

"Libyan Soldiers in Ethiopia"
by Prof. Theodore M. Vestal.

Sunday, September 7, 2008,

From 25 February--5 March 2007, I went to Libya for the first time. I was the guest of the Government of Libya and presented a paper on "The Importance of Political Definitions: Semantic Guidelines from Political Science" at a conference on "Democracy in the 21st Century" at Sebha (on the edge of the Sahara) on 27 February. Brother Leader Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi opened the conference with a reasoned, deep-voiced presentation just before my opening panel. There had not been many academicians from the United States in Libya since the two nations had re-established diplomatic relations, so the presence of a small contingent of Americans at the conference was front page news in the Tripoli newspapers. On 3 March, we went to the Government's Historical Society in Tripoli. The archives contained an excellent collection of documents, books, and oral histories about Libya through 1969. The Society Director introduced me to his expert on the Italian Colonial period. In response to my inquiry about Libyans fighting in the Italian Colonial Army against Ethiopia, he told me there had been 30,000 Libyan "askari" with Italian officers who fought for Mussolini against the Ethiopians during the 1935-1940 war. I was somewhat non-plused by his quick response. I didn't realize that Libya was documenting records of colonial oppression to seek compensation from the Italian Government. I also learned that Eritrean "askari" were brought into Libya by the Fascists to fight against Libyan freedom fighters during the 1930s. The number of Eritreans and their deployment would be an intriguing story. I highly recommend the Libyan Historical Society as a place for further about the era of Italian Colonialism.

I hope this will be helpful.

With warm regards,
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