



# Air War in East Africa 1940-41

*Jon Sutherland, Diane Canwell*

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This little known campaign against the Italian invasion of British Somalia was bravely fought by a small force of elderly RAF and Commonwealth aircraft against almost overwhelming odds. This, against a backdrop of Britain's meager assets being in demand in the much more prominent and important theatres such as Egypt and, of course, at home during the height of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.

The history starts with the Italian's use of airpower and gas against the spear-armed Abyssinians in 1936. In August 1940 the Italians attacked and overwhelmed British Somalia and under air cover the British evacuated to Aden. The Allies fought many air battles with the better equipped invaders and flew dangerous reconnaissance missions in preparation for the major offensives in 1941.

On the Northern Front, the first phases see aggressive air patrols and Allied reinforcements arriving from Egypt. They attacked towards Agordat pushing deep into Eritrea from the Sudan. Meanwhile to the south the South African Air Force and ground forces attacked into Italian Somalia during January and February 1941. In March the allies attacked Keren and the Italians finally surrendered. The final allied air strikes against Asmara and Massawa led to the final collapse of Italian resistance in May 1941. The campaign in Ethiopia saw General Cunningham's force advances 1,725 miles from Kenya in 53 days to reach the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa and liberating it on April 6 1941. However, the conflict was still not over – there was continued resistance from 7,000 Italian troops and air operations continued against them until their surrender in September 1943.

The book includes the experiences of the men who flew the outdated aircraft of the RAF and the SAAF in the campaign and includes many quotes and incidents from both Allied and Italian pilots.

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