

*A Short Biography*  
*Of*  
**Blatan Ghetta Lorenzo Taezaz**  
*A super diplomat of war times*



Blatangeta Lorenzo Taezaz

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## Introduction

Lorenzo Taezaz was born on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1900 to an Eritrean parents in Adi KeyiH in the Akele Guzaie province of Eritrea. Little is known about his early years except that he received his first education in Italian schools in Asmara and Keren and started his career with the Italian colonial administration when he was still very young. Because of his intelligence and hard work, Lorenzo rose to the rank of Secretary to the Governor of Asmara, the highest position that an Eritrean could reach in the colonial administration\*.

Lorenzo Taezaz is an Eritrean of high caliber who displayed his intelligence, devotion and determination to fight Italian colonialism. After experiencing the shackles of colonialism in his home land he opted for gaining higher education in order to fight the mighty Italian colonial power on the political and diplomatic fronts. It is to be remembered that the colonialist's main weapon to realize their dream of occupying and staying in African was to keep its people uneducated. Due to the ban on native education beyond the 4th grade level, Lorenzo Taezaz like many other young Eritreans crossed the Mereb river into Ethiopia to further his education. In an interview with a researcher his daughter has shed some information on the main reasons for Lorenzo Taezaz to cross the border and move to Ethiopia. "One day, while he was filing papers, he read a secret military document which spelt out Italian war plans against Ethiopia, including the intention to use poison gas." She claims

Our legendary compatriot Dr. Lorenzo Taezaz managed to get high education at the University of Montepeler in France. After graduation he was rendered high political and diplomatic posts in Ethiopia, a country that has become a target of the Italian colonial expansion in the Horn of Africa.

According to Dr. Daniel Kindie, a reknown historical and political commentator, Lorenzo Taezaz's commitment to duty "In the field of diplomacy, few can rival him. Simply stated he was a genius in all walks of life"\*. He was Ethiopia's Permanent Representative to the League of Nations in Geneva during World War II. During that time Lorenzo Taezaz's reputation grew steadily. He was widely accepted as the most significant black diplomat on the world stage. The following is a quote from Dr. Daniel Kindie's paper titled "Dr. Lorenzo Taezaz And The Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1941)": Lorenzo, who lacked neither ideals nor insight, successfully played several roles as a pressman, diplomat, intelligence officer, agitator, and counselor, and discharged his responsibilities with great distinction. In the process, he displayed great fortitude and endurance. For no one can dispute the key role he played in fighting the Italian war efforts in the Horn of Africa.

Lorenzo Taezaz's legendary work and achievement is a source of pride to all Eritreans and Ethiopians.

Here below you will find a short biographical sketch of Lorenzo Taezaz from his birth up to his untimely death in Sweden in 1946. This biographical sketch is written by Dr. Daniel Kindie and posted in Wikipedia. I took the freedom to copy and post it in my website's new biography section.

# Lorenzo Taezaz And The Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1941)

Elias | May 18th, 1991

By Dr. Daniel Kendie



Lorenzo Taezaz could be considered as one of the legendary heroes of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-1941. From the day he left his homeland in 1925, until his untimely death in Sweden in 1946, he had an unusual life. Few Ethiopians of his generation have enjoyed a life so intense and so productive over a period of 21 years. He contributed more than his share to the liberation of Ethiopia from Italian fascism. Yet, the young generation of Ethiopians, which has grown up after the war, are almost entirely ignorant about him. The reason of his consignment to oblivion, for instance, has never been fully known. Similarly, the manner of his death which invites more questions than answers is passed over in complete silence.

The purpose of this study is limited in scope. First, it is to introduce Lorenzo Taezaz to the general reader, and possibly, to stimulate more discussion about him among scholars who study Ethiopia. Second, to investigate the actual role he played in the 1935-1941 period of Ethiopia's struggle against fascism. This requires some information about the man's early life, and the circumstances for his departure from Eritrea. Who was he? And what was his background? I will treat the essentials of his early life and discuss the reasons why he left his homeland, how he met Ras Teferi Mekonnen [the future Emperor Haile Selassie I], and how he started his career with the Ethiopian government.

I have reviewed the existing literature. As will be noticed, it gives him scant coverage. Most of the literature refers to him only in passing. Even important events in which he was involved appear in snippets rather than as a whole, so that their overall impact is diffused, preventing one from ever knowing his full story. For this reason, I had to interview a number of people. These include: his daughter, Mrs. Woizerit Lorenzo, the late Ambassador Ephreim Tewolde Medhin, his lifelong friend, Dr. John Spencer, a war time colleague who knew him from 1936-1946, and Mebratu Taezaz, his brother. Three of them were interviewed in Asmara in 1983, and Dr. Spencer, on 30 August 1987 in New Haven, Connecticut.

