

Mad Mike Hoare in the Congo



MIKE HOARE
Congo Mercenary

AFRICA'S MOST FAMOUS MERC DOCUMENTS HIS WILD RIDE IN THE UNTAMED DARK CONTINENT

by Capt. Joseph Columbus Smith, 1st
Bn, Rhodesian African Rifles (Ret.)

(www.paladinpress.com).

The biggest treat is that Col. Mike Hoare has penned, at age 87, crisp and witty new forwards to:

Congo Mercenary (1967),
The Road To Kalamata
(1986), *The Seychelles Affair* (1989),
and *Congo Warriors*

(1991).

These books chart not only Hoare's personal history as a mercenary leader in the Congo's savage post-independence maelstrom (1960-1965) but also detail the heavy communist hand behind the terror in Africa, then and now.

HOARE AND HIS COMMANDOS RACE AGAINST TIME

Hoare and his 4 Commando of "mercs" and later 5 Commando raced against time to

rescue hundreds of white missionaries, priests and nuns from "the chop" of machetes and unspeakably worse. Sometimes they arrived just a few minutes late and Hoare's compassionate descriptions of those dead and dying scenes will leave you weeping.

His "volunteers"—as he calls them—were shock troops, and took many casualties performing these rescues, but killed thousands of marauding savages in the process, restoring order to the Congo. More important to this audience are Hoare's leadership hints, ladled throughout these volumes and spiced with humor.

Because I was a "mercenary" infantry officer in Rhodesia for three years, SOF publisher Lt.Col. Robert K. Brown has asked me to review the books from the perspective of another mercenary's experience.

After reading the four books, I admit up front I feel a kinship with Mike Hoare and the warmth of another comrade in arms. His words in these four books simply hold water and are a soldier's primer to boot.

(First of three reviews of Hoare books by Capt. Joseph Columbus Smith, 1st Bn, Rhodesian African Rifles (Ret.))

MAD MIKE REBOOTS

"Mad Mike" Hoare, Africa's most famous "mercenary," is very much alive and just "re-booted," with the re-printing of his four famous books by Paladin Press, out of Boulder, Colorado

AN IRISH MERC IS BORN IN INDIA

Col. Hoare, born of Irish parents in India in 1920, joined the British Army and served in WWII in India and the Burma campaign. He resigned after the war as a major with seven years' service.

In 1960, just two weeks after the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was declared independent, mineral rich Katanga Province declared itself an independent country, a new breakaway state, divorcing itself from the DRC.

TSOMBE RECRUITS HOARE

Moise Tsombe was elected its first Prime Minister and declared Katanga would maintain diplomatic ties with Belgium (the colonial parent) and a strong anti-communist stance. He brought in then Maj. Hoare and commissioned him to recruit white mercenaries ("4 Commando") to defend Katanga against rampaging tribesmen and the communist-led government in the Congo capital of

Leopoldville.

Concurrently (mid-September 1960), DRC Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba was unloading arms, ammunition, and troop trucks from 19 huge Russian Ilyushin cargo planes in Leopoldville, delivered compliments of Moscow. The Kremlin was responding to Lumumba's plea for assistance in squashing breakaway provinces (*Congo Warriors*).

FEROCIOUS AGGRESSION AGAINST THE COMMIES

Hoare earned the tag "Mad Mike" from the communist press for his ferocious aggression against the communist rebels who overran the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1964-65.

While Katanga never achieved permanent statehood, and Tsombe was forced into exile, he never forgot the protection Hoare and his 4 Commando provided his fledgling nation.

Via a typical African twist of fate, Tsombe was called back to Leopoldville in 1964, this time as the Prime Minister of the DRC. The government had taken a decidedly anti-communist stance, angering the Communist block to the degree that they launched a terror campaign, the size and savagery of which had never been seen before or since.

