

Proposed Title –

Soldiers of Fortune: An examination of the role and effectiveness of Mercenaries in the Congo Crisis

For my dissertation, I propose to investigate the role of Mercenaries during the period of violence and upheaval known as the Congo Crisis between 1960 and 1965¹. Specifically, I propose to examine the prevalence of mercenaries during the period, their exact role and duties as well as their impact upon the various wars and revolts that took place during the specified time period. The dissertation will look at several different engagements that mercenaries of various stripes participated in and will dissect each case individually, presenting the aforementioned criteria in relation to each case, and making the argument that, while in some cases their actions may be questionable, the mercenaries were a vital and effective force during this troubled time. Furthermore, through the examination of battles, histories and personal memoirs, it shall be argued that the mercenaries were a highly effective fighting force without which a far greater toll of violence would have been extracted upon the Congo and its people, especially in regards to the later engagements of the crisis. In addition, from these aforementioned sources, a side examination of the character of mercenaries who participated in the crisis through the lens of micro-history, as well as what this case can tell us about conflicts in the Cold War and about the mercenary in general, will be attempted.

To begin, it is important to give a brief quick historical overview in order to further expand upon what this dissertation will be covering. The specific period I will be examining is the period of destabilisation known as the Congo Crisis², which occurred following decolonisation between 1960 and 1965³ in the then Republic of the Congo. Within this period, I will be investigating the role of foreign combatants hired by various factions within the Congo to perform military tasks and their perceived effectiveness in completing these tasks. To be exact, I will be focusing on the initial period following Belgian decolonisation, the successionist state movement of Katanga, and finally the Simba Revolt.

Now why is this particular area worthy of research? Well as I will later discuss in review of the literature, there is a surprising lack of work on the area of mercenaries during this period.

¹ A. Mockler, *Mercenaries*. (London: Macdonald, 1970). 155.

² L. Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo 1960 – 1965*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

³ Ibid.

What does exist is limited to a handful of books, with the key works being decades old. What more recent works exist on the topic are, from my initial observations, lacking in focus on the role of the mercenaries. Therefore, by combining these resources with first-hand accounts and memoirs published over the years, I will use my dissertation to expand upon this particular area of research. Literary availability aside, this period, as my research has led me to conclude, marks the resurgence of a military tradition that stretches back to the ancient world⁴. It is this reason that I believe commends this area to further study and research, as it marks perhaps the first modern approach to this military practice and offers a unique understanding of the nature of both modern warfare and the relationship between formal and informal combatants. Moreover, the role that mercenaries played during the Congo Crisis opens up the discussion to the involvement and growth of forces that operate outside of conventional armed conflict. As I have found in my research so far, the mercenaries operated very differently from how armies traditionally operated in the field, employing various tactics and strategies that were and can be portrayed as unorthodox in comparison to conventional ones. While such a discussion on these tactics will be a key part of my discussion of the effectiveness of the mercenaries, such a particular area can feed into wider discussions and research on the *modus operandi* of irregular and unorthodox armed groups, which itself is a wide-ranging topic that is both historically and currently relevant to this day. In addition, research into this area also will provide the ability to analyse modern events in both the Congo and wider Africa with greater forethought and clarity. By this I refer to the fact that this period takes place post Belgian decolonisation, and through my initial research has opened a wide range of thought-provoking questions related to the actions and repercussions of both colonisation and decolonisation. Considering now the seemingly ever-present spectre of colonisation when ever discussion of Africa arises, an analysis into what the mercenaries saw, did and helped prevent would offer a fresh observation on a particularly difficult topic and be able to feed back into discussions of western involvement, even unofficially, in post-colonial states. On the whole, this area of research offers I believe a wide range of relevant academic benefits that cater to multiple disciplines and is thus a useful area of study.

As of now, the proposed layout of my dissertation is to contain three primary chapters, each one dealing with a particular case study of a period within the Congo Crisis. Firstly, chapter one will be dealing with the initial period following the Congo's independence⁵. It is during

⁴A. Mockler, *Mercenaries*. (London: Macdonald, 1970). 21.

⁵ A. Mockler, *The New Mercenaries*. (London: Corgi Books, 1986). 59.

this period that the Congo went through rapid changes in both military restructuring and political upheaval. Mercenaries this time were few, primarily involved with low level activities, as well as being involved in the first rumblings of violence⁶. As a result, this chapter will potentially be the shortest out of all the chapters, with the primary argument being on how the mercenaries were to become a vital force due to the actions of the Congolese and how they were being viewed before the major incidents began.