There is some controversy about the circumstances of his departure from Eritrea. The controversy has something to do with Italian war plans to invade Ethiopia, and Lorenzo's alleged understanding of that plan as related to me by his daughter. Before coming to grips with his actual role in the fascist Italy period, therefore, I have found it important to evaluate his daughter's version of Lorenzo's immigration to Ethiopia. For this reason, I had also to provide some sketchy information about the historical background of the Italian occupation of Eritrea and the subsequent threat to the rest of Ethiopia.

## **Brief Background**

Lorenzo Taezaz was born on 30 June 1900 in the Akele Guzaie province of Eritrea, then an Italian colony. He received his first education in Italian schools in Asmara and Keren and started his career with the Italian colonial administration when he was still very young. Because of his intelligence and hard work, Lorenzo rose to the rank of Secretary to the Governor of Asmara, the highest position that an Eritrean could reach in the colonial administration.

In 1924, while on vacation in Aden, he met Ras Teferi Mekonnen, the future Haile Selassie, who was there on an official visit, and who encouraged him to go to Ethiopia. A year later, Lorenzo went to Addis Ababa. Subsequently, Ras Teferi Mekonnen arranged for his education, and along with other Ethiopians, he sent

him to France on a government scholarship. Lorenzo spent the next eight years at the University of Montpellier where he completed his studies in Law and Philosophy. Apart from his native Tigrigna, he already spoke Amharic, Arabic and Italian, but Montpellier also provided him with an opportunity to master French and English.

He returned to Ethiopia in 1933 and began to serve the Ethiopian government in several capacities: Secretary, Ministry of Justice (1933); member of the Anglo-Ethiopian Boundary Commission which demarcated Ethiopia's borders with former British Somaliland (1933-34); member of the same Commission which was charged with the duty of surveying the grazing grounds of the Ogaden, and investigating the causes of the Wal-Wal incident of 1934, which led to the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-1941; appointed private secretary of Haile Selassie, and in addition he served as liaison officer to the international press (1935-1936). He even saw action at the Battle of Maichew (1936) that culminated in the defeat of the Ethiopians by the Italians.

Lorenzo had presented a plan to Haile Selassie to transfer the government center to Gore (1) – a remote and inaccessible town in western Ethiopia from where the counter-offensive could be prosecuted. However, the costs and risks of fighting the mechanized Italian army was debated and measured against the risks and costs of not fighting. When the Council of Ministers agreed by twenty one to three vote(2), that the risks were too grave and the costs too high, it was decided that Haile Selassie should go and personally present Ethiopia's case to the League of Nations. In May 1936, therefore, Lorenzo left Ethiopia and accompanied Emperor Haile Selassie in his exile to Europe. There, he was appointed Ethiopia's Permanent Delegate to the League of Nations and subsequently took an active role in the struggle against Italian fascism. During the occupation, Lorenzo secretly entered Ethiopia on several occasions. After Ethiopia's liberation in 1941, he was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs (1941-1943), Minister for Posts, Telephones and Telegrams (1943), President of the Chamber of Deputies (1943-1944), Minister to Moscow, USSR (1944-1946), and Delegate to the Paris Peace Conference (May 1946). A month later, he died in a hospital in Stockholm, Sweden.(3)

When I visited the late Ambassador Ephreim Tewolde Medhin at his residence in Asmara, he was ninety years of age. The following is a summary of what I was able to gather from him:

#### Interview I. Ambassador Ephreim Tewolde Medhin:

Lorenzo was my life long friend. Ever since we left Eritrea, we shared adversity and happiness together. There was no future for both of us in Eritrea. In 1925 we escaped to Aden. It should be recalled that Lorenzo had met Ras Teferi Mekonnen in Aden a year earlier and had thus invited him to go to Addis Ababa. I took the boat and waited for him in Djibouti. When we met in Djibouti, both of us were in tears. From there, we took the train and went to Addis Ababa. Ras Teferi Mekonnen asked us what we wanted to do. Both of us requested him to send us abroad to school, which he did. I went to Beirut. Lorenzo went to France... What we did for Ethiopia during the war, is for history to judge. We stayed in Europe to help intensify the diplomatic struggle, but Lorenzo was exceptional. He even traveled inside Italian occupied Ethiopia on secret missions. I can assure you that he was a selfless patriot. At a time when an entire generation of educated Ethiopians was simply wiped out by fascism, he was Ethiopia's eyes and ears. The British only talked to him.(4)

