of 6,000 soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Although improving the capabilities of the Army was important to Haile Selassie, his

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

long term vision was the establishment of a viable Ethiopian Air Force, capable of defeating any foreign invader.

Kagnew Station was originally called Radio Marina and was initially established by the Italians as a naval communication site. Upon the Italians' defeat, the British took control of the station, only to concede it to the Americans who transformed it into a premier spy station during World War II. Its usefulness was invaluable, as proven by its importance in intercepted details of Germany's military disposition which were utilized by Eisenhower to plan the Normandy invasion.<sup>3</sup> Following allied victory, the station was abandoned by the United States, only to be reactivated at the outbreak of the Korean War.

Renamed Kagnew Station, the listening post was modernized by the United States and could now monitor the entire Communist World. The reasons behind its military significance are geographic in nature. Kagnew is located only 15 degrees above the equator and suffers only minor fluctuations in climate and seasons. Additionally, Asmara is located in the Eritrean highlands, with an altitude one and a half miles above sea level, decreasing the level of electromagnetic interference.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the station was located in an area of northeast Africa that allowed monitoring of Arab states, Asia, and the Soviet Union, not to mention relaying critical information to and from Washington. Not surprisingly, there is somewhat limited data on exactly what occurred at Kagnew Station, but in the 1950s and 1960s it was an essential piece of the American National Security puzzle.

---

<sup>3</sup> Michela Wrong, *I Didn't Do It For You* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 200.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199.

The first step taken toward establishing a “modern” Ethiopian Air Force occurred in 1956 via a request from Haile Selassie to the United States to conduct a survey of Ethiopia’s Air Force capabilities. The USAF survey team completed its assessment in 1957 and as part of its report “favored extending assistance over a period of years starting with a modest jet training program.”<sup>5</sup> Although the majority of the senior military leadership in Washington rejected the idea, President Eisenhower agreed in 1958 to a limited training program, which included the delivery of three T-33 jet trainers, one C-47 cargo aircraft, and training for Ethiopian pilots in the United States.<sup>6</sup> This gradual approach to improving the Ethiopian Air Force was undertaken partly due to the support it received from the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa and the American Military Air Advisory Group (MAAG). Haile Selassie had achieved a minor victory, plus the agreement laid the foundation for continued and increased support of the Ethiopian Air Force by the United States. Additionally, in 1959, Haile Selassie “played the Soviet Card” by visiting Moscow on an official state visit, although most agree that this ploy did not seriously worry the United States government.

In 1958, President Eisenhower authorized funding for twelve F-86 Sabre jets for Ethiopia. This delivery would supply the Imperial Air Force with “modern” jet fighter aircraft, a rarity in sub-Saharan Africa. The delivery was contingent on an acceptable level of maintenance, operational support, and training, which delayed the delivery until 1961.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the limitation imposed by the U.S. government or the delivery

---

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955-1957 18:357-60; *Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalog (DDQC)*, 1986 12 (1987) as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 105.

<sup>6</sup> National Security Council (NSC) Operations Coordinating Board, “Progress Report on U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia – NSC 5615/1,” 9 July 1958, *DDQC*, 1986 12 (1987), p. 433 as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 105-106.

delay, the F-86 would propel the Ethiopian Air Force into an African military power without rival in the region and reinforce its growing security relationship with the United States.

The F-86 “Sabre” was first designed in 1944 by North American Aviation. Equipped with a single J47 jet engine, the Sabre was a subsonic, swept-wing aircraft designed for air-to-air combat, dive bombing, and escort. It was normally armed with air-to-air missiles, but could be modified dependent on the mission. The most popular version was the F-86D, of which over 2,000 were produced. The fighter saw extensive action during the Korean War and was considered a reliable workhorse for the United States Air Force.<sup>8</sup>

According to Ethiopian Air Force leadership, everything changed when the Americans became directly involved in the modernization of the flying program.<sup>9</sup> The process involved much more than delivery of aircraft. It also included training, which occurred at various times within the United States. It was in 1959 that the first Ethiopian pilots attended flight training in the U.S., where they completed one of two specific tracks. All pilots initially went to Lackland AFB, Texas, to attend language training, followed by primary flight training in the T-34. Upon completion of this “screening”, the trainees continued in the T-37, T-33, and F-86 track or the T-28, T-33, and F-86 track. Occasionally, some might fly the T-38, but this was relatively rare. In 1960, these same pilots returned to Ethiopia and became part of the initial instructor pilot cadre at Debre Zeit.

---

<sup>8</sup> “F-86 Sabre Jet History,” *Boeing* website, <http://www.boeing.com/history/bna/f86.htm>, accessed on 2 October 2012.

<sup>9</sup> The following sections are composed of information gathered from the Colonel Berhanu interview.

Ethiopian attendance at American military flight training schools only lasted until 1961. One of Haile Selassie's goals was to establish a first-class training center within Ethiopia. The Safirs remained the primary Ethiopian trainer, the T-28s were utilized as the basic trainer, and the recently acquired three T-33s were employed as jet conversion trainers. When the T-33s arrived, American instructor pilots were required to assist in setting up the program, but these instructors only remained in Ethiopia for six months. There were, however, always a certain number of American pilots in Ethiopia as part of the Advisory Group. These pilots would develop close relationships with their Ethiopian counterparts and often flew with them to maintain flight currency or helped when there was a shortage of available instructor pilots. ,

The Ethiopian flight training program consisted of flying the Safir for 100 hours and then the T-28 for another 100 hours. Upon completion of this training, pilots were awarded wings and depending on one's success, they were assigned either the fighter or transport/helicopter track. The transport track was intended for pilots to transition to the C-47, C-54, DC-3, Canberra, Cessna, or helicopters. This system of training would remain in Ethiopia until approximately 1966.

During this interim period, Somalia invaded Ethiopia in 1964 as part of the First Ogaden War. Agitation began in 1963 with the creation of the Ogaden Liberation Front (OLF), a group of nomads currently living in the region. Demanding autonomy and a repeal of taxes, the movement expanded rapidly to include the development of an army.<sup>10</sup> In February 1964, with assistance from the Somali government, the OLF initiated hostilities. Eventually, the Somali National Army joined the conflict, shelling the

---

<sup>10</sup> David H. Shinn and Thomas P. Ofcansky, "Ogaden War (1964)," *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2004), 305.

border city of Ferfer and attacking the town of Dolo. On 30 March 1964, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) negotiated a cease-fire, but not before more than 2,000 individuals had lost their lives.<sup>11</sup>

During this conflict the Ethiopians flew their F-86s into Somalia and attacked Hargeisa Air Base. This action greatly upset the Americans who did not wish for their weapons to be utilized in an offensive manner. This created a problem for the Emperor, because although the aircraft were Ethiopian, the United States retained the ability to influence their use and began requiring consent prior to use in a combat environment. Another interesting aspect of this period was the reorganization of the Air Force that was initiated through the insistence of the Americans. Prior to this period, the service was directly under the control of the Emperor, who wanted to keep a close eye on its development. Eventually, the Americans convinced Haile Selassie to establish a Commander of the Air Forces, which was more in line with the other military branches.

Although the establishment of an F-86 squadron in Ethiopia was an important beginning to the transition to jet aircraft by the Imperial Air Force, by the 1960s this technology was considered somewhat outdated by Western standards. In 1962, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and Ethiopian Defense Minister Mengesha Merid signed a memorandum which guaranteed the delivery of additional F-86 aircraft, along with T-28Ds and more T-33 trainers.<sup>12</sup> Empowered by the increased commitment of the United States to expand the Ethiopian Air Force, Haile Selassie pressed the Johnson administration in 1964 for state of the art technology – the F-5 Freedom Fighter.

---

<sup>11</sup> Shinn and Ofcansky, "Ogaden War," 305.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Senate, *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad: Ethiopia, Part 8*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1970), 1906-07, as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 112.

The F-5 represented the newest and most advanced fighter aircraft that the United States possessed. Actually, the Freedom Fighters were not even scheduled for delivery to the USAF until mid-1964.<sup>13</sup> However, as the aircraft was being considered for export to Third World nations, Haile Selassie utilized the growing presence of Soviet assistance in Somalia to convince the United States to acquiesce. In June 1964, the U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Edward Korry informed the government of Ethiopia that the United States planned to provide a squadron of twelve F-5 fighters, although the timeline for delivery was undetermined.<sup>14</sup> The delivery of the F-5s would be a historic event, making Ethiopia the first black-ruled state in sub-Saharan Africa to possess supersonic jet fighters.<sup>15</sup>

The decision to provide Ethiopia with F-5 fighters was not universally accepted within the ranks of U.S. policy makers. Arguments against the arms transfer included the likely offensive use of such weaponry in the growing border disputes with Somalia. Additionally, a Third World arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union could possibly lead to a proxy war in the Horn of Africa. Undoubtedly, these decisions would affect the expansion of the Cold War into Africa, a region that had previously held little interest to the Kremlin. Such difference of opinion led to numerous delays in the American delivery schedule.

Growing impatient with the American delays, Haile Selassie engaged in Cold War politics and publically entertained the notion of Soviet assistance to Ethiopia should the United States fail to deliver. While most believed such actions were only a bluff, Haile

---

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Incoming Telegram from Mogadishu," 30 May 1964, *DDHQ*, 1977, 122C as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 116.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Senate, *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*, 1906-07

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 113.

Selassie was successful in forcing the Americans to honor their agreement. In the later stages of 1966, the United States began the delivery of the F-5As to Ethiopia, with the remainder of the squadron arriving in 1967.<sup>16</sup> The F-5s were considered technically more advanced than the MiG-17s, but the true measure of their success would be realized through the flight training received by the Ethiopians.

Twelve brand new F-5A aircraft were delivered to Debre Zeit, where the 5<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron was established in 1966. By this point, the B-17s and Fireflies were no longer operationally flying. In the meantime, the F-86 aircraft were relocated to Asmara and designated the 1<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron. As previously mentioned, the United States also sent the Ethiopians twelve T-28Ds, a counterinsurgency attack aircraft. As part of this delivery, a U.S. Mobile Training Team (MTT) arrived in Ethiopia to provide a unique form of combat skills training. These American pilots were highly proficient in counterinsurgency flying due to their recent experiences in Vietnam, although their tour of duty in Ethiopia lasted only three months.

The flight training program established by the Ethiopians produced highly skilled and technically competent pilots. The washout rate, however, was extremely high. A typical class would start with approximately 45 trainees. Of these initial 45, only 30% would successfully complete the first stage. With the class now reduced to 15 pilots, only five would be selected for jet conversion training in the T-33s and the others would transition to transports and helicopters. Of these five, perhaps three would graduate and begin training in the F-5 or F-86. The Ethiopians were extremely proud of their tough and rigorous standards, but this would eventually affect the number of qualified

---

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*, 129.

pilots available during the Ogaden War and threaten the Ethiopian Air Force's wartime readiness.

The F-5 pilots were considered the best of the best in the Ethiopian Air Force. Their arduous training program consisted of three phases. Phase one was conversion, which included systems, instruments, and navigation training. Phase two was combat training, both air-to-air and air-to-ground. This was made up of advanced fighter maneuvers required for formation combat flying and dog-fighting skills. Gun and missile fires were also accomplished in this air-to-air training on practice ranges. Air-to-ground instruction consisted of rocket attacks, strafing, bombing, dive-bombing, and skip bombing. Upon successful completion of these stages, pilots entered phase three which was the maintenance of currency. Minimum requirements were reevaluated every three months and pilots who did not meet standards regressed to earlier phases for retraining. This is how the Air Force would effectively operate until the Revolution in 1974.