THE CHINESE-BACKED PAL

The Chinese armed, paid, and launched the Popular Army of Liberation, a.k.a. the "Simbas" (lions) movement, and in just a few

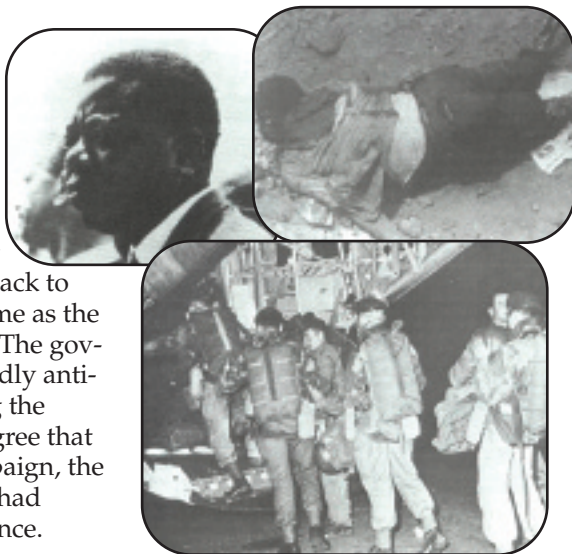
months these savages had terrorized two thirds of the Congo, including the Congo's own pathetic national army.

In just one case, a 14-year-old male "Simba" 'officer' and his 'aides' held daily public kangaroo courts in Stanleyville, raping, chopping, spearing, and shooting hundreds. Those not yet killed (and whites, particularly Americans, were preferred victims) were held prisoner waiting their

turn on the square. This gruesome scenario was re-played simultaneously all over the Congo, now paralyzed by terror.

Captured Simba documents exposed classic commie terror tactics: target village chiefs, schools, hospitals, and the intelligentsia. Create an atmosphere of terror (we saw all of this in Rhodesia).

According to Hoare, Prime Minister Tsombe saw the Simbas' threat as



Top left: Moise Tsombe, the leader of the independent Katanga and later prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo. U.S. Air Force photo. Top right: A victim of the civil war, who has been subjected to cannibalism. U.S. Army photograph by Stig von Bayer. Above: Belgian paras loading up for Stanleyville from Kamina airfield. U.S. Air Force photo



This map shows the territorial control of the Congo in 1960-1961. The yellow represents the area controlled by the government in Leopoldville. The red represents a rival government formed in Stanleyville. Green represents Katanga, and blue represents the mining state of South Kasai. Map made by Wikipedia user Acntx, used under the GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.2

"...an all out attempt by the Communist block to seize power in the Congo, overthrow law and order, and establish a communist presence in the heart of Africa."

The commies had more than just ideology in mind. The Congo, particularly Katanga, is mineral rich beyond belief. The uranium used to build the USA's first atomic bomb came from Katanga (Hey, the late Saddam Hussein did send a party to the Congo for uranium).

HOARE RECRUITS A WHITE ARMY

Tsombe immediately recalled Hoare and ordered him to recruit 1000 white mercenaries and quickly bring them to the Congo.

In his books, Hoare repeatedly applauds Tsombe for having the moral courage to import white mercenaries to save the Congo. The global response was damning and the black states were particularly outraged for two reasons:

1. It exposed the worthlessness of all post-colonial national armies which were too incompetent to assist Tsombe, and 2. It particularly irked all commie-leaning black states who knew that the communist Simbas could be smashed by the white units. But Tsombe never looked back,



Platoon O/C Joe C. Smith in front of troops of B Company, 1 Rhodesian African Rifles (1RAR).

never second-guessed his decision to save the Congo and, of course, was never forgiven.

Hoare and his new “5 Commando,” plus a battalion of Belgian paratroopers, some odds and sods other “mercs” and a half dozen U.S. Air Force Hercules C-130s and crews, raced all over saving lives, although sometimes arriving a few heartbreaking seconds late. 5 Commando killed thousands of Simbas and saved and helped liberate the Congo, period. But they suffered many deaths with their shock troop tactics.

THE SAVAGES BRUTALIZE BELGIAN NUNS

After liberating just one of many Belgian and American missions, Hoare related how he arrived to find naked Belgian nuns cowering in a small room, black and blue with bruises. Several nuns had teeth knocked out.