Dr. John Spencer knew Lorenzo for some ten years. The following provides what he could recall from memory:

#### Interview II: John Spencer:

I met Lorenzo on 15 January 1936 in Dessie at the headquarters of His Majesty the Emperor Haile Selassie. I remember everything very well. Even the place where we met was kept dark for fear of Italian air raids. In general, he gave me the impression of an extremely reserved man. Perhaps his inner nature needed privacy and solitude for reflection. He had a quick mind and a sharp tongue. He impressed me as being an intellectual. He spoke excellent French and English. We collaborated on the war bulletins for some months

in Addis Ababa. We met again in London in June 1936 where we worked together. He was very meticulous. It was easy to work out a sentence with him. He helped draft Haile Selassie's 1936 address to the League of Nations, translated his speeches and led the Ethiopian delegation to Geneva. In 1938, Haile Selassie wanted to return to Ethiopia to lead the resistance, and so, he sent Lorenzo to Ethiopia to assess the situation and to help organize the Arbegnoch (the patriots). He did a thorough job. As a result, the Emperor decided to move. However, the British strongly objected to the plan, contending that it was premature. But the truth is, since they were negotiating with the Italians over the Mediterranean, they did not want the talks to be prejudiced. Lorenzo again spent some months inside Ethiopia in 1939 and re-organized the resistance. He did a marvelous job. The Italians left Ethiopia in 1941, and I met Lorenzo in Addis Ababa in 1943. This time, he was the foreign minister. He performed very well. It was not an easy task to evict the British from Ethiopia. He had a terrible time as they were toying with the idea of establishing a protectorate over Ethiopia. But, nevertheless, he came out with flying colors. The last time I met him was at the Paris Peace Conference in May 1946. A month later, he died in Sweden.(5)

#### Source Review

There is an enormous literature on Italian fascism and Ethiopia. But as pointed out earlier, however, the coverage on Lorenzo is scanty, and where it is not, disconnected details are not united.

Kebede Tesema, an important Ethiopian intelligence officer of the time, who was later to occupy several ministerial posts in Haile Selassie's government, published *Historical Notes* (Addis Ababa, 1955). Among other things, his book contains invaluable information on how the Ethiopians managed to sustain effective guerrilla warfare against the mechanized Italian Army. Although he fully recognizes Lorenzo's vital contribution to the prosecution of the war, strangely enough, he does not say much about his role in making that operation effective. Similarly, the Italian journalist, Del Boca, in his illuminating book, *The Ethiopian War 1935-1941*, (London, 1965), mentions Lorenzo three times. Even then, this is done in the context of his exile to Europe along with Haile Selassie, the speech he made at the League of Nations in 1938, and how he distributed arms to the insurgents in Western Ethiopia in 1939.

In the same way, Richard Greenfield, in his *Ethiopia, A new Political History*, (New York, 1965), provides some insight into the valuable information Lorenzo brought out of Ethiopia describing the extent of guerrilla operations and the poor morale of the Italians.

John Spencer, who served the Ethiopian government for many years as advisor in foreign affairs, as has already been pointed out, knew Lorenzo from 1936-1946. In his informative book, *Ethiopia At Bay* (Algonac, Michigan 1984), he writes of Lorenzo's French education, the information he used to collect from the war fronts (1934-35) for the publication of war bulletins, his translation of Haile Selassie's speeches into French in Geneva, and the detailed information he brought out of Ethiopia in 1939 regarding the status and operations of the patriotic forces. He also mentions the invaluable contributions Lorenzo made to the military campaigns through which the emperor returned to Ethiopia in 1941, and Haile Selassie's praise of the significant role played by Lorenzo in the liberation campaign of Ethiopia.

In his recent book on the Italo-Ethiopian War, Haile Selassie's war: *The Italian-Ethiopian Campaign, 1934-1941* (New York, 1984), Anthony Mockler provides Lorenzo's biographical sketch in just six lines and dismisses his activities with the Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan and Kenya, in just a couple of paragraphs. Beyond that, there is nothing. There is also the autobiography of Haile Selassie, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937* (London, 1976). In this book, Haile Selassie praises Lorenzo's diplomatic skill and the outstanding services he rendered to the country.