By 1973, the Emperor's long reign in Ethiopia was in serious jeopardy. Famine, the continued rebellion in the northern region of Eritrea, and a military force disgruntled by substandard pay created an atmosphere of political and social instability. Although Emperor Haile Selassie attempted some last minute reforms, he was ultimately deposed by the Provisional Military Administrative Council, more commonly known as the Derg, on 12 September 1974.<sup>17</sup> The Derg immediately arrested the senior members of the government administration, most of who were eventually executed. By December, the Derg declared Ethiopia a socialist state and implemented social

---

<sup>17</sup> Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 154.

programs such as land reform and nationalization of private assets to strengthen their political position.<sup>18</sup> At this time multiple political parties were gaining prominence, to include the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON), who hoped to ascend to power when the military government reverted to civilian control. Unfortunately, such a transition never occurred.

The problems in Ethiopia could not have come at a worse time for the United States. The Nixon administration was in the midst of the Watergate scandal and the U.S. government was not inclined to increase the amount of military assistance that Haile Selassie so desperately desired. Additionally, Kagnaw station was waning in its strategic importance due to the development of satellite technology and the establishment of a new communications station on the island of Diego Garcia. General Aman, a hero in the 1964 Ogaden War and originally the Chairman of the Derg, was considered too moderate by the more radical members of the military committee and was killed by the radical membership of the Derg in November 1974.<sup>19</sup> At this time the revolution became much more violent and unstable; the war in Eritrea was escalating and the Derg regime began a series of mass arrests and executions of its political enemies.

In 1975, the Derg regime sent a delegation to the Soviet Union to discuss the possibility of military assistance. Not surprisingly, the Soviets were reluctant to provide aid to the Ethiopians due to their close association with Barre and the Somali government. It was estimated that from 1974 to 1977, the Soviets provided over \$300

---

<sup>18</sup> Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 192.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-90.

million to the Somalis in military assistance, not to mention numerous advisors.<sup>20</sup> In a last ditch effort to maintain a relationship with Ethiopia, the Ford administration, in the spring of 1976, agreed to send the Derg two F-5E squadrons, a total of 16 aircraft. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger acknowledged that the U.S. was “taking a chance”, shipping the first half of the squadron, eight aircraft later that year.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 5-1. F-5E Training Class, Williams AFB, AZ. From Left: Maj. Mengistu Kassa, Brig. Gen. Legesse Tefera, Capt. Girma Workagegneu, Brig. Gen. Ashenafi Gebre Tsadik (Photo courtesy of Brig. Gen. Ashenafi)

With the promise of delivery of F-5Es to Ethiopia, the Americans also agreed to additional training of Ethiopian Air Force personnel in the United States. In 1976, Ethiopia sent a delegation of 49 individuals of various specialties to the U.S. The pilots made up just a small percentage of this select group, as only six were sent to complete advanced flight training. The remaining personnel were technicians, provided with the opportunity to receive advanced training in numerous support functions –

<sup>20</sup> Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 178.

<sup>21</sup> David A. Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 16.

communications, radar operations, engine maintenance, etc. Of the six pilots, all would attend F-5E conversion training at Williams AFB, Arizona under the instruction of the 425<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Squadron. Additionally, two pilots, General Legesse and Colonel Mengistu, completed advanced weapons school.

### **Somalia**

The examination of the military build-up in Somalia will not be covered to the depth of that in Ethiopia, but it is, nonetheless, important to understand its basic evolution and structure. Shortly after independence, the United States, Italy, and West Germany offered to provide Somalia with approximately \$10 million in military assistance to help the fledgling government establish defense forces. This offer was rejected and instead the Somalis signed an agreement with the Soviet Union that provided a larger army and a modest Air Force.<sup>22</sup> This marked the beginning of Soviet-Somali military cooperation.

The Soviets immediately began supplying aircraft to Somalia. These included 40 MiG-15 and MiG-17s, three Antonov AN-24s, and three AN-2s. In addition to some surface-to-air missiles, the Soviets helped build or reconstruct airfields at Mogadishu, Hargeisa, Baidoa, and Kismayu. In exchange for this cooperation, the Soviets were given access to the port of Berbera, to which they made significant improvements.<sup>23</sup> This ideology of “arms for access” is eerily similar to the agreement the Americans had made with the Ethiopians.

---

<sup>22</sup> Harry Brind, “Soviet Policy in the Horn of Africa,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter, 1983-1984), 80.

<sup>23</sup> Tom Cooper with additional details from Gianfranco Lanini, “Ogaden War, 1977-1978,” *ACIG Org* website, Sub-Saharan Africa, [http://www.acig.info/CMS/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=140&Itemid=47](http://www.acig.info/CMS/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=140&Itemid=47), accessed on 19 August 2012. Expanded information contained in the article can be found in Cooper’s book, *African MiGs* (Vienna: SHI Publications: 2004).

The Somalis were respected by the Ethiopians due to the large amount of army equipment they possessed, particularly tanks, artillery, and anti-aircraft guns. In 1967, the Somali National Army had nine mechanized infantry battalions, four tank battalions equipped with T-34s, two field artillery battalions with 76mm guns and 12mm howitzers, two heavy anti-aircraft battalions with 100mm radar-controlled guns and three light anti-aircraft battalions with 37 mm and 14.5mm automatic cannons.<sup>24</sup>

Following the coup that placed Siad Barre in control, the Soviets increased their military assistance, sending hundreds of Soviet advisors and technicians to Somalia. This included sending 40 MiG-21s, up to 10 Ilyushin IL-28s, and some Mi-8 helicopters. In addition to the Soviet aircraft, the Somalis maintained some American transports, specifically three Douglas C-47s and one Beech C-45.<sup>25</sup> According to Tom Cooper, “the small force was never capable of manning or maintaining all of its aircraft.”<sup>26</sup> This is yet another similarity between American assistance in Ethiopia and the Soviet aid to Somalia in the prelude to the Ogaden War.

At the outbreak of the Ogaden War, the Somalis had a significant advantage in tanks, artillery, and aircraft. Additionally, it is estimated that over 1,500 Soviet advisors were stationed in Somali prior to the outbreak of the conflict. It is also estimated that over 500 Somali pilots and mechanics received both political and technical training in the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> As aircraft inventories are significant to our analysis, tables detailing the type, number and dates of the aircraft supplied to each state prior to the war are

---

<sup>24</sup> Tom Cooper, “Ogaden War.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> “Somalia: Foreign Military Assistance,” *Country-Data.com* website, <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-12055.html>, accessed on 1 October 2012. Information is based on the Country Studies Series by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress.

included in Appendix 1. Interestingly, these reported orders and deliveries do not necessarily agree with additional foreign government documents or mass media publications, especially with respect to the number of Somali MiG-21s.

## CHAPTER 6 PRELUDE TO THE WAR

1977 was an extremely important year in the modern history of the Horn of Africa. Not only was this the “official” beginning of the Ogaden War, but it also marked a dramatic reversal of military assistance and technical training provided to Northeast Africa by the Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. While the Americans disengaged, the Soviets attempted to support both regimes simultaneously, although eventually opting for Ethiopia.

As Ethiopia’s relationship with the United States continued to deteriorate at the conclusion of 1976, the Derg regime was perhaps at its weakest. Between the ongoing war of secession with Eritrean nationalists and the escalating internal resistance to the revolutionary government, the Derg regime was now in a state of survival. United States military aid and assistance to Ethiopia had been dramatically reduced as a result of the growing violent nature of the newly established government in Addis and the increased reports of human rights violations. Desperate for ammunition and military equipment, the Derg turned to the most logical choice: the Soviet Union.

In December 1976, the Soviet Union signed a \$100 million military agreement with Ethiopia which would provide second-line equipment to the Derg, like the T-34 tank.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter, on February 3, 1977, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the radical first vice chairman, seized control of the Derg through a bloody shootout. In the middle of a committee meeting in the Palace of Menelik, Mengistu and his body guards took seven of his chief enemies into the basement under gunpoint and summarily executed them.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth G. Weiss, “The Soviet Involvement in the Ogaden War,” Institute for Naval Studies, Center of Naval Analyses, Professional Paper 269 (February 1980), 3.

<sup>2</sup> David A. Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union*, 25.

Included in this group was the Teferi Banti, the Chairman of the Military Council and leader of the Derg. Following the executions, Mengistu was “elected” Chairman and he embarked on a purge of counter-revolutionary members of the EPRP and MEISON, a persecution that would more commonly become known as the Ethiopian “Red Terror”.

According to Marina Ottaway, “within 24 hours of his victory Mengistu met with the Soviet ambassador to Ethiopia who assured him of Soviet backing and received a personal message of congratulations from Fidel Castro.”<sup>3</sup> In an effort to gain complete control over the entire Horn of Africa, the Soviet Union initially attempted to court both Ethiopia and Somalia as clients of military aid and political influence. In order for such a scheme to be successful, the prevention of war was imperative, and the Soviets believed they could influence both sides of the potential conflict into a peaceful resolution. One interesting approach was undertaken by Cuban President Fidel Castro. In mid March, 1977, Castro met first with Mengistu and then with Barre to propose the establishment of a socialist confederation comprised of Ethiopia, Somalia, and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen. Both Mengistu and Barre rejected the proposal mainly due to the unresolved dispute over the Ogaden region.<sup>4</sup>

The American response to Mengistu’s violent accession to power was one of great displeasure. On 25 February 1977, Ethiopia was removed from the list of countries eligible to receive U.S. aid.<sup>5</sup> Shortly thereafter, in mid April, the United States informed the Ethiopian government that it planned to reduce personnel in the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) and withdraw from Kagnev Station by September. Mengistu’s

---

<sup>3</sup> Marina Ottaway, *Soviet and American Influence*, 107.

<sup>4</sup> Don Oberdorfer, “The Superpowers and Africa’s Horn: 500-Year-Old Regional Dispute Now Has Global Ramifications,” *The Washington Post*, 5 March 1977, A1.

<sup>5</sup> Bereket Habte Selassie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 130-140.

response was quick and left no doubt as to the current state of U.S. – Ethiopian relations. On 23 April 1977, he gave Washington 4 days to vacate Kagnev station and have all MAAG personnel departed. In retaliation, the United States completely suspended all arms supplies to Ethiopia on 27 April.<sup>6</sup> With the relationship apparently fractured beyond repair, Mengistu sought increased arms and assistance from the Soviet Union as a substitute for the United States, something Moscow at this point was only too willing to accommodate.

---

<sup>6</sup> Kessing's Contemporary Archives, 1 July 1977, 28423, as referenced in Samuel M. Makinda, *Superpower Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 115.

## CHAPTER 7 THE OGADEN WAR OF 1977-78

With all the necessary background information in place, we can confidently transition to the primary focus of this thesis: the recreation and examination of the Ogaden War itself, and more specifically airpower's role in determining the final outcome. Although factual, this representation is not necessarily impartial. The information collected comes from a variety of primary and secondary sources, but the pivotal data utilized to create the narrative was provided by former Ethiopian Air Force pilots themselves.<sup>1</sup> Through their oral testimony, this depiction of the Ogaden War is an effort to describe the historical conflict from the Ethiopian perspective, as seen through their eyes and memories. In certain instances this testimony contradicts previously published material on the Ogaden War. In fact, the multiple conflicting accounts of the war were a primary motivation for the Ethiopian pilots to come forward and provide their interpretation.

One of the greatest problems we have seen in attempting to understand the Ogaden war is the gross exaggerations that have occurred on both sides of the border.<sup>2</sup> Military equipment, casualties, and outcomes of battles have all been used as propaganda weapons. These practices have also affected the historic memory of the Ethiopian Air Force's role and significance in the conflict, to include airplanes shot down and inventories. While this paper recognizes such contradictions of information, the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Ethiopian pilots interviewed include: Col. Berhanu Kebede, interviewed by author, Santa Clarita, CA, 23 September 2012; Brig. Gen. Tsegaye Habtie Yimer, interviewed by the author, Washington, D.C., 29 September 2012; and Brig. Gen. Ashenafi Gebere Tsadik, interviewed by the author, Washington D.C., 6 October 2012.

<sup>2</sup> A complete explanation of this phenomenon can be found in John Darnton's article, "In Ogaden War, Exaggeration as a Weapon," *New York Times*, 25 February 1978, 5.

majority of sources are Ethiopian based and therefore represent a distinctly Ethiopian point of view and perspective.