About this remote mission, Hoare said in *Congo Mercenary*, the Simbas (Lions) carried out “rapings in public, slow torture, and other bestialities, some of them too frightful and shameful to record . . . for the amusement of the rebel guards.”

One of Hoare’s “Wild Geese”—Harry G. Smith—wasn’t reticent to tell *Soldier of Fortune* about the horrors he witnessed, nor his revenge. “Their favorite method of killing was to make a nun drink gasoline and then cut her open and set her afire. Children were tied between two

jeeps and torn apart. Crucifixion and castration were the norm. Only those who were there would understand what I am writing of. I believe this information was never made available to the public because the United Nations pulling out gave the Simbas *carte blanche* to do whatever they wanted to the population.”

TREACHEROUS BASTARDS

Smith didn’t hesitate to say he and other mercs practiced reciprocity on the Simbas when they got the chance (we have no evidence Col. Hoare was aware of this). Smith described the Simbas as “bare-chested, bare-foot, marked with mud, and with animal skins draped over their bodies. They were between 14 and 16 years old. They were treacherous bastards, who got their strength from Madame Orena, a witch doctor, who had them believing they were invincible.”

Hoare’s “5 Commando” raided this mission so quickly the Simbas didn’t have time to kill. His books are full of clues into his productive military mind that forged an unstoppable force.

OLD DOG HOARE LEANS NEW TRICKS

Hoare was an old-school British infantry officer when he touched down in the Congo. The format was pretty SOP: Send out a recce, plan the advance to the objective carefully, plan the attack, and make each shot count!

But when Hoare arrived in Katanga (1960), this old Congo hand

took Hoare aside and told him to toss his beloved and dog-eared British field manuals into Lake Tanganyika. Congo’s savage rebels, hopped-up on a witch doctor’s potion, convinced they were impervious to bullets, would charge fearlessly en masse. Rotten shots they may have been, but they usually did inflict casualties on the advancing troops.

“Here it is not a question of counting your rounds and firing when you see the whites of their eyes,” said Hoare in *The Road to Kalamata*, but about laying down an immediate maximum volume of firepower on the enemy. He was told that “great noise is associated with great power in the African mind and serves to intimidate the enemy.”

In his new FN (Fabrique Nationale) rifles, his “volunteers” had both noise and power. Hoare was amazed at the devastating effect of the 7.62mm NATO round on the enemy (who now seemed not so impervious to bullets). With an FN, Hoare observed, even just four men could produce a withering base of fire. It was as if, he said, each man was a light machine gunner. (The FN was the weapon of Rhodesia and I couldn’t concur more.)

“Reconnaissance by fire” (empty a magazine of 7.62mm into a suspicious area) was added to his lexicon, as was the terrifying practice of racing down roads certain an ambush awaited. But with lives ticking away, Hoare had no choice, nor would he have wanted one.

“Mercenary soldiers are by definition assault troops,” said Hoare in *Congo Mercenary*, and when he was recruiting in Johannesburg, South Africa and Salisbury, Rhodesia, he was looking for a specific type.

He told his recruiters, “in my view the right type was young, fit, and with a sense of adventure. Military experience was desirable but not absolutely essential. I would give them the training I knew would be required in the Congo.”

I suspect Hoare very much approves of the concept of the USA’s all-volunteer Army. He declared that a volunteer (he called all of his soldiers “volunteers”) can learn in a

twentieth of the time it would take a conscript/draftee and is ten times more effective a soldier than a draftee.

RAGTAG RECRUITS

Hoare wanted his soldiers to look like soldiers. He wanted them to “meet regular army standards...not for us the sloppy dress and three days’ growth of beard almost mandatory for a Belgian mercenary...with us to be unshaven was a crime...a decent soldierly appearance my foremost demand.”

His standard for officers was much higher and he was disappointed with the first batch sent to the Congo. “Very few who had been given the rank had ever received any formal training as officers and fewer still understood the art of leadership and man management. Their main concern seemed more to do with the privileges and the pay that went with their appointment than with their responsibilities toward their men.”