Let us then begin with a brief survey of Italy's involvement in the affairs of the area – an involvement which probably caused Lorenzo's departure from his place of birth.

#### Background to the Italian Occupation of Eritrea and the Threat Against Ethiopia

The Eritrea of the 1920s that Lorenzo left, was a sad place. Eritreans were constantly reminded of their inferiority in their own country by their colonial masters, the Italians. The Asmara municipality excluded them from all participation. In the central government hierarchy, they had no part. Eritreans could at best aspire to be low-paid clerks or orderlies. There was no trace when they could advance towards participation in government, or of administration scheme which could lead to it. There was to be, in perpetuity, only rulers and the passive ruled.(6) The combined effect of the policy of colonial oppression, social humiliation and material deprivation had several results in Eritrea. Of immediate concern to us during this particular period is the immigration of some 200,000 Eritreans to Ethiopia. One such Eritrean was Lorenzo Taezaz.

Why did he escape from Colonial Eritrea? Was his immigration to Ethiopia largely inspired by personal feelings of hopelessness in his future in colonial Eritrea, or by some other purpose? Was he conscious of a specific threat against Ethiopia at the time? How was it possible for him to play an outstanding role in the resistance movement against fascism, and eventually to become Ethiopia's Foreign Minister? These questions are pertinent. It is useful to consider them in the context of the historical background that led to Italy's involvement in the affairs of the people of the region.

As far as Italy was concerned, Asmara was merely a stepping-stone to bigger designs: Eritrea was acquired with the larger objective of the whole Ethiopia in mind.(7) The fact that between 1890 and 1896 Italy launched a series of assaults against Ethiopia from Eritrea is a sufficient testimony to that design. In any event, the series of intolerable military encroachments on Ethiopia's sovereignty culminated in the Battle of Adowa of 1896, in which the Italians were routed.

As The Spectator of March 7, 1896 observed regretfully:

The Italians have suffered a great disaster – greater than has ever occurred in modern times to white men in Africa. Adowa was the bloodiest of all colonial battles. (8)

Italy's pride was wounded. If ever Rome was to occupy a respectable place in the councils of Europe, that national humiliation and disgrace had to be avenged. Thereafter, propelled by Mussolini's 1922 dictum, that "Italy must either expand or explode,"(9) fascism came to power. In such a situation, the first policy declaration el Duce made was to settle once and for all, the great account which has been left open since 1896.(10) "If only Italy had 6,000 more soldiers in Adwa, the result would have been different," he was to say later.

To that end, he gave the necessary directives for building up Eritrea's economic infrastructure in order to facilitate military mobility for the conquest of Ethiopia. Such a direction can be discerned from a letter Mussolini wrote in 1925 to the Prince of Scala, the Minister of the Colonies, in which Mussolini called his attention to the poor defensive conditions of Eritrea, and to correct such deficiencies as might exist.(11) Since nobody was threatening Eritrea, one can only interpret that message to mean preparations for committing aggression against Ethiopia.

Similarly, Pietro Badoglio, the Chief of Staff of the Italian Armed Forces, had instructed General Malladra in 1926 to carry out a thorough study of Eritrea's defenses (read preparations for war), including the possible use of poison gas, either through aerial bombing or through artillery shelling.(12) Ten years later, Badoglio, who directed Italy's invasion of Ethiopia from Colonial Eritrea and Somaliland, did precisely that.

### Lorenzo's Departure from Eritrea

I had heard contradictory accounts about Lorenzo's departure from Eritrea. Since the evidence provided by anyone of the people I talked to was insufficient to prove any point, I decided to interview Woizerit Lorenzo, his daughter. In response to my question why her father, who was privileged by the standards of many Eritreans, because he was working at the Civil and Political Affairs Department of the colonial administration, left Colonial Eritrea and went to Ethiopia, Woizerit Lorenzo explained her father's immigration in the following way:

### Interview III:

One day, while he was filing papers, he read a secret military document which spelt out Italian war plans against Ethiopia, including the intention to use poison gas. Taken by shock and horror, while he was weeping, his tears dropped on the papers and spoiled the document. No sooner had this taken place than his Italian boss discovered what had happened and asked him why he was sprinkling water on vital government document? Being naive and innocent, he confessed that it was not water that spoilt the pages, but his tears. “Why did you have to weep?” asked the Italian. “Because I read the secret document which tells a lot about what you intend to do against Ethiopia,” he replied. “Yes, but that has nothing to do with you Eritreans. You are worried about a different people and society, which should not be of concern to you,” retorted the Italian. Three days later, Lorenzo told Ephreim Tewolde Medhin about what he had read. After that, both discussed the matter and escaped to Aden and from there they went to Addis Ababa where they met Haile Selassie.(13)