In analyzing the Ogaden War, there are relatively distinct markers which help identify the progression and various stages of the conflict. These stages include: the initial fighting dominated by guerilla warfare; the “official” Somali invasion and rapid advancement supported by regular forces; the Ethiopian resistance during the major battles at Dire Dawa and Jijiga, which stalled the Somali advance; and the Ethiopian counter-offensive. Perhaps with the exception of the unconventional guerilla border conflicts, airpower played a pivotal role in determining the outcome of these individual stages and demonstrated that even in Africa, control of the air was an essential element for military victory.

Said Barre’s regime in Somalia had been indirectly supporting the guerilla attacks in the Ogaden region for years. The most powerful of these forces was the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). However, by 1977, the Somali National Army began to surreptitiously participate in these border conflicts, often removing their uniforms prior to engaging in battle.<sup>3</sup> The force protecting the Ogaden at the time was the Ethiopian Army’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Mechanized Division, which first began to report heavy artillery and armored personnel carriers engaging in skirmishes across the border into Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, it was also reported that Somali guerillas were storing large caches of weapons and ammunitions in various covert places inside Ethiopia. Apparently, weapons were prepositioned as close as 25 miles from Dire Dawa, in various caves within the vicinity

---

<sup>3</sup> William G. Thom, *African Wars: A Defense Intelligence Perspective* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2010), 126.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

of Jeldesa. With this preparation and escalation, it became apparent that Somalia was in the final stages of implementing a full scale invasion of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Air Force was not a passive observer during this period. In the spring of 1977, the newly created F-5E squadron was actively flying missions out of Dire Dawa Air Base. Dubbed the 9<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, the unit consisted of eight brand new aircraft. As war with the Somalis grew imminent, the regular F-5E training missions were converted into reconnaissance sorties that ventured farther east into the Ogaden region and up to the Somali border. It was through these missions that the Ethiopian government realized the potential severity of the situation. The F-5E pilots were frequently fired upon by SA-7s, a Soviet-made surface to air missile, that were easily identified by their signature smoke trails. As a result of these reconnaissance missions, the Ethiopian pilots were able to report the large buildup of Somali forces along the border and the increase in hostile, offensive actions.

This escalation in the conflict created a significant problem for the Derg government. Because of the arms embargo enacted by the Carter administration, the Ethiopian Armed Forces could no longer accumulate the required American military equipment required to successfully defend themselves against an all out invasion by the Somalis. Besides the halt in delivery of ammunition, tanks, and naval equipment previously agreed upon by the Americans, the remaining eight F-5Es were diverted from Ethiopia to the Philippines. Of equal concern was the termination of access to spare parts for the sustainment of the Ethiopian Air Force aircraft. In response to this situation, Mengistu was forced to engage in additional dialogue with the Soviet Union. In addition to negotiating for further military assistance, these discussions also

represented an effort to convince their socialist brothers to help maintain control of the Somali government and prevent an invasion.

Eventually, after the expulsion of the United States and the closing of Kagnew Station, Mengistu entered into a second formal agreement with the Soviet Union to provide military assistance. On 6 May 1977, both sides signed a Friendship and Cooperation Agreement, which included an arms package worth \$385 million.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the Soviet Union agreed to provide Ethiopia with aircraft conversion training for their pilots in anticipation of the delivery of MiG-21 and eventually MiG-23 aircraft in the future. As a result of this agreement, the Ethiopian Air Force sent a significant number of their pilots to the Soviet Union in June 1977. Since the F-86s were no longer actively flying, all of these pilots attended the flight training, along with some F-5A and F-5E pilots, including Brigadier General Ashenafi and Colonel Berhanu Wubneh. This left the Ethiopian Air Force with a severe shortage of available combat pilots required for the defense of the nation.

As full-scale war approached, the WSLF attacks intensified, with the city of Gode being a primary target. Gode is located in the far southeastern portion of the Ogaden, situated only 75 miles from the Somali border. Additionally, it contained Ethiopia's most forward airbase: an important facility in the Ethiopian Air Force's war planning strategy. Although no aircraft were permanently stationed there, the airfield was to be used as a forward staging site to launch and recover aircraft near the front lines of a potential conflict. For this reason, Gode Air Base was stockpiled with bombs, missiles, ammunition, and fuel. Unfortunately, the defense of the airbase was the responsibility

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 204.

of the Ethiopian Army, which provided as little as a company of soldiers - 150 men - to protect it.

Additionally, in 1977 the region was experiencing a devastating famine which forced the Derg government to deploy the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission to Gode to help alleviate the suffering and assist with the humanitarian intervention. A member of the commission was the previously mentioned Swedish Count Gustaf von Rosen, who was flying relief missions into the city. In early July 1977, the WSLF attacked the town of Gode in an effort to seize the important air base and its supplies. In response to the attack, the Ethiopian government flew in members of the recently established militia to augment the suppression of the guerilla forces. Although Gode was successfully defended against the guerilla attack, von Rosen was killed. It seems ironic that the expatriate pilot, who flew in the Russo-Finnish War, the Congo, and Biafra, would be killed in ground combat. The victory in Gode, however, would be short-lived, as the regular Somali army was preparing to invade.

There is a general lack of consensus as to when the Ogaden War “officially” began. While some sources mark the date as 23 July 1977, according to the Ethiopians the war actually began on 16 July 1977. Militarily speaking, the Somalis greatly outnumbered the Ethiopians with regard to trained army personnel and weapons. The Soviets had been extremely generous with the number of tanks, artillery pieces, and anti-aircraft weapons they provided to the Somalis. In 1977, the Somalis had nearly three times the number of tanks that the Ethiopians possessed and they also had a clear advantage in the number of combat aircraft at their disposal.<sup>6</sup> According to one

---

<sup>6</sup> Gebru Tareke, “The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2000), 638.

source, at the beginning of the conflict, Ethiopia had 36 combat aircraft and Somalia had 66 combat aircraft, nearly twice as many.<sup>7</sup> If the Ethiopians maintained an edge anywhere, it was in the superiority of their American aircraft and flight training.

If the Ethiopians appeared ill prepared for the Somali onslaught, the Soviets can be partly to blame. The Ethiopian government relied too heavily on the Soviet government's ability to dissuade Barre from attacking Ethiopia with regular Army forces. In fact, in May 1977, the Ethiopians foolishly elected to move some of its forces from the Ogaden region to the northwest portion of Ethiopia to counter a threat from the rebel forces of the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU). Based on the Soviet's information that Somalia would not attack, a brigade from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was transferred and was unable to return to the Ogaden until August.<sup>8</sup> It seems apparent that Barre realized his chances for a successful invasion of Ethiopia were at their peak. The defection of the Americans, the escalating civil war and unrest, and the ongoing secessionist war with Eritrea made their neighbors extremely vulnerable to attack. Additionally, Somalia had accumulated approximately six months worth of ammunition and supplies, just in case Soviet support for the war faltered. The window of opportunity was now, but victory would need to be achieved quickly.

On 16 July 1977, Somalia invaded Ethiopia using regular army troops, supported by the WSLF guerillas. The initial attack was a simultaneous five pronged offensive. In the south the Somalis invaded from Moyale against the city of Bale. Also from the south, they reattacked Gode from their positions in Dolo Odo and from Beledweyne they

---

<sup>7</sup> Joseph K. Nkaisserry, Brigadier Kenyan Army, "The Ogaden War: An Analysis of Its Causes and Its Impact on Regional Peace on the Horn of Africa," Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barrack, PA (1997), 7.

<sup>8</sup> "Ethiopia/Somalia War: The Long Struggle," *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 18, No. 20, 7 October 1977 (London: The Castle Press Ltd., 1977), 5.

attacked Kelafo. These targets in the southern region of the Ogaden were not strongly defended and offered the Somalis an opportunity for immediate success. In the north, Somalia attacked Degeh Bur from Berbera and from their primary forward base of Hargeisa they pushed westward toward Boorama. At Boorama the forces split into two separate forces. One section continued north towards Aysha to destroy a portion of the Addis-Djibouti railroad, while the remaining unit trekked westward towards Shinile. Soviet involvement in the planning aspect of this invasion is unclear, but the Ethiopians claim to have confiscated a detailed map of the blitzkrieg offensive from a captured Somali tank near Dire Dawa that was supposedly drawn by a Soviet advisor.

At the beginning of the war, manning was a significant problem for the Ethiopian Air Force. With the majority of their pilots training in the Soviet Union, there were barely enough pilots to fill the cockpits. Actually, the F-5A Squadron did not have enough. In mid-July, the 5<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron had only five pilots available to fly combat sorties, while it maintained a fleet of 18 aircraft. Eventually, this number would rise to approximately 10 pilots, but this was still insufficient. The F-5E Squadron was not much better, having only eight pilots capable of flying seven aircraft. One of the original eight F-5Es was destroyed by an enemy rocket propelled grenade in Dire Dawa prior to the official start of the war, leaving the squadron with only seven mission capable jets.

From a modern Air Force perspective, this ratio of pilots to aircraft is nonsensical and dangerous. A healthy pilot to aircraft ratio would appear to be approximately 3-1, with an absolute minimum acceptable level of 2-1. Former F-5 pilots working in the headquarters at Debre Zeit were recruited or volunteered for combat duty at the beginning of the war. Additionally, with the immediate recall and return of several pilots

from the Soviet Union, the number of available pilots steadily increased, but as we can see, the number of Ethiopian fighter pilots actively flying in the Air Force was extremely low. This personnel shortage was one of the reasons why the Somalis had a clear numerical advantage at the onset of the war, albeit on paper and not in the air. This shortage highlights the tireless efforts and aerial skill of the Ethiopian pilots who were flying, not to mention their heroic actions and bravery.

The first opportunity for the Ethiopian pilots to see action during the Ogaden War occurred immediately after the Somali attack. On Saturday, 16 June 1977, three F-5A were flown from Asmara to Debre Zeit. The following day, the Ethiopian Air Force flew their first combat missions of the war. Gode was given the highest priority for defense because of the ammunition and fuel depots located on the base and was therefore the location of the first Air Force sorties. When the Ethiopian Air Force took off from Debre Zeit, they initially experienced poor weather conditions and were uncertain as to the likelihood of successfully completing their mission. Fortunately, as the formation approached Gode, the weather cleared dramatically and the first target of the aerial campaign was successfully hit – a bridge on the southeast side of Gode. The F-5As recovered to Dire Dawa safely and the combat sorties would continue as quickly as the airplanes could refuel and rearm. According to Colonel Berhanu, “the pilots of these initial missions to Gode were not lacking in available targets. Tanks and artillery pieces were everywhere and provided easy targets of opportunity.”<sup>9</sup> The destruction of these targets would effectively postpone the surrender of Gode.

---

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Berhanu Kebede, interviewed by author, Santa Clarita, CA, 23 September 2012

The F-5As continued to attack targets in the immediate vicinity of Gode, but the Somalis had a significant number of anti aircraft guns and surface-to-air missiles at their disposal. Additionally, they were extremely well trained in their use. Early in the conflict, the F-5A Squadron Commander, Colonel Berhanu, was a victim of this proficiency and his aircraft was shot down near Gode. On that fateful day, his aircraft had experienced radio failure and he was forced to fly the mission “in the blind”. His formation was attacking targets on the southeast side of Gode, which was entirely occupied by Somali forces. According to Col. Berhanu,

While flying formation sorties, the pilots watch for ground fire against the other aircraft. When they fire missiles at you, you don't see them unless you are in an extremely tight turn. The other pilot watches your tail and communicates the information to you. In this case they were shouting to me about the missile launch, but I didn't have a radio. Initially, the left engine was hit and the fire warning came on. I shut down the left engine but the fire persisted and finally I lost all control of the aircraft.<sup>10</sup>

Col. Berhanu was hit by an SA-7 missile and forced to eject from the aircraft. Fortunately he was in a left hand escape maneuver at the time and was back over friendly territory when he ejected. He was successfully recovered, but the F-5A was destroyed; the first aircraft lost to enemy fire in the war. He was forced to remain overnight in Gode, where he experienced first-hand the continuous artillery shelling of the city carried out by the Somalis. The next day he returned to Dire Dawa and immediately continued flying combat sorties. Additional troops were sent to Gode on 17 July 1977 to reinforce the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, but the city was eventually lost and the remaining troops retreated hastily toward the stronghold city of Jijiga in the north.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Colonel Berhanu Kebede, interviewed by author, Santa Clarita, CA, 23 September 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Gebru Tareke, “The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited,” 644.



