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Congo Mercenary



Synopsis

Col. Mike Hoare tells how his force of mercenaries, 5 Commando, put down a Communist-backed rebel uprising in the Congo. As they restored law and order, town by town, he and his men freed 1,800 nuns and priests. His men also learned what it means to be real soldiers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review has two parts: comments on the story told by the book, and then comments about the book itself. First, the story. This is Colonel Hoare's personal account of his service in the Congo as a mercenary, helping the Congolese government put down a communist-backed revolt. Colonel Hoare is a good author, and his retelling of the events makes for a very fascinating read. This book may challenge any preconceptions you have about mercenaries and their use, and give you some insights into the mind of a mercenary commander. It documents the struggles he had getting his mercenary group (5 Commando) organized and trained, and of course their many experiences through 18 months of service, including heart-wrenching accounts of the atrocities inflicted by the rebels on the European (mostly Belgian) residents. This is better than any adventure novel--it really happened. If you are a student of military history, African history, or just like reading these types of stories, I highly recommend this book. Now for the book itself (e.g. the paper, binding, print quality, etc.). This is advertised as a reprint. To be more specific, this appears to be a reprint that was made by scanning an earlier printing and then reprinting it. The text is very readable, but is not "clean", like you would expect from a typeset edition. If you've ever scanned a B/W document (at 300 DPI, say) and printed it on your laser or inkjet printer, you'll get the idea. It's readable, but not perfect. This has two downsides: first, sometimes the text shows flaws in places where the scanning was

imperfect (the scanning head moved slightly or some such thing).

First of all, the edition of the book I read is an older one, but I assume the newer edition is pretty similar. In "Congo Mercenary", Col. Mike Hoare vividly and effectively recounts his mercenary exploits in the dark years of 1964-1965. His penmanship is quite good and the book comes with some extras including a short essay on leadership, maps, a brief summary of the Congo Crisis leading up to the events, and photographs ranging to rescued hostages to an amphibious landing (there are some brutal images as well such as the bodies of Catholic priests murdered by the Simbas and the bloated corpse of a dead rebel laying on the ruins of a Simba monument in Stanleyville). As to the book itself, it blows the fictional "Heart of Darkness" out of the water. Early on readers see Hoare arrive as a lone passenger on a plane into a country descending into chaos. Communist-backed Simba rebels are rampaging, looting, killing, and raping across sizable portions of the Congo. The Congo government is suffering from political intrigues that will eventually bring Mobutu to power by the end of the book. Hoare and some others realize something must be done so they form a force of mercenaries called 5 Commando to crush the Simbas and rescue hostages (and get a sizable pay check of course). The book flows through scenes of humor and tragedy. It also tries to bring to life warfare in the Congo ranging from holding the line against drugged teenage rebels with antiquated weapons to being on a gunboat caught in a storm on a large African lake. And then there are the columns of trucks, jeeps, and armored cars driving at breakneck speed down jungle roads shooting their way out of one ambush after another.

This is an invaluable, extremely well-written account of the mercenaries recruited to fight in the Congo during the rebellion of 1964-1965. [As a Foreign Service Officer I encountered Mike Hoare and his mercenaries in Kindu, Coquilhatville, and Paulis.] Major (later Colonel) Hoare had an unusual background for a mercenary commander. Born in India, in World War II he served in the London Irish Rifles (perhaps in a staff position) and was mustered out as captain. He qualified as a chartered accountant in 1948 and then immigrated to South Africa, where he ran safaris and enjoyed sailing his small yacht. In 1960-1961 he formed a mercenary force to serve Moïse Tshombe in the breakaway province of Katanga in the Congo. Three years later, soon after Tshombe was named prime minister of the Congo, Hoare was summoned to Leopoldville, where he was charged by Tshombe and General Joseph Desire Mobutu to recruit, train, and lead a group of hundreds of mercenaries. For practical reasons, recruitment offices were established in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Hoare assembled hundreds of mercenaries, few of whom were experienced

soldiers. He weeded out a number of recruits immediately and then provided brief training to the remainder. His 5 Commando included about 300 mercenaries who were initially organized in five units stationed in central and eastern Congo. In August 1964 'rebels' controlled over half of the Congo and were threatening to topple the Leopoldville government. I find it astonishing that Hoare was able to recruit and train a disparate group of mercenaries and then provide uncommon leadership in a catch-as-catch-can series of military engagements. His account of how he accomplished this should be highlighted in any chronicle of effective 'irregular soldiers.

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