How much reliance could be attached to the information, especially that provided by his daughter? Did he really escape from Eritrea because of what he had read? And did such information ever exist? The 1925 letter of Mussolini to the Minister of the Colonies may provide a clue. There is also Badoglio’s handwritten instruction to General Malladra regarding the use of poison gas. These clues, when considered along with the fact that mustard gas that had been shipped into Massawa was utilized to substitute for the mountain warfare in which Italians lacked training (14), may lend considerable weight to what Woizerit Lorenzo contends. However, when Italy launched its unprovoked aggression against Ethiopia in 1935, the country was not prepared to resist the aggression. In fact, the primary cause of Ethiopia’s defeat was that it had no arms, and was allowed none. The secondary cause of its defeat was that it had no aviation.(15) It therefore appears very unlikely that Lorenzo had access to secret war plans. For, if he did, he would have made it available to Haile Selassie, and that would have given Ethiopia a span of ten years with which to strengthen its defenses.

One is inclined to think that his daughter has read back into the past on the basis of the actual use of poison gas, the likely Italian preparations to do something against Ethiopia and Lorenzo’s patriotic role against fascism. In such a set-up, it becomes easy within the family to make Lorenzo into an even more prescient hero. While one does not deny the utility of oral sources, perhaps the most one can say in this particular case is that her information cannot be used to supply adequate answers to the type of questions we raised earlier.

That Lorenzo served the Italian authorities from 1920-1925, is not debatable, and that he met Haile Selassie in Aden in 1924 is not also in dispute. But what cannot be sustained is the contention that he escaped from Eritrea because of the “secret document” he had read. Available evidence does in fact support the view that his escape from his home land was likely motivated by his daily exposure to constant humiliation, provocation and racial discrimination.

In this regard, let us consider the views of the London Times correspondent George Steer, who was expelled from Addis Ababa by the Italians in 1936, and who later participated in the liberation campaign of Ethiopia in the capacity of a British Intelligence Officer in charge of Offensive Propaganda. Steer who knew Lorenzo both in Europe and in Africa has this to say:

He rose to be Secretary to the Governor in Asmara when he was still very young, for Lorenzo is quick as lightning. It was the highest position that he could reach: Lorenzo is not a white man. Embittered by his servile condition, he could bear it no longer after a scene in a small cinema to which Italian friends had invited him. Other Italians hissed them for bringing in a colored man. Lorenzo was already miserable enough. With his savings he fled to Aden and waited there in poverty until [Haile Selassie] picked him up.(16)

One is inclined to accept this version of Lorenzo's escape from Colonial Eritrea. It is also likely that Steer heard it from the man himself. Since impressions of youth are more lasting than those of the immediate past, it seems that such an experience had a chilling effect on his outlook. It made him resent the Italians very deeply. In expecting him to treat them not as an equal, but with a submissiveness demanded of a subject, the Italians succeeded in converting him into an envenomed and resolute enemy for all time.

Thereafter, and as mentioned earlier, Lorenzo went to school in France, and having returned to Ethiopia in 1933, he began to serve the government in several capacities until he was forced into exile again by the Italians, this time to Europe along with Haile Selassie.

### Lorenzo's Role Against Italian Fascism

Haile Selassie's moving address to the League of Nations that stirred the conscience of the world and which was drafted by Lorenzo in part reads:

I am here to give Europe warning of the doom that awaits it, if it bows before force. I ask the fifty-two nations assembled here to give my country the support they promised her. There is not on this earth any nation that is higher than any other, apart from the kingdom of God. God and History will remember your judgment.(17)

It should be noted here that after delivering this historic address to the League of Nations, the Emperor Haile Selassie settled in Bath, England. As far as the League was concerned, therefore, it was Lorenzo, who in his capacity as Permanent Delegate of Ethiopia accredited to that world body, who continued the diplomatic struggle in Geneva. To that end, he even carried his credentials signed and sealed in his pocket. If any motion prejudicial to Ethiopia were to be tabled at the Council, he had all the intention of walking into the Assembly Hall and occupying the vacant post.(18) However, he was also impatient with the obstacles that loomed on all sides. As was to be expected, when Ethiopia was sacrificed by the League at the altar of political expediency, Lorenzo could not but agree with those few Ethiopian ministers who saw the virtues of guerrilla warfare.