Figure 7-1. Col. Berhanu (Photo courtesy of Col. Berhanu)

It was about five days after the start of the war that the Somali MiGs starting flying into the Ogaden region. They utilized the majority of their 40 MiG-21 aircraft, mostly conducting bombing raids behind enemy lines.<sup>12</sup> These aircraft were predominantly stationed in Hargeisa, due to the limited range of these Soviet aircraft. The aircraft also flew close air support missions, providing the necessary air support for the ground troops engaged in attacks against the cities of Kelafo, Kebri Har, and Gode. The Ethiopian Air Force response was immediate, but not overpowering, mostly due to the lack of pilot availability.

During this initial period of the war, the F-5As continued their relentless bombing and strafing attacks against the invading Somali forces. The Ethiopian Air Force pilots were flying as many as eight sorties per day in an effort to slow the advance of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Somalis. Because of the continuous Ethiopian air attack, the Somali ground forces were taking a beating and requested Somali air cover for their operations. Air superiority, however, was not a tactic known or taught by the Soviet Union to the Somali Air Corps and they could not protect their forces from the F-5A attacks. The MiG-21s were more interceptors than air-to-air combatants. While the MiG-21s had tremendous power and could normally carry two missiles, according to the Ethiopian pilots they were not equipped with guns. Additionally, the MiG aircraft were not nearly as maneuverable as the Ethiopian F-5s, which gave the Ethiopians a clear advantage in aerial combat.

The F-5Es were also extremely active in the early stages of the conflict. Although the primary mission of the F-5E was interception and air superiority, they were also used for tactical attack. Initially, their primary missions were close air support and interdiction, routinely targeting the Somalis east of Jijiga, and at Kebri Dehar and Degeh Bur. They were normally armed with bombs to attack enemy forces on the ground. In response to the Somali Army's call for air assistance, the Somali Air Corp began to launch MiG-17 aircraft to intercept the F-5Es. Upon initial contact, the F-5Es were forced to jettison their payloads and engage with the enemy. According to the Ethiopian pilots, if you did not jettison the armaments, the aircraft would be too sluggish to maneuver, which created a significant advantage for the opposing aircraft. Although these Somali interdiction missions were successful in their protection of the ground forces, they were deadly to the Somali pilots. The Ethiopians achieved multiple kills of the subsonic MiG-17s and the Somalis were quickly forced to abandon this tactic. This was the beginning of the air war in the Ogaden, which would prove both devastating and demoralizing to the Somalis.

Another advantage held by the Ethiopian Air Force was the superiority of the TPS-34D American radar system. This system was erected at Jijiga and was highly effective in identifying, tracking, and targeting the Somali MiGs. The radar facility was so accurate that it could acquire the MiGs as soon as they were airborne from Hargeisa Air Base. At this point, the information would be relayed to Dire Dawa and the Ethiopian F-5Es were launched to intercept the Somali MiGs. As the MiGs were en route to their close air support or interdiction targets, the radar technicians would assist the F-5E pilots with vectors to put the Ethiopian fighters in favorable positions to engage the Somali MiGs. This system was extremely successful and it was estimated that the majority of MiG aircraft, as many as 15, were shot down during the first ten days of the war. The superiority of the Ethiopians became so pervasive, it was rumored that Somali pilots were ejecting from their aircraft as soon as their warning systems detected an Ethiopia missile launch and prior to being hit.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron was commanded by Colonel Berhanu Wubneh and, as mentioned earlier, was comprised of eight F-5Es. In order to better protect the aircraft, they were bedded down at night in Debre Zeit. In the morning the aircraft were flown to Dire Dawa Air Base, where they were refueled and armed for their combat missions. After the sorties, the aircraft would recover to Dire Dawa and prepare for subsequent missions. At the end of the day, the aircraft were flown to Debre Zeit and put to bed. Because the missions were accomplished by visual acquisition of the targets, the combat sorties were limited to daylight only operations. Debre Zeit was considered a safer, more secure location, well distanced from the front lines. A similar operation was

developed for the F-5As of the 5<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, commanded by Colonel Berhanu Kebede.

At this point early in the war, leadership in the F-5E squadron proposed the idea of conducting first-strike missions into Somali territory, primarily targeting air assets located at Hargeisa Air Base and Berbera. Although the fighter pilots were confident that these preemptive strikes would disable the Somali Air Corp on the ground, such plans were eventually disapproved by the Air Force Chief of Staff. The Ethiopian government was concerned about international condemnation for conducting blatantly offensive operations and was worried that by using American airplanes to attack Somalia, the U.S. government might come to Somalia's aid with military assistance. Hargeisa Air Base would eventually be targeted, but this would not occur until January 1978, in preparation for the counteroffensive.

While the air war was proceeding successfully for the Ethiopians, the same could not be said of the ground war. The Somali ground forces were a fierce, well-trained fighting machine. Even the Ethiopians recognized the skill and bravery of their adversaries. They stood their ground well and were effectively organized. Add this to the fact that the Somalis had large numbers of tanks and artillery pieces, it should not be surprising that they experienced great success in the lightly defended regions of the south and southeast Ogaden early in the war. Their tank forces were so well regarded, that according to an anonymous Ethiopian soldier, "if one were to combine the Ethiopian Air Force and the Somali tank units, one would have created Africa's dream army."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous Ethiopian sergeant, 15 March 1994, referenced in Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," 661.

Prior to the official start of the war, Ethiopia had elected to keep the bulk of its forces, including the region's only mechanized brigade, in the vicinity of Jijiga. This left the smaller outposts vulnerable to attack. Additionally, the civilian populations of these smaller outposts were ethnic Somalis and Muslims, two facts which made them more sympathetic to the invaders and at times willing to assist them. Ethiopian resistance has been described as both feeble and fierce, but in towns such as Degeh Bur and Kebri Dehar the soldiers were recognized for their bravery.<sup>14</sup> The overall analysis, however, was that the Ethiopian Army was woefully unprepared despite over 25 years of U.S. assistance.<sup>15</sup>

The strategically important city of Gode fell to the Somalis on 25 July 1977, when the remaining forces withdrew. Less than 500 of the 2,350 militia sent to defend Gode safely arrived in Harar during the retreat.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the month, the Somalis had captured the majority of the Bale region and the major Ogaden towns of Kelafo and Kebri Dehar. What remained for the Somalis were the strategically important cities of Jijiga, Harar, and Dire Dawa. All three were located within 75 miles of each other, contained sizeable populations, and were situated along a major supply line. Harar was an ancient city, older than Addis Ababa, and was rich with Ethiopian history and tradition. Losing it would not only be a military defeat, but also a psychological one.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, as previously mentioned, Dire Dawa contained a major Ethiopian Air Base,

---

<sup>14</sup> Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," 644-45.

<sup>15</sup> "War in the Horn of Africa: A First Hand Report on the Challenges for United States Policy," *Report of a Factfinding Mission to Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya December 12 to 22, 1977 to the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives*, 3 February 1978 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," 644.

<sup>17</sup> "War in the Horn of Africa," *Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representative*, 10.

vital to the war effort and resistance. If Ethiopia hoped to achieve military victory, the defense of this region was essential.

Although only limited fighting had occurred since the end of July, mostly due to the weather conditions caused by the region's rainy season, the Somalis were preparing for a major attack by mid-August. Their target was Dire Dawa, for it was assumed that if the westernmost city of this strategic triangle could be captured, then both Harar and Jijiga would eventually capitulate for lack of supplies and reinforcements. Additionally, the Ethiopians expected the first assault to occur on Jijiga, which left Dire Dawa much less protected. On 17 August 1977, five Somali army units attacked at night from two locations in the northeast. The Somalis attempted to overwhelm the city by utilizing mechanized columns. The Somalis had over 3,000 men: the 16<sup>th</sup> armored battalion with 32 T55 tanks; the 30<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> artillery battalions with 85mm and 122 mm guns; a BM 13 rocket company; and the 15<sup>th</sup> Motorized Brigade.<sup>18</sup> Overall, the city of Dire Dawa was not adequately prepared for the Somali attack. It was, however, the finest hour for the Ethiopian Air Force.

Beginning in the early morning, the Somalis bombarded the city with a barrage of artillery shells, followed by tanks. Although the army was in control of the base's defense, it was the commander of the air base who proved his mettle. General Fanta Belay, who would later become the Air Force Chief of Staff and a state minister, immediately realized the severity of the situation. At 0600, an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing-707 had landed at the base to deliver supplies and personnel. Soon after, the perimeter fence was breached by Somali tanks, and the enemy forces were inside the compound.

---

<sup>18</sup> "Ethiopia/Somalia War: The Long Struggle," *Africa Confidential*, 5.

Unfortunately, there were also two F-5Es on the ramp at Dire Dawa. General Fanta literally pulled the F-5 pilots out of bed and personally assisted them in getting the aircraft airborne as soon as possible. He did the same to the B-707 crew, whose aircraft was damaged by gunfire, but managed to successfully depart the airfield. According to the Ethiopian sources, there were no airplane losses during this initial attack. After the airplanes departed, General Fanta grabbed a rifle and started fighting on the front lines of the base to stave off the Somalis, reinforcing his legacy as both a brave leader and patriot.

Fortunately for the Air Force, the weather cleared later that day and the entire fleet of F-5A and F-5Es were launched from Debre Zeit to assist in the defense of Dire Dawa. Because of the heavy casualties previously suffered by the Somali Air Corps, the Ethiopian Air Force flew relatively unopposed, although the Somalis had the ZSU-23-4 "Shilka", a self-propelled, radar guided anti-aircraft weapon system. Through close coordination with ground controllers, the Air Force relentlessly attacked the Somali forces causing heavy casualties and destroying 16 of their T-55 tanks.<sup>19</sup> They bombed and strafed the Somali army almost continuously during hours of daylight and the Ethiopians claimed that the Somalis were easy targets, focusing on the enemy's tanks and artillery. So intense was the concentration of Ethiopian fighters, some aircraft were forced to hold west of the city, to wait for their "turn" to attack.

Another significant factor in the Dire Dawa battle was the performance of the Ethiopian Special Forces unit. Just days earlier, these Israeli trained soldiers had departed the city to the north toward Shinile. After the fighting commenced, they could

---

<sup>19</sup> Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," 646.

see and hear the artillery shelling from their positions outside the city and immediately returned to Dire Dawa to assist in the city's defense. Interestingly, the Special Forces unit reentered the area of Dire Dawa also from the northeast, unintentionally surrounding the Somalis and cutting off their logistical lines of communication and supply.

Through a combination of airpower and tactical maneuvering, the Somali forces were routed at Dire Dawa. Overextended, the Somali army was led to its slaughter at Dire Dawa by uncoordinated attacks and a complete lack of air support. This battle was pivotal in the overall outcome of the war, because it not only halted the advance of the Somali forces, but it produced a reenergized sense of nationalism within the state of Ethiopia. Ethiopians, I have been told, will always put aside their internal differences when severely threatened by a foreign enemy – as in the case of the attack on Dire Dawa. Hypothetically, this was a major turning point in the war. If the Somalis had taken Dire Dawa, they may have proceeded all the way to Awash, which had been claimed by the Somalis as part of their ethnic territory. The Ethiopian Air Force had proven Haile Selassie correct. It was able to defeat an enemy from the skies and force a numerically superior adversary to retreat, all of which occurred prior to the arrival of Soviet military assistance.