He illustrated their selfish blindness via a touching story about a good and enthusiastic soldier who suddenly went quiet and seemed to wither over a few days. The soldier’s platoon leader—a lieutenant—had missed low morale indicators altogether, but Major Hoare detected the metamorphosis and sat the worried soldier down to find out “why.”

Since his recruitment in Salisbury, Rhodesia a few months earlier, the young soldier had not received a single letter from his young wife and was devastated. He had written often and still no response from his wife at home.

Hoare immediately called the Red Cross, gave them the soldier’s home address, and asked them to untangle the mystery. It turned out the young wife was still crazy about her husband but harbored a big secret. She had never learned to read or write and somehow had hidden her secret from her husband.

Hoare informed the young soldier, whose morale was instantly restored. A few phone calls, a display of humanity, and that platoon was brought back to full strength via a boost in morale to a single soldier.

Lessons learned.

FIELD JUSTICE

Military justice can be just a trigger pull away and not without its humorous side. A mercenary not in Hoare’s 5 Commando—but under his command umbrella—raped and then murdered a young local woman (not funny). Hoare’s officers were so outraged they dragged Hoare out of bed at 2 a.m. to convene a summary court martial. They had the “perp” and witnesses in tow and were hopeful a quick execution would follow a speedy trail.

Within minutes, the sobbing perpetrator had confessed to the rape and shooting of the girl on the river bank. Begging for mercy, he volunteered that he was a bit of soccer sensation in Europe and a bright future and moral redemption awaited him if he would just get out of the Congo.

After a brief closed-door deliberation, a sentence was arrived at and the blubbing soccer star was marched to the exact spot on the river bank where he had killed the girl.

Hoare’s staff held the man tied up while their leader unholstered his Army Colt .45, carefully took aim, and blew off one of the man’s big toes and then shot off the other. The toeless one was tossed into the back of a jeep and dropped on the steps of a hospital. (Hoare concluded he hadn’t the authority to execute.)

POKING THE NANNIES

On a lighter note, I can relate a case of “field justice” that I presided over while commanding an African company in the Rhodesian African Rifles (circa 1979). When my 13-truck convoy rolled into base camp, two young African ladies (a.k.a. “nannies”) stepped out of their *kia* (mud hut with thatched roof) and waved shyly as my handsome soldiers, in their fresh, starched Rhodesian camouflage, stood tall in the moving transports.

Just before dawn, a sentry reported that our three trackers were missing. Just as the mist lifted, I spotted deep footprints leading from the back of the tracker’s tent straight to the mud hut where the young ladies lived. I



This photo of USNS *General W. H. Gordon* (T-AP-117) was probably taken from the bridge of USNS *General R. M. Blatchford* during that ship’s return to New York on 11 August 1963. *General R. M. Blatchford* had been deployed since February 1961 transporting United Nations troops to and from their home countries in support of United Nations operations in the Congo. On the right is SS *San Angelo Victory* of the Prudential Lines (renamed from Prudential Steamship Co. circa May 1962). Photograph by Journalist J. J. Sarver, USN, who covered the return of *General R. M. Blatchford*.

was about to launch a small patrol to “track down” my trackers when all three exited the mud hut and began walking back to camp across the plowed field. In an hour they were standing before me “on orders.” I asked the first tracker, “Did you leave the base last night and poke the nannies?”

“Yes, Eische!” was his two-word response.

The second tracker’s response was identical.

But when I asked the final tracker if he, too, had “poked the nannies,” he responded indignantly, “No Sir! I stood guard!”

Company Sergeant Major Chitereka burst out laughing and it took supreme effort on my part to keep a “stiff upper lip.”

Punishment was swift. I had all three kitted up with steel pots and full gear and turned them over to the tender mercies of a new corporal. The close order drill went on all day. Great theater for all. Only in Africa.

Next month we’ll review the still controversial *The Seychelles Affair*. The following month, we will revisit the issue of communist influence in Southern Africa and a seeming strange reversal of course by the CIA in the mid 1970s that Col. Hoare says in *Congo Warriors* happened “almost overnight.” 🇺🇸