With regard to the situation inside Italian occupied Ethiopia, it should be noted that Italian atrocities that were regarded by many as the apogee of fascist barbarity had reached a climax. The Ethiopian nationalist movement was gaining ground. There was continuous rebellion, even if it was uncoordinated, bedeviled as it was by factions which adhered to personalities rather than programs. Italian censorship was so strict that little information reached the outside world. It was therefore assumed that the fascists were making good their occupation of the country. Hence, in February 1938, Haile Selassie decided to dispatch Lorenzo to make a secret visit to Ethiopia and to explore the possibilities of his return to lead the resistance. Lorenzo had to succeed in this mission, if only because the prospect of failure was too grim to contemplate. Accordingly, he went to Ethiopia and spent several months inside the country. He delivered Haile Selassie's messages to the various leaders of the resistance, assessed their strength and weakness, mediated their disputes, distributed arms at strategic points, helped to integrate them into a cohesive fighting force, and left the country.(19) Three months later, Lorenzo was back in Europe. Haile Selassie was so impressed by what he had to tell him, that he decided to report the whole situation to the League of Nations, some of whose members had started recognizing Italian occupation of Ethiopia. But since the emperor was ill, Lorenzo had to read the speech for him, which in any case, he had drafted:

Is the League, the appointed guardian of the principles of international justice, about to sign its own death warrant by tearing up with its own hands the covenant which is the sole justification of its being? Is right to triumph over Might, or Might over Right? [Let me reiterate to you here and now] that an implacable guerrilla warfare is being waged and will continue to be waged until either the [country] is evacuated by the Italians, or the Ethiopian people have been exterminated.

... The Italian government exercises no control over the greater part of Ethiopia... Its troops merely control the towns (where) garrisons can only be supplied with provisions and munitions by means of aircraft. (I am



annexing to this statement) the petitions presented by the Ethiopian warrior chiefs setting forth the situation and asking for the assistance of the League of Nations.(20)

The petitions, no doubt, were written by warrior chiefs, at Lorenzo's suggestion. He took the petitions with him and annexed them to Haile Selassie's speech. And from the point of view of those States that were hesitating to recognize Ethiopia's occupation by Italy, the speech and the petitions must have had a restraining influence. Countries like Sweden, Mexico, the USA, USSR and others never recognized Italian occupation of Ethiopia.

In 1939, Lorenzo went back to Ethiopia on a similar mission. According to George Steer, who seems to have closely following his activities:

Lorenzo, a lively man who used to worry where to get the next stamp to send a letter to the Secretariat of the League of Nations, came to Paris by arrangement. His timing was good. The League of Nations did not meet that year. He went off dressed in a tarboosh, saying that he was a Sudanese of the Eritrean frontier tribe of the Habab.(21) The volcano (the Ethiopian resistance movement) permanently simmered, and Lorenzo's coming gave it a poke. He poked it all around – north and south, east and west, skillfully exploiting the resentment that had been simmering. Among other things, he composed the quarrels of the resistance leaders in Gojjam after three days of negotiation. Elsewhere, he promised the people that the end is not far off.(22)

Similarly, Christopher Sykes, who describes Lorenzo as "an Ethiopian of high character and distinguished record," reports that he was known at this time as Wolde Michael, elsewhere as Thompson and correctly as Lorenzo Taezaz.(23) The French intelligence officer, Colonel Robert Monnier, who had also made a clandestine journey in the interior of Ethiopia in July 1938, taught Lorenzo how to use a compass in his arduous travels. Lorenzo therefore extensively traveled inside Ethiopia. He constantly disguised himself in order to elude the Italians.

But in areas where he felt secure, he appeared in an Ethiopian army officer's uniform with a considerable escort of Ethiopian soldiers. The fact that Lorenzo was able to wander about Ethiopia in uniform and with an escort, it was said, is an indication of the state of affairs prevalent inside the country.(24) At other times, he traveled disguised as a priest or as a peasant.(25) After several months in the country, and after having established an Ethiopian Intelligence Bureau in Khartoum Lorenzo proceeded to Cairo to give full account of his discoveries to the skeptical British Middle East Headquarters.(27)