During this portion of the war, the Ethiopians were beginning to feel the effects of the suspended military assistance and arms delivery from the United States. They had quickly exhausted their supply of armor piercing bullets, utilized to attack tanks, and were low on bombs, missiles, and basic ammunition. It was during this period that the Ethiopian government started searching for additional foreign assistance. Tom Cooper

reported that the Israelis were providing F-5 combat pilots early in the war, a claim emphatically denied by the Ethiopians.<sup>20</sup> According to Ethiopian Air Force leadership, the Israelis never flew with the Ethiopian Air Force during the Ogaden War, but only aided in the delivery and development of highly lethal cluster bomb weapons and technology. The Ethiopians needed advanced weaponry for their aircraft, but the Israeli cluster bombs were not designed for use on the F-5s. Therefore, Israeli engineers traveled to Debre Zeit, to provide technical assistance in modifying the fighters and creating improvised tactics to permit their employment. Col. Berhanu Kebede was the first Ethiopian pilot to test the weapon on the F-5As, which he accomplished with great success. After the testing and modifications were complete, the Israelis departed Ethiopia.

Similarly, the Ethiopian F-5s were quickly running out of spare aircraft parts. Although the Derg government repeatedly tried to renegotiate with the Americans, the Carter administration was adamant about the enforcement of its embargo of military assistance to the Horn of Africa, including the supply of spare aircraft parts. The Ethiopians turned to the Kenyans, who also maintained an inventory of Northrop F-5 aircraft. The Northern Frontier District of Kenya was another potential target eyed by Somali irredentists, which fostered a relationship of convenience between Ethiopia and Kenya. This steady supply of aircraft parts from the Kenyans allowed the Ethiopian Air Force to keep the majority of its aircraft inventory operational, especially in the period of the war prior to the arrival of Soviet MiGs.

---

<sup>20</sup> Tom Cooper, "Ogaden War."

Although the Somalis were soundly defeated in Dire Dawa, their military determination endured. The next Somali objective was the city of Jijiga. Of the three cities comprising the “strategic triangle”, Jijiga appeared the most likely for successful capture. First, its location was the closest to Somalia and provided the easiest opportunity for logistical support. Additionally, Jijiga contained a significant number of ethnic Somalis, who could provide covert assistance to the “liberating” forces, a condition that was not available in either Harar or Dire Dawa. Jijiga would witness some of the bloodiest battles of the Ogaden War and was interesting in the fact that control of the city changed hands several times.

This intense period of the Ogaden War was not, however, limited to ground warfare. The skies over Jijiga also witnessed numerous air combat engagements, not only air-to-air, but also air-to-ground and ground-to-air. By this time, the Somalis had long replaced the MiG-17s with MiG-21s in accomplishing the mission of interception. One such battle took place over Jijiga on 22 August 1977 and rewarded General Ashenafi with his first aerial victory of the war.

Brigadier General Ashenafi Gizaw joined the Air Force in 1965 and attended the Officer Course in 1968. During his time in the Air Force he served as a fighter pilot, instructor pilot, Squadron Commander, Regiment Commander, and eventually, the Ethiopian Air Force Operations Officer. He was credited with two kills in the F-5E during the Ogaden War, but was later imprisoned by both the Derg regime in 1978 and again after the coup in 1991, the latter of which lasted for ten years without a trial. It was later explained to him that his incarceration was the result of his association with known political activists, although Ashenafi claimed he had no personal interest in politics.

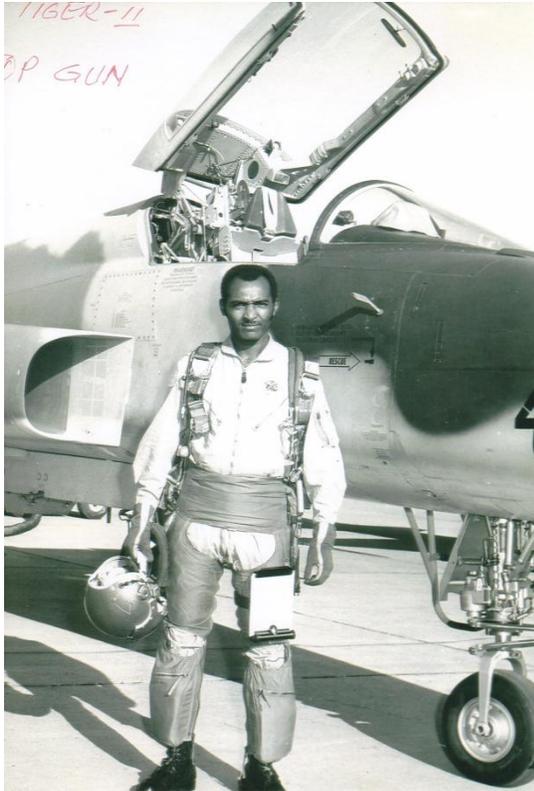


Figure 7-2. Brig. Gen. Ashenafi (Photo Courtesy of Brig. Gen. Ashenafi)

The mission assigned to General Ashenafi was to provide combat air patrol coverage for a C-119 that was unloading some artillery pieces for the army in Jijiga. Due to a maintenance problem experienced by his wingman, General Ashenafi was forced to depart Dire Dawa single-ship. After loitering for approximately 30 minutes, he was rejoined by the other F-5E flown by Colonel Mengistu. At this point, Ashenafi was at his return to base fuel quantity, commonly referred to as “bingo fuel”, when they were engaged by two Somali MiG-21s, just north of Jijiga.

Quickly after initiating contact, one of the Somali MiG-21s broke down and away, as if to disengage. This tactic was well known to the Ethiopian fighter pilots and they broke formation to chase the two MiGs separately. Ashenafi initially lost sight of the enemy aircraft, but quickly reacquired the target and set himself up for a missile shot.

At approximately two kilometers away, Ashenafi fired his first Sidewinder missile. Instantly the missile's trajectory went well below the Somali MiG, but after it reacquired the heat signature it tracked directly at the MiG and "blew it in half."<sup>21</sup> Ashenafi had never trained with missiles and his first attempt to fire one from his airplane resulted in a kill.

While the other MiG escaped, Ashenafi was extremely low on fuel and thought he might have to eject from his F-5E. He climbed to conserve as much gas as possible and eventually was able to glide the aircraft into Dire Dawa. Due to the high approach angle and excessive speed, Ashenafi blew a tire on landing, but he had successfully recovered the aircraft. Due to the diligence of the maintenance technicians the aircraft was able to return to service in minimal time.

By the end of August, the Somalis repeatedly threatened the heavily defended town through a constant bombardment of heavy artillery, but were held off by the firmly entrenched Ethiopians. Smaller scale battles continued for another week, in which control of the city was actually exchanged twice.<sup>22</sup> One of the first casualties of the battle for Jijiga was the American APN-24 radar system, which the Somalis were able to successfully destroy. According to *African Confidential*, "the loss of the radar station...enabled the Somali planes to carry out some air attacks for the first time."<sup>23</sup>

In early September 1977, the Somalis finally captured the town of Jijiga, forcing the Ethiopians to temporarily vacate the city. Despite the destruction of the radar facility at Karamara, the Ethiopian Air Force still achieved great success by imposing heavy casualties on the Somali forces. Realizing the importance of Jijiga, Chairman Mengistu

---

<sup>21</sup> Brig. Gen. Ashenafi Gebere Tsadik, interviewed by the author, Washington D.C., 6 October 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," 647.

<sup>23</sup> "Ethiopia/Somalia War: The Long Struggle," *Africa Confidential*, 5.

flew to Jijiga to personally motivate the Ethiopian troops to retake the city. Mengistu's resolve was admirable and he said, "There would be no peace in the Ogaden region until all Somali forces had left the region."<sup>24</sup> Although the city's recapture was accomplished, it was a short lived victory. Jijiga eventually fell to the Somalis on 12 September 1977 and would remain under their control for the next six months.

Shortly after the Ethiopian defeat at Jijiga, Ashenafi achieved his second kill of the war. Flying an attack mission with General Legesse, the formation was tasked to destroy an anti-aircraft gun near Jijiga. One of Ashenafi's guns was jammed during the mission and the fighters were having trouble neutralizing the target. As they were preparing to return to base, two Somali MiG-21 fighters from Hargeisa were picked up on radar. Ashenafi and Legesse went into a spread formation, flying a scissors maneuver at 450 knots. During this time, Ashenafi lost sight of Legesse and went into a defensive maneuver called the "egg". This maneuver consists of flying an oval shaped pattern, while maintaining a minimum of 350 knots and a continuous 4G pull. Successfully executing this maneuver will prevent an enemy aircraft from getting into a position favorable for a kill.<sup>25</sup>

As Ashenafi continued to fly the defensive maneuver, he visually spotted the Somali MiG. It was immediately apparent that the MiG-21 had an advantageous position and Ashenafi elected to turn directly into the enemy fighter. At this point the Somali pilot made a huge tactical error and pulled up, allowing Ashenafi a chance to take a missile shot. Fortunately, the missile missed, which Ashenafi believes was lucky;

---

<sup>24</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, "Ethiopian Leader Predicts a Long War in the Ogaden," *New York Times*, 19 September 1977, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Brig. Gen. Ashenafi Gebere Tsadik, interviewed by the author, Washington D.C., 6 October 2012.

the MiG was so close the debris would have caused serious damage to his F-5E. After another missed missile shot, Ashenafi continued his pursuit and eventually shot the Somali MiG down with his guns as the aircraft crossed in front of him. Moments later, Legesse also achieved an enemy kill. These two victories would be the last of the Ogaden War, as Ethiopia claimed air superiority from that point forward. With a few rare exceptions, the Somali Air Corp ceased to operate for the remainder of the war. The Ethiopian Air Force would fly the rest of the war unopposed.

After achieving control of the skies, the Canberra bombers and F-5s continued their bombing missions, slowing the advance of the Somali forces. Unfortunately, during the Ethiopian retreat from Jijiga, the strategically important Marda Pass was also relinquished to the Somalis, making the reconquest of Jijiga a much more challenging endeavor. The achievement of air superiority, however, did not mean that Ethiopian aircraft did not face enemy threats. As mentioned previously, the Somalis had large numbers of anti-aircraft guns and surface to air missiles. In fact, while flying missions in the vicinity of Jijiga after its capture, two Ethiopian F-5Es were shot down. Both aircraft were destroyed and one pilot, Afework was captured by Somali forces and died in captivity. The other pilot, Batcha, was successfully recovered by the Ethiopian Air Force.

This event highlights another important member of the Ethiopian Air Force, the Rescue Squadron. Although the squadron was comprised mostly of helicopters, it also contained some fixed wing aircraft. The staple of the unit was the French built Alouette helicopter, often described as small, but extremely versatile. The unit had five or six of these helicopters at the beginning of the war which were primarily used for search and

rescue missions. The helicopters would deploy as single aircraft to areas of ongoing conflict with the mission of rescuing pilots who had been shot down or who had ejected. Occasionally, the Alouettes would be utilized as transportation vehicles, but due to their limited capacity of six, this occurred very rarely.

The Ethiopian Rescue Squadron was under the command of Brigadier General Tsegaye. General Tsegaye graduated from the Harar Military Academy in 1958 and was a classmate of General Legesse. Additionally, he was the first Commander of the newly established Ethiopian Air Force Academy in Debre Zeit in 1986.

It appears that the manning of the Rescue Squadron was much healthier than that of the fighter squadrons. At various times during the war, there were anywhere from 30 to 45 helicopter pilots available for duty. The unit also contained some fixed wing aircraft. They possessed a few light Cessna aircraft, including a C-172, which were often employed for reconnaissance and communications purposes, relaying valuable information to the appropriate command agencies. Ethiopia also maintained some American Bell UH-1D "Hueys", but these fell under the Army Aviation Regiment, not the Air Force. Additionally, due to the limitations of American spare parts, these helicopters were used infrequently during the Ogaden War. It was in late September/early October that the Ethiopian supply problems were quickly alleviated through the military assistance programs provided by the Soviet Union.