By the winter of 1939, he was back in England with news to gladden and inspire. Again Haile Selassie wanted to move, but this time, the British were not convinced that he had a large following in the country. In 1938, if Britain did not act in support of Haile Selassie, it must have been certainly acting, when it argued that the emperor's wish to move to Ethiopia and to lead the resistance was premature. But the truth is, as Spencer remarked, since Britain was negotiating with the Italians over the Mediterranean, it did not want the talks to be prejudiced. However, British reluctance a year later had some merit worthy of note. At a meeting of some 900 patriotic commanders which took place in Gondar, the need to abolish the monarchy and declare Ethiopia a republic was discussed. To that end, even a document was prepared for the League of Nations touching on the form which a future government of the country might take.(28) Since Britain was aware of that, London did not want to end up by backing a man whose leadership was challenged. To dispel their doubts, however, Lorenzo was sent back to Ethiopia. This time, he was to provide evidence that important members of the resistance affirmed their allegiance to the emperor. He collected 10,000 signatures in a matter of weeks and helped to persuade the British to support Haile Selassie's claim to the throne.

On June 10, 1940, Italy declared war on France and Britain. As a result, Haile Selassie was allowed to go to Khartoum to organize and lead a liberation army. He immediately asked for the battalion of trained Eritreans which had deserted from the Italian army in 1937, but which was kept in internment in Kenya.(29) Who else but Lorenzo could go to Kenya? He went there and read them Haile Selassie's invitation requesting them to join the resistance. They responded with wild cries of delight,(30) and they did. Back in Khartoum, more work was waiting for Lorenzo, and more duties that needed his attention. He wrote the decrees and the military mobilization orders of Haile Selassie, which the British Royal Air Force effectively utilized in the

propaganda warfare against the Italians. Eritreans in Kassala, for instance, were seen to kiss the seal, press it to their foreheads and weep.(31) At long last, as the British army moved to evict the Italians from Ethiopia, it entered the country along the tracks blazed by Lorenzo Taezaz.(32)

## **Conclusion**

It was pointed out earlier that because the existing literature gives scant coverage to Lorenzo's background in general, and to the actual role he played in the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-1941 in particular, this study would attempt to rectify that limitation. From the discussion we have already had, we can therefore make the following conclusions.

Although Lorenzo's escape from Eritrea was largely motivated by the reality of an empty future in his homeland, his uncompromising position against fascism seems to have been largely inspired by his early experience of constant humiliation and racial discrimination. Those painful memories have lived with him for very many years. In those days, Haile Selassie needed educated young Ethiopians to help him in his modernization program. He sent several of them to Europe to study European methods of administration, science and technology. As fate would have it, in sending Lorenzo to France, he did make a wise decision. It paid off.

Lorenzo, who lacked neither ideals nor insight, successfully played several roles as a pressman, diplomat, intelligence officer, agitator, and counselor, and discharged his responsibilities with great distinction. In the process, he displayed great fortitude and endurance. For no one can dispute the key role he played in Ethiopia's liberation. But more than most, Lorenzo's commitment to duty must have strengthened Haile Selassie's faith in education.

By delivering the Emperor's messages to the various leaders of the resistance, Lorenzo provided the movement with a sense of direction and helped co-ordinate the internal and external struggle against Italian fascism. Whenever disputes arose among the leaders, by appealing to their sense of patriotism and by mediating their conflicts, he helped in the emergence of a cohesive and formidable fighting force that carried out devastating guerrilla operations against a mechanized army considered invincible at the time.

If thousands of peasants could turn into soldiers overnight, fight with limitless courage, and turn the tide of the war, they owe it to Lorenzo's organizational and agitation ability and to the arms he distributed to them at critical times and places. If Eritrean soldiers, who were in the service of fascism, could desert the Italian army and join the Ethiopian forces of resistance, it was in part because of the knowledge that Lorenzo was around.

As a lawyer, and fluent in several European languages, Lorenzo effectively argued Ethiopia's case in Geneva, and gained for his country considerable sympathy and support.

When the British government hesitated in supporting Haile Selassie's return to Ethiopia, contending that the emperor had no power base inside the country, Lorenzo was instrumental in changing London's mind. He went to Italian occupied Ethiopia, collected the signatures of 10,000 important members of the resistance who affirmed their allegiance to the emperor, and convinced the British to go along with Haile Selassie. Is there any wonder then, if the late Prime Minister Endalkachew Mekonnen could immortalize Lorenzo's name in the funeral oration by paying tribute to his memory in words that are both fitting and deserving?(33)

## **Bibliography and Endnotes**

1. Steer, G. L. *Caesar in Abyssinia*, Hodden and Stoughton Ltd., London 1936, p. 356.
2. *Ibid*, p. 364.
3. The rumor mills in Ethiopia have been grinding out conflicting stories about his death. It is strongly alleged by many Ethiopians that Lorenzo was poisoned by Wolde Giorgis Wolde Yohannes, Haile Selassie's

powerful Minister of the Pen, who deeply resented Lorenzo's wide popularity with Haile Selassie. Spencer for one is convinced that he died a natural death. He claims that Lorenzo suffered from intestinal adhesions.

4. Interview I, December 10, 1983, Asmara. The Ambassador was very sick, but still he was kind enough to talk to me for some minutes. While trying to recall the circumstances of their departure

from Eritrea, tears were constantly in his eyes.

5. Interview II was conducted on August 30, 1987, New Haven, Connecticut.

6. Longrigg, H. Stephen: *A Short History of Eritrea*, the Claredon Press, 1945, p. 135.

7. Marcus, Harold: *Haile Selassie I, the Formative Years, 1892-1936*, University of California Press, 1987, p.84.

8. *The Spectator*, March 7, 1896.

9. Coffey, M. Thomas: *The Lion by Tail, the Story of the Italo- Ethiopian War*, Viking Press, New York. 1970, p.7.

10. Kirkpatrick, Ivor: *Mussolini, A Study in Power*, Hawthorn Books, New York, 1964.

11. de Bono, Emilio: *The Conquest of the Empire*, London 1937, p.2.

12 Instructions for General Malladra, Rome, 10 July, 1926, IFM/MAI, 50/24/64, *ibid.*, Marcus, p.76.

13. Interview III, July 15, 1983, Asmara.

14. Barker, A.J.; *The Civilizing Mission: A History of the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-1936*, the Dial Press, New York, 1968, p.242.

15. *Ibid*, Caesar in Abyssinia, p.8.

16. *Ibid*, p.73.

17. *The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Selassie I*, translated by Edward Ullendorff, Oxford University Press, 1976, pp.299-312.

18. Sanford, Christine: *Ethiopia Under Haile Selassie*, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. London, 1946, p.100. His brother, Mebratu Tazaz whom I interviewed in Asmara on August 15, 1983, informed me: "Between 1937 and 1941, Lorenzo entered Ethiopia several times. He had to disguise himself sometimes as a woman, sometimes as a peasant, and sometimes as a priest. The Italians could not tolerate his activities and had to issue an award for anyone who could catch him."

19. An important Italian source that provides interesting reading about Lorenzo especially from the Italian point of view is Angelo del Boca's *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale*, Vol. I: *Dall'Unità alla marcia su Roma*, Bari, Laterza, 1976, pp.97, 189, 246, 691; Vol. II: *La conquista dell Impero*: (1979); pp. 336-339, Vol. III (1982), *La caduta dell' impero*, pp.27-28.

20. League of Nations, Provisional Agenda of the 101st Session of the Council, May 9th, 1938, Geneva: Document C. 193. M. 104. 1938. VII.

\* Why Paris? Britain also was not making much progress in its negotiations with Mussolini. Haile Selassie was still in England and he could be used against Italy. Since Steer was working for the British Intelligence Service, he must have been instructed to contact Lorenzo.

21. Steer, G.L.: Sealed and Delivered, Hodden and Stoughton Ltd. London, 1942, pp. 8-41.
22. Ibid.
23. Sykes, Christopher: Orde Wingate, A Biography, The world Publishing Co., 1959, New York, pp. 240-244. Wingate commanded the British army in the liberation campaign of Ethiopia.
24. Ibid, Sanford, p. 104.
25. Ibid, Baker, p. 309.
26. Gabre Meskel Habtemariam was from Seraie, Eritrea. He completed his studies in engineering, University of Paris in 1928. In the 1940s he was editor of the Voice of Eritrea, which demanded Eritrea's unification with Ethiopia.
27. Sanford, Christine: The Lion of Judah Hath Prevailed, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1955, p.86.
28. Greenfield, Richard: Ethiopia, a New Political History, Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, New York, 1965, pp. 247-48.
29. Ibid, Sykes, p. 244.
30. Ibid, Sealed and Delivered, p. 103.
31. Ibid, The Lion of Judah, p. 33.
32. Ibid, p.26.
33. Lorenzo! You are no more with us. But history will remember you as a great patriot. You stand head and shoulders above us all. The outstanding services you rendered to the cause of Ethiopia's liberation have already occupied a prominent place in the history of Ethiopia. Your tenacity, bravery and single mindedness of purpose, will, forever, inspire millions of Ethiopians. For more of the oration, see Sendick Alamatchin, Amharic Weekly, June 25, 1946.

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