These historic events represent one of the most significant reversals of military alliances in modern warfare. As previously discussed, since the early 1960s, Somalia was the recipient of generous Soviet military aid. They had supplied the Somalis with MiG-17s, MiG-21s, and applicable flight training which were all utilized during the

Ogaden War. However, with the invasion of Ethiopia, Somalia had violated the OAU agreement to honor previously established African borders. Additionally, the Soviets were surprisingly supporting both governments at the beginning of the war, which appeased neither regime. In a bold and probably unwise decision, on 13 November 1977, Siad Barre broke diplomatic relations with Cuba and expelled all Soviet and Cuban advisors from his country.<sup>26</sup> One can only imagine that Barre was anticipating that the United States would enthusiastically fill the void by providing military assistance to Somalia as a counter to the Soviets' expansion in Ethiopia. Unfortunately for Barre, the United States was content to sit out the remainder of the war as an "innocent" bystander.<sup>27</sup>

With the disintegration of Soviet-Somali relations, the Kremlin immediately embraced the Derg regime by supplying Soviet equipment and advisors. It is estimated that during this period, the Soviet provided the Ethiopians with \$1 billion dollars of military assistance.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, a large proportion of the Soviet military advisors previously stationed in Somalia were simply transferred to Ethiopia. This was significant, because at the time of their expulsion, there were 1,687 Soviet advisors reportedly in Somalia.<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, on 25 November, the huge shipment of military equipment began to arrive in Addis Ababa. The Soviets utilized over 225 transport aircraft during this massive airlift operation supplying the Ethiopians with heavy and light tanks, multi-barreled rocket launchers, artillery, small arms, ammunition,

---

<sup>26</sup> David A. Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Donna R. Jackson, *Jimmy Carter and the Horn of Africa: Cold War Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 74-75.

<sup>28</sup> Robert G. Patman, *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa*, 223.

<sup>29</sup> "The Battle for the Horn," *Newsweek*, 13 February 1978, 48.

vehicles, medical supplies, food, and petroleum.<sup>30</sup> The air-bridge from the Soviet Union to Ethiopia lasted for approximately six weeks, with a Soviet plane landing every 20 minutes, day and night. Such a massive operation demonstrated the Soviet commitment to the Ethiopian cause and was reminiscent of the Berlin Airlift in the late 1940s.

In addition to the army equipment, the Soviets also supplied aircraft to the Ethiopian Air Force. This delivery included 48 MiG-21s and MiG-23s, at least 10 MI-6s and MI-8s, and six MI-24s.<sup>31</sup> These numbers were overwhelming to the Ethiopian Air Force, which was a relatively small service and had previously requested a more modest amount. It was estimated by Ethiopian Air Force leaders that by the end of the war, more than 160 Soviet aircraft were in Ethiopia; a number reinforced by David Korn.<sup>32</sup> This created problems for the Ethiopian Air Force, especially since the bases were not properly equipped to handle such large quantities. So excessive was the amount of equipment delivered to Ethiopia, a large portion of it remained in shipping crates and was not utilized at all during the conflict.

Cubans forces were also sent to Ethiopia to support the local forces. Approximately 6,000 Cuban troops were transported to Ethiopia via Soviet transport ships and airplanes from Angola and Cuba.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the Soviet advisors, the Cubans immediately assumed a combat role and fought both on the ground and in the air. These forces, however, did not often intermix with the Ethiopians. The Cuban army units remained segregated and Cuban aircraft only flew in support of their fellow

---

<sup>30</sup> Colin Legum (Ed.) *African Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents 1977-1978* (New York: African Publishing Company, 1979), B-228.

<sup>31</sup> Tom Cooper, "Ogaden War."

<sup>32</sup> David A. Korn, *The United States, Ethiopia and the Soviet Union*, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Tom Cooper, "Ogaden War."

countrymen. The Soviet aircraft were primarily flown by the Cuban pilots during the remainder of the war, although some of the MiGs were flown by the Ethiopian pilots who had returned from the six month training in the Soviet Union. The number of Cuban fighter pilots actively engaged in the war, however, was relatively modest. Only twelve Cubans were said to have flown MiGs in support of Ethiopia during the Ogaden War, again a number far smaller than aircraft available. According to the Ethiopian pilots, the Air Force only slowly transitioned to the MiGs during the war. For the most part, they continued to fly the American aircraft and only began to fly the Soviet aircraft in earnest after the war had ended.

The delivery of the Soviet equipment and the arrival of the Cubans facilitated the counteroffensive that would begin in 1978. Soviet General Valiley Petrov took command of the Ethiopian military operations for the remainder of the war, working with the Ethiopian high command to plan and execute the combat operations by maximizing their rapidly expanded capabilities. The tide of the war, however, had already changed. The Ethiopians had thwarted the Somali attack on Dire Dawa and halted the advance of the enemy forces just west of the Marda Pass. With the Somalis' supplies running low and the renewed capabilities of the Ethiopians, victory now seemed achievable.

During this period of reorganization, the Ethiopian Air Force was again relentless in its attacks and bombing of Somali positions, especially in the vicinity of Jijiga and Harar. These interdiction missions targeted the known supply routes of the Somalis, which offered little resistance since air superiority had been regained. In the Somali occupied town of Fadis, located to the southwest of Harar, a supply depot was repeatedly targeted by the F-5As. Interdiction missions also focused on the supply

routes near the towns of Degeh Bur, Kebri Dehar, and Jijiga. Certain areas of Jijiga were still protected by surface to air missile sites, but since the Ethiopians knew their locations, they could easily fly around their positions. By this portion of the war, the Ethiopians had completely exhausted their supply of both missiles and cluster bombs, and were now using any type of weapon they could effectively attach to their aircraft.

One of these missions involved probably the most well known Ethiopian fighter pilot of the war - Brigadier General Legesse. General Legesse is credited with five air combat "kills".<sup>34</sup> This was the highest of any Ethiopian pilot and such an accomplishment would have qualified him as an "ace" in the United States Air Force. The mission in which General Legesse was shot down occurred in the later part of 1977. Although the majority of the south was occupied by Somali forces, there were still pockets of active resistance and the control of certain towns remained with the Ethiopian Army.

---

<sup>34</sup> Officially, General Legesse has four confirmed kills, but has been credited with as many as six.



Figure 7-3. Brig. Gen. Legesse (Photo Courtesy of AMFEA)

One of these outposts was the small town of Filtu. Close air support to this location was the primary purpose of the sortie that day and was flown by a formation of two F-5Es from Dire Dawa. The formation was led by General Ashenafi, with General Legesse serving as his wingman. Prior to take off, intelligence reports indicated that Filtu was still under the control of the Ethiopian Army, although it was under attack by Somali forces. Upon arrival in Filtu, the formation flew over the city to establish communications with the ground forces and visually search for the enemy's position. Ashenafi recalls the presence of what appeared to be Ethiopian forces on the ground in Filtu. Later, he purported that these were most likely dummies, erected by the Somalis

in an effort to deceive the Ethiopian air support. In actuality, the Ethiopian Army had already pulled out of the city and were some ten miles north of Filtu retreating.

While surveying the situation from the air, Legesse's aircraft was hit by a surface to air missile. In an effort to put him over Filtu, Ashenafi adamantly directed Legesse to turn his F-5E left to facilitate ejection over friendly forces. Unfortunately, this maneuver put him right in the middle of the Somali Army and he was immediately captured.

General Legesse was taken to Mogadishu, where he remained a prisoner of war for 11 years. He was eventually repatriated to Ethiopia through a Red Cross sponsored POW exchange, but the years of solitary confinement and torture had left Legesse nearly crippled and severely traumatized. For his heroism, General Legesse was awarded the highest order of medal for heroism in Ethiopia - Ye Hibretesbawit Ethiopia Ye Jenga Medalia- which is comparable to the American Medal of Honor.

The Somalis attempted one more offensive in Harar on 22 January 1978. However, this attack was easily defeated by the integrated Ethiopian air and ground forces, which had gained both experience and confidence in the preceding months. While the tanks faced off on the ground, the air forces strafed the enemy's rear positions and lines of communications. Additionally, the Cuban MiGs were effectively utilized in this battle due to its close proximity to Dire Dawa. The Somalis were routed at Harar and began the retreat toward Jijiga.

As the tide of the war was turning in favor of the Ethiopians, the command section began to plan counteroffensive operations. The Somali Air Corp had not flown in months, but in January a Somali MiG-21 flew directly over the Air Base at Dire Dawa, apparently on a reconnaissance mission. The 9<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron immediately

scrambled two F-5E to intercept the Somali MiG. By the time the F-5Es were airborne the MiG had departed, so the formation, led by General Ashenafi headed directly toward Hargeisa in Somalia to search for the aircraft.

Although they never found the MiG, the sortie turned into a reconnaissance mission for the Ethiopians. They first tried to determine the validity of an intelligence report claiming a new airstrip was located one mile east of Hargeisa Air Base. Upon arrival, the Ethiopian formation was met by 100mm anti-aircraft fire. The mysterious airfield was determined not to exist, but a bomb storage facility was identified on Hargeisa Air Base by the pilots. The Ethiopians were determined to preserve their air supremacy and a follow up attack on Hargeisa was planned immediately thereafter.

Due to Ashenafi's recent experience over Hargeisa, he was chosen to lead the first attack formation against the Somali base. Loaded with two 500 pound bombs, Ashenafi's target was the anti-aircraft site, while the remaining three aircraft would use missiles against the bomb storage facility. Interestingly, the formation was three F-5Es and one F-5A, partly because the Ethiopian Air Force was running low of American long-range aircraft. The mission was successful and the targets were eliminated. Additionally, the formation identified an Ilyushin Il-28 on the ramp. This Soviet bomber had previously targeted Ethiopian ground troops near Jijiga and was destroyed by an impromptu strafing run. The Somali Air Corps was now completely grounded, which assured there would be no air threat to the Ethiopian ground forces at Jijiga or subsequent battles during the counteroffensive.

Intelligence reports had also identified ten tank repair facilities around Hargeisa and a six-ship formation of Ethiopian MiG-21s was launched to destroy the sites. This

mission was considered relatively easy because the anti-aircraft site had been previously destroyed. The tank facilities were inflicted with significant damage and likely put out of commission for the remainder of the war. This mission was deemed particularly important to the success of the counteroffensive because of the now limited tank repair capability of the Somali forces.

The counteroffensive began in February 1978, with its primary purpose being the liberation of Jijiga. Recapturing Jijiga meant the Ethiopian Army would have a clear run to the Somali border 60 miles away and leave the Somalis with little alternative but to withdraw from the Ogaden.<sup>35</sup> Mechanized Cuban troops initially moved northward toward Shinili and then proceeded east. They employed their MiG-17s to fly reconnaissance missions to scout the route for enemy forces prior to movements. The bulk of the Ethiopian forces departed Dire Dawa and headed directly east, while another unit headed toward China Hasen from Kombalcha. At Jeldesa, the Somalis were suddenly being attacked from multiple directions and quickly vacated the city, leaving behind most of their equipment due to their burdensome nature, particularly their anti-aircraft guns. Overall, the Somalis were not prepared for the Ethiopian counteroffensive, now supported by additional troops and new equipment.

As the Ethiopian and Cuban forces moved east, the Somalis were dug in at the Ahmar highlands around Harar and in the Kara Marda Pass, although their forces had shrunk to only 12,000 troops by 1978.<sup>36</sup> At the onset of the counterattack, the Ethiopian Air Force flew numerous air superiority missions and provided close air support. The Ethiopian air attacks had destroyed almost all of the Somali heavy weapons and the

---

<sup>35</sup> "Ethiopia Attacks Strategic Ogaden Town," *The Washington Post*, 6 March 1978, A8.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Urban, "Soviet Intervention and the Ogaden Counter-Offensive in 1978," *RUSI: Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies Journal*, 128:2, June 1983, 42.

interdiction missions threatened to cut off the Somalis from their supply bases.

Additionally, the Somali Air Corp remained grounded and anti-aircraft weapons were in short supply.<sup>37</sup>

Attacking Jijiga through the Marda Pass would be both time consuming and costly. Therefore, unconventional tactics were utilized and the Ethiopian 10<sup>th</sup> Division circumnavigated the mountains and attacked the Somalis from the rear. The Cubans used Mi-8 and Mi-6 helicopters to paratroop their forces to the north, from which they also attacked Jijiga.<sup>38</sup> During the entire process, the Ethiopian Air Force continued its air campaign of bombing, interdiction, and close air support. With attacks originating from multiple positions, the Somalis were quickly overwhelmed. Ethiopian signal technicians intercepted messages from the Somali command ordering its troops to hold their positions, but the Somali forces were rapidly deteriorating and forced to retreat.

On 5 March 1978, Jijiga was liberated. This victory was quickly matched in Degah Bur on the 6<sup>th</sup> and Fik on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Immediately after these events, Somali President Barre announced the unilateral withdrawal of Somali forces from the Ogaden and Ethiopia claimed complete victory on 23 March 1978. In spite of this apparent triumph, Somalia still controlled Geladin, Shibalo, Mustahil, Ferfer and several other towns, which amounted to nearly a third of the territory seized from July-August 1977.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the WSLF refused to accept defeat and vowed to continue to wage war against the Ethiopians.<sup>40</sup> While Ethiopia was victorious in the Ogaden War, violence and conflict would continue in the region for decades to come.

---

<sup>37</sup> Mark Urban, "Soviet Intervention and the Ogaden Counter-Offensive in 1978," 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," 660.

<sup>40</sup> Colin Legum (Ed.) *African Contemporary Record*, B-229.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION: WHY THE ETHIOPIANS WON THE OGADEN WAR

Although the Ogaden War's duration was only eight months in length, its impact on both countries was immense. Casualties alone are estimated between 20,000 and 60,000 soldiers on both sides of the border<sup>1</sup>, which doesn't even take into account the large number of displaced civilians and refugees affected by the war. Additionally, the Ogaden War is considered a significant "advancement" in African warfare. While this conflict may have started as a typical guerilla campaign, it transformed into a conventional, perhaps even "modern" war, arguably a first between African nations, albeit heavily supported by the superpowers' arms and influence.

So why did Ethiopia win the Ogaden War? To return to the original question, there were a multitude of reasons that eventually led to victory. In 1977, Ethiopia's defeat of Somalia was anything but a foregone conclusion. In fact, by September 1977, a significant portion of Ethiopia's territory was occupied by Somali forces and their troops were still advancing. The previously mentioned factors of population size, Somali's limited supply of war materials, and the eventual Soviet involvement were certainly all contributory factors. However, as demonstrated in this article, the Ethiopian Air Force was indispensable to the success of Ethiopia in defending her territories.

The great disparity between the population sizes of Ethiopia and Somalia has been argued as a major reason for ultimate victory in the war. Ethiopia's population was approximately ten times that of Somalia and in a war of attrition, the nation with the greater number of potential soldiers should prevail. This does not, however, take into account the multiple conflicts Ethiopia was involved with during the Somali invasion. Its

---

<sup>1</sup> Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," 664.

troops were spread thin on three separate fronts and the military leadership had been partially purged by Mengistu just prior to the outbreak of the war. Although Mengistu had implemented a program of mass training for the militia, its full benefits could not be realized until later in the war, long after the Somali forces were retreating.

The same argument can be made about Soviet and Cuban involvement. The massive influx of weapons and personnel turned the war from defensive to offensive. But once again, we must remember that this assistance did not occur in significant amounts until November 1977, well past the successful defense of Dire Dawa and the halting of Somali troops just beyond the Marda Pass. Soviet weapons and Cuban personnel greatly assisted the Ethiopians in driving the invading forces back to Somalia, but they did not halt their forward progress in August and September. This was accomplished by the Ethiopians themselves, particularly the Ethiopian Air Force.

Finally, the fact that Somalia was only sufficiently provisioned for a war of short duration, approximately six months, is assumed to be true. This situation was further complicated by the expulsion of Soviet advisors and Cuban troops by the Somalis in November. Somalia was therefore committed to fighting a protracted conflict, reliant on both speed and surprise. Their advance, however, was slowed considerably by the constant bombardment and harassment by the Ethiopian fighters. Additionally, as the Somalis became more overextended, the persistent attacks against the Somali lines of communication and supply reduced their fighting capabilities on the fronts. By slowing down the Somali advance and weakening their resupply, the Ethiopians could bide their time. The longer the war progressed, the greater chance Ethiopia had for victory.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Ethiopian Air Force was just as important to defeating Somalia as any other reason...perhaps even of greater importance. Ethiopian airpower was prevalent during all the various stages of the conflict. Outnumbered in aircraft, they achieved 24 air-to-air victories, and did not lose one aircraft in aerial combat.<sup>2</sup> Undermanned in the cockpit, they flew six to eight missions daily. Additionally, drastically short of maintenance materials and ammunition, their technicians improvised to provide the pilots airplanes to fly and bombs to drop. When one looks at how small the Ethiopian Air Force was at the time of the war, their accomplishments were truly remarkable.

Of course the aircraft themselves deserve some of the credit and the Ethiopian pilots continually praised their American aircraft. The Northrop F-5A and F-5E dominated the Soviet MiG-17s and MiG-21. Their maneuverability, excess lift capacity, and superior range gave them a distinct advantage over the Somalis. However, planes do not fly themselves. Perhaps this was best articulated by the former Ambassador and Ethiopian Defense Minister Ayalew Mandefro, when he said, “what counts most in warfare is the human element behind the weapons and not the caliber of the weapon itself.”<sup>3</sup> This sentiment is reflected in the heroic actions of General Legesse, General Ashenafi, General Tsegaye, Colonel Berhanu and all the other Ethiopian pilots who fought in the war, some paying the ultimate sacrifice.

Courage and patriotism cannot be taught, but combat flying skills can. The flight training programs that the Ethiopian pilots completed were what made them so successful in the air. It started with the Swedish, but culminated with the American

---

<sup>2</sup> Tom Cooper, “Ogaden War.”

<sup>3</sup> “Ethiopian War Hero General Legesse Tefera Honored,” Reported by the Organizing Committee, 8 July 2008, *Ethiomeia* website, <http://ethiomeia.com/all/6175.html>, accessed on 7 July 2012.

systems of basic and advanced flight training that provided the superior air combat skills required to achieve air superiority and defeat the Somalis in the air. General Ashenafi claimed, “The American instructors taught us more than basic flying, they taught us how to fly the corners.”<sup>4</sup> The Ethiopians continued this tradition of high quality training at their own flight schools in Debre Zeit. The difficult standards may have washed-out a large proportion of potential aviators, but the small numbers it produced were exceptional. According to Colonel Berhanu, “we were small, but we were very effective.”<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the reason the Ethiopian Air Force was so successful during the Ogaden War of 1977-1978 was a combination of superior aircraft, advanced training, and heroic individuals. After the war, the Soviets were determined to figure out why the MiG-21s was so readily defeated by the American F-5Es. The rationale among the Soviets for the one-sided victories was the general inexperience of the Somali pilots. Therefore, they decided to simulate a combat engagement, pitting the F-5E against a MiG-21. An Ethiopian pilot was at the controls of the F-5, while an experienced Soviet pilot flew the MiG. Similar to the results in the war, the F-5 soundly defeated the MiG-21, to the great surprise of the Soviet advisors. Afterwards, the Soviet pilot was admonished and sent home in defeat...just like the Somalis had been in the Ogaden.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Brig. Gen. Ashenafi Gebere Tsadik, interviewed by the author, Washington D.C., 6 October 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Col. Berhanu Kebede, interviewed by author, Santa Clarita, CA, 23 September 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Capt. Yohannes Wondafrash and Capt. Behailu Tekle, interviewed by the author, Washington, D.C., 1 October 2012.

APPENDIX  
TRANSFERS OF MAJOR CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS 1953-1980<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Research Database Website*, <http://www.sipri.org/>, accessed on 31 August 2012.

Table A-1. Transfers of Major Conventional Weapons 1953-1980.

Supplier/ recipient (R) or licensor (L)	No. ordered	Weapon designation	Weapon description	Year of order/ licence	Year(s) of deliveries	No. delivered/ produced
<b>USA</b>						
R: Ethiopia	(10)	DC-3/C-47 Skytrain	Transport aircraft	(1958)	1958-1959	(10)
	6	T-33A Shooting Star	Trainer aircraft	(1958)	1958	6
	(14)	F-86F Sabre	Fighter aircraft	1959	1960-1961	(14)
	12	T-28A Trojan	Trainer aircraft	(1960)	1961	12
	4	T-33A Shooting Star	Trainer aircraft	1962	1962	4
	2	DC-3/C-47 Skytrain	Transport aircraft	1964	1964	2
	12	F-5A Freedom Fighter	FGA aircraft	1965	1966-1968	12
	12	T-28D Trojan	Trainer/combat ac	1965	1966	12
	2	DC-4/C-54	Transport aircraft	1966	1966	2
	2	T-33A Shooting Star	Trainer aircraft	(1966)	1966	2
	(6)	Bell-205/UH-1H	Helicopter	(1967)	1968	(6)
	6	Cessna-180 Skywagon	Light aircraft	1968	1969	6
	17	C-119K Packet	Transport aircraft	(1970)	1970-1971	17
	4	Cessna-172/T-41	Trainer/light ac	1970	1971	4
	3	F-5A Freedom Fighter	FGA aircraft	(1970)	1971	3
	4	Bell-205/UH-1H	Helicopter	(1971)	1972-1974	(4)
	2	T-33A Shooting Star	Trainer aircraft	1972	1972	2
	8	F-5E Tiger-2	FGA aircraft	1973	1976	(8)
	4	DHC-3 Otter	Light transport ac	1974	1974	4
<b>USSR</b>						
R: Ethiopia	1	Il-14/Crate	Transport aircraft	1965	1965	1
	2	Mi-6T/Hook-A	Helicopter	1976	1976	2
	2	Mi-8T/Hip-C	Helicopter	(1976)	1976	2
	2	An-12/Cub	Transport aircraft	1977	1977	2
	(4)	An-26/Curl	Transport aircraft	(1977)	1977-1978	(4)
	(6)	Mi-24A/Hind-B	Combat helicopter	(1977)	1977	(6)
	(2)	Mi-6T/Hook-A	Helicopter	1977	1978	(2)
	(30)	Mi-8T/Hip-C	Helicopter	1977	1977-1978	(30)
	(20)	MiG-17/Fresco	Fighter aircraft	(1977)	1977-1978	(20)
	(12)	MiG-21MF/Fishbed-J	Fighter aircraft	(1977)	1977-1978	(12)
	(36)	MiG-21PF/Fishbed-D	Fighter aircraft	(1977)	1977-1978	(36)
	(30)	Mi-24D/Hind-D	Combat helicopter	1980	1980-1982	(30)
	(24)	Mi-8T/Hip-C	Helicopter	(1980)	1980-1982	(24)
Somalia	(20)	MiG-15/Fagot	Fighter aircraft	(1963)	1963-1966	(20)
	(6)	MiG-15UTI/Midget	Trainer aircraft	(1963)	1963	(6)
	20	Yak-11/Moose	Trainer aircraft	(1963)	1965	20
	2	An-24/Coke	Transport aircraft	(1965)	1966	2
	3	An-2/Colt	Light transport ac	(1965)	1966	(3)
	(4)	Il-28/Beagle	Bomber aircraft	(1965)	1967	(4)
	(30)	MiG-17/Fresco	Fighter aircraft	(1966)	1967	(30)
	2	An-26/Curl	Transport aircraft	(1971)	1973	(2)
	(6)	Mi-4A/Hound-A	Helicopter	1971	1973	(6)
	(5)	Mi-8T/Hip-C	Helicopter	1971	1973	(5)
	(1)	An-24/Coke	Transport aircraft	1972	1973	1
	(7)	Il-28/Beagle	Bomber aircraft	(1972)	1973-1975	(7)
	(14)	MiG-21MF/Fishbed-J	Fighter aircraft	1973	1974	(14)

## LIST OF REFERENCES

### Published Sources

- Bell, J. Bowyer. *The Horn of Africa: Strategic Magnet in the Seventies*. New York, 1973, as reference in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*.
- Brind, Harry. "Soviet Policy in the Horn of Africa," *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter, 1983-1984): 75-95.
- Charles, Milene (English text edited and Soviet documents translated by Jo Fisher). *The Soviet Union and Africa: The History of Involvement*. Lanham, MD, 1980.
- Cooper, Tom and Peter Weinert, with Fabian Hinz and Mark Lepko. *African MiGs, Volume 2, Madagascar to Zimbabwe: MiGs and Sukhois in Service in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Houston, TX, 2011.
- Donham, Donald L. *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution*. Berkeley, 1999.
- Farer, Tom J. *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm*. Washington, D.C. 1979.
- "Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Other Security Cooperation Historical Facts," as of 30 September 2010, *Historical Facts Book*, prepared by Financial Policy and Internal Operations Business Operations, DSCA.
- Giorgis, Dawit Wolde. *Red Tears: War Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*. Trenton, NJ, 1989.
- Gizi Map. *Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somaliland*. Hungary, 2011.
- Halliday, Fred. *Threat from the East? Soviet Policy from Afghanistan and Iran to the Horn of Africa*. New York, 1982.
- Halliday, Fred. "US Policy in the Horn of Africa: Aboulia or Proxy Intervention?" *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 10, Peasants (September-December 1977): 8-32.
- Harbeson, John W. *The Ethiopian Transformation: The Quest for the Post-Imperial State*. Boulder, CO, 1988.
- Hess, Robert L. *Ethiopia: The Modernization of Autocracy*. Ithaca, NY, 1970.
- Issa-Salwe, Abdisalam M. *Cold War Fallout: boundary Politics and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*. London, 2000.

- Jackson, Donna R. *Jimmy Carter and the Horn of Africa: Cold War Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia*. Jefferson, NC, 2007.
- Jackson, Donna R. "The Ogaden War and the Demise of Détente," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2010 632 (November 2010): 26-40.
- Keller, Edmond J. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic*. Bloomington, IN, 1991.
- Kessing's Contemporary Archives, 1 July 1977: 28423, as referenced in Makinda, *Superpower Diplomacy*.
- Korn, David A. *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union*. Carbondale, IL, 1986.
- Knaisserry, Brigadier Joseph K. "The Ogaden War: An Analysis of Its Causes and Its Impact on the Regional Peace on the Horn of Africa," Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 1997.
- Lefebvre, Jeffrey A. *Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia 1953-1991*. Pittsburgh, PA, 1991.
- Lefebvre, Jeffrey A. "Ethiopia and the 1963 Somali-Soviet Arms Deal: Containment and the Balance of Power Dilemma in the Horn of Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (December 1998); 611-643.
- Legum, Colin (Ed.) *African Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents 1977-1978*. New York, 1979: B210-B237.
- Lewis, I.M. *A Modern History of the Somali Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. Oxford, 2002.
- Lockyer, Adam. "Opposing Foreign Intervention's Impact on the Course of Civil Wars: the Ethiopian-Ogaden Civil War, 1976-1980," Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, University of Newcastle, 25-27 September 2006.
- Makinda, Samuel M. "Conflict and the Superpowers in the Horn of Africa," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1982), 93-103.
- Makinda, Samuel M. *Superpower Diplomacy in the Horn of Africa*. New York, 1987.
- Marcus, Harold G. *A History of Ethiopia*. Berkeley, 1994.
- Matusevich, Maxim. *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa*. Trenton, NJ, 2007.

Nation, Craig T. and Mark V. Kauppi (Eds.) *The Soviet Impact in Africa*. Lexington, MA, 1984.

National Security Council (NSC) Operations Coordinating Board, "Progress Report on U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia – NSC 5615/1," 9 July 1958, *DDQC*, 1986 12 (1987), as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*.

Ottaway, Marina. *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa*. New York, 1982.

Pankhurst, E.S. "The Beginning of Modern Transport in Ethiopia: The Franco-Ethiopian Railway and Its History," *Ethiopia Observer*, I, No. 1 (1958), as referenced in Hess, *Ethiopia*.

Papp, Daniel S. "The Soviet Union and Cuba in Ethiopia," *Current History*, 76: 445 (March 1979): 110-129.

Patman, Robert G. *The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa: The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement*. Cambridge, 1990.

Payton, Captain Gary D. "The Soviet-Ethiopian Liaison: Airlift and Beyond," *Air University Review – Air and Space Power Journal* (November-December 1979)

Porter, Bruce D. "The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945-1980," *African Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 338 (January 1986): 132-133.

Sauldie, Madan M. *Super Powers in the Horn of Africa*. New York, 1987.

Selassie, Bereket Habte. *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*. New York, 1980.

Schwab, Peter. "Cold War on the Horn of Africa," *African Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 306 (January 1978): 6-20.

Schwab, Peter. *Ethiopia: Politics, Economics, and Society*. Boulder, CO, 1985.

Shinn, David H. and Thomas P. Ofcansky. "Ogaden War (1964)," and "Ogaden War (1977-1978)," *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia*. Lanham, MD, 2004: 305-306.

Spencer, John H. Ethiopia, *The Horn of Africa, and U.S. Policy*. Institute of Foreign Policy Analysis, Foreign Policy Report (September 1977). Cambridge, MA, 1977.

Tareke, Gebru. *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa*. New Haven, CT, 2009.

Tareke, Gebru. "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2000): 635-667.

- Thom, William G. *African Wars: A Defense Intelligence Perspective*. Calgary, 2010.
- Tronvoll, Kjetil. *War & the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia: The Making of Enemies and Allies in the Horn of Africa*. Woodbridge, U.K., 2009.
- Tucker, Phillip Thomas Tucker, *Father of the Tuskegee Airmen, John C. Robinson*. Washington, D.C, 2012.
- U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955-1957* 18:357-60; *Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalog (DDQC)*, 1986, 12 (1987), as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*.
- U.S. Department of State, "Incoming Telegraph from Mogadishu," 30 May 1964, *DDHQ, 1977: 122C*, as reference in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*.
- U.S. Senate, *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad: Ethiopia, Part 8*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1970): 1906-07, as referenced in Lefebvre, *Arms for the Horn*.
- Urban, Mark. "Soviet Intervention and the Ogaden Counter-Offensive in 1978," *RUSI: Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies Journal*, 128:2, June 1983: 42-46.
- Valenta, Jiri. "Soviet-Cuban Intervention in the Horn of Africa: Impact and Lessons," *Journal of International Affairs*, 34:2 (Fall/Winter 1980/1981): 353-367.
- "War in the Horn of Africa: A First Hand Report on the Challenges for United States Policy," *Report of a Factfinding Mission to Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya December 12 to 22, 1977 to the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives*, 3 February 1978 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978): 10-11.
- Watson, Paul. "Arms and Aggression in the Horn of Africa," *Journal of International Affairs*, 40:1 (Summer 1986); 159-176.
- Weiss, Kenneth G. "The Soviet Involvement in the Ogaden War," Institute of Naval Studies, Professional Paper 269 (February 1980)
- Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge, 2007.
- Wrong, Michela. *I Didn't Do It For You*. New York, 2005.

## Newspapers and Magazines

- Darnton, John. "In Ogaden War, Exaggeration as a Weapon," *New York Times*, 25 February 1978: 5.
- "Ethiopia II: USSR and US Influences," *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 19, No. 5, 3 March 1978: 3-4.
- "Ethiopia Attacks Strategic Ogaden Town," *The Washington Post*, 6 March 1978: A8.
- "Ethiopia/Somalia War: The Long Struggle," *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 18, No. 20, 7 October 1977. London, 1977: 5.
- "Ethiopia: The People's Revolutionary Party," *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 6 January 1978: 4-6.
- Hoagland, Jim and Laurence Stern. "U.S. Aid to Ethiopia – From Emperor's Dentist to Jets," *The Washington Post*, 11 May 1972, A4.
- Kaufman, Michael T. "Ethiopian Leader Predicts a Long War in the Ogaden," *New York Times*, 19 September 1977: XXX.
- Obendorfer, Don. "The Superpowers and Africa's Horn: 500-Year-Old Regional Dispute Now Has Global Ramifications," *The Washington Post*, 5 March 1977: A1.
- Ottaway, David B. "U.S. Air to Ethiopia Stalled After Killings," *The Washington Post*, 5 December 1974, A20.
- Carroll, Raymond with Lloyd H. Norman in Washington, Arnaud de Borchgrave in Mogadishu, James Pringle in Nairobi and bureau reports. "The Battle for the Horn," *Newsweek*, 13 February 1978: 45-47.

## Websites

- Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State, "Background Notes," *U.S. Department of State* website, <http://www.state.gov/>, accessed on 22 September 2012.
- Cooper, Tom, with additional details from Gianfranco Lanini, "Ogaden War, 1977-1978," *ACIG.org* website, Sub-Saharan Africa, <http://www.acig.info/CMS/>, accessed on 19 August 2012.
- Egal, M.I. "The Partitioning of Somalia and the Politics of Destruction," *Somalilandpress* website, <http://somalilandpress.com/the-partitioning-of-somalia-and-the-politics-of-destruction>, accessed on 9 September 2012.

“Ethiopia, the Ogaden Region,” (Central Intelligence Agency, 1980), *Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division* website, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/>, accessed on 20 November 2012.

“Ethiopian War Hero General Legesse Tefera Honored,” Reported by the Organizing Committee, 8 July 2008, Ethiomedia website, <http://ethiomedia.com>, accessed on 7 July 2012.

“F-86 Sabre Jet History,” Boeing website, <http://www.boeing.com/history/>, accessed on 2 October 2012.

“History of the Ethiopian Air Force,” Association of Former Members of the Ethiopian Air Force website, <http://formerethiopianairforce.org/history>, accessed on 24 July 2012.

Simmons, T. “The Brown Condor,” *Race and History: News and Views* website, <http://www.raceandhistory.com/>, accessed on 14 September 2012.

“Somalia: Foreign Military Assistance,” *Country-Data.com* website, <http://country-data.com/>, accessed on 1 October 2012. Information is based on the Country Studies Series by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Research Database* website, <http://www.sipri.org/>, accessed on 31 August 2012.

## **Interviews**

Brigadier General Ashenafi Gebere Tsadik, interviewed by the author, Washington, D.C., 6 October 2012.

Brigadier General Tsegaye Habtie Yimer, interviewed by the author, Washington, D.C., 29 September 2012.

Captain Yohannes Wondafrash and Captain Behailu Tekle, interviewed by the author, Washington, D.C., 1 October 2012.

Colonel Berhanu Kebede, interviewed by the author, Santa Clarita, CA, 23 September 2012.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Scott A. Schaefer earned a Bachelor of Science degree in geography with a minor in German from the United States Air Force Academy in 1989. Upon graduation, he attended Undergraduate Pilot Training at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi, where he received his pilot wings in 1990. During his career, Lt. Col. Schaefer has flown the T-37, T-38, C-130, C-9, T-1, E-11, DA-40, and B-737 aircraft, accumulating more than 6,000 total flying hours and was stationed overseas in both Germany and Japan. In 2011, he successfully piloted 81 combat missions while deployed to Kandahar Air Base, Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Additionally, Lt. Col. Schaefer attended the Defense Language Institute in 2007 to study Russian prior to serving two years as the Chief of Defense Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. In 2013, Lt. Col. Schaefer will return to the Air Force Academy as a member of the faculty in the Department of History.