Chapter two will be examining the successionist state of Katanga between 1960 and 1963⁷, which is where the mercenary activity really begins. Within this chapter, the argument will be focused on the multitude of vital roles the mercenaries had and how important they were to helping secure Katanga's independence, however disliked this may have been. Moreover, the mercenaries role within Katanga opens the opportunity to examine them in the true context of the Cold War, as they were often pitted against both United Nations forces⁸, which allows for an insightful look at to how they were viewed on the international stage and what this can tell us about their resurgence. Plus, this chapter will include a further exploration of the limited size and capacity of the mercenaries in relation to other combatants and how even with this handicap they were effective in performing their roles.

And for the final chapter, the proposal is to focus on the Simba Revolt⁹ and the role of Commando 5 between 1964 and 1965. As before, the main argument will be on the effectiveness of the mercenaries in relation to the size and scope of operation. It is during this chapter that a greater emphasis on their tactics and strategies will be placed, thanks in part to the use of memoirs of men like Mike Hoare. In addition, the argument within will also draw attention to the violent actions of the Simba Revolt and how on a number of occasions, the mercenaries helped to prevent or limit tragedies that occurred. Nevertheless, this chapter, as I will touch upon again later, offers the ability to expand outside my initial proposed area of study due to how historically the units involved in dealing with the Revolt were still operational till 1967¹⁰, dealing with remnants and other tasks. Consequently, if for whatever reason I need to expand my scope of study, this opens up the opportunity to have an

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ C. Othen, *Katanga: 1960 – 63*. (Stroud: The History Press, 2018).

⁸ Ibid. 139.

⁹ A. Mockler, *The New Mercenaries*. (London: Corgi Books, 1986). 84.

¹⁰ Ibid. 120.

additional chapter on the disbandment and mercenary activities following the end of the crisis.

As I mentioned earlier, the available literature on mercenaries and mercenary operations during the Congo Crisis are fairly limited. I have found so far that there is very few works which directly discuss the role of mercenaries in the Congo or that go into any particular depth in regards to them. Thus far, I have found six works which directly focus on, or at least contain a good deal of information on, the mercenaries and their role within the Congo Crisis. Through my initial research, I have found them to be of great use in developing my knowledge and understanding of the crisis, but they are not without fault. The two works which have been most useful thus far have been “Mercenaries” and “The New Mercenaries” both written by Anthony Mockler, with the former being published in 1970¹¹ and the latter in 1986¹². “Mercenaries” is Mockler’s more historical work, focusing on the history of mercenaries as both an idea and a reality, with a focus from the 12th century though to the events of Biafra, with explorations of the more theoretical such “What is a Mercenary?”¹³ and their particular strengths and weaknesses¹⁴. Now, while there is only a single chapter focusing on the exploits of the Mercenaries, unlike other works, Mockler focuses almost exclusively on the role of the mercenaries in the Congo, with key facts and events placed in context in relation to mercenary activity. Also, Mockler goes into great detail about not only the role of the mercenaries in the Congo, but also the leaders of the mercenaries and the tactics and strategies they employed. For my dissertation, this is crucial information and thus makes this work of great importance to my work. Mockler’s later work, “The New Mercenaries”, is a look at the phenomenon of modern mercenaries, with this book detailing the events between 1960 and 1985 which included the Congo Crisis, the war in Angola and the coup attempts in the island nations of the Indian ocean. Similar to his previous work, Mockler’s eye for detail and expansion upon his previous work on the Congo is invaluable to my dissertation and thus provides a key platform from which I will be able to expand the research in this topic area. In regards to the other works I have so far acquired, I have had a mixed reaction to them, with some being more useful than others. Namikas’ “Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo 1960 – 1965”¹⁵ on the one hand is a useful resource for my

¹¹ A. Mockler, *Mercenaries*. (London: Macdonald, 1970).

¹² A. Mockler, *The New Mercenaries*. (London: Corgi Books, 1986).

¹³ A. Mockler, *Mercenaries*. (London: Macdonald, 1970). 13.

¹⁴ Ibid. 194.

¹⁵ L. Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo 1960 – 1965*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

dissertation due to its more academic style in comparison to Mockler and its wider focus on the entirety of the Congo Crisis, but also having a focus on the role of mercenaries with the crisis. Yet in comparison, Tickler's "The Modern Mercenary"¹⁶ is far more abbreviated in comparison to both Mockler's and Namikas' works, taking a broader approach to a range of mercenary conflicts with only slight depth paid to each one. Therefore, it is this gap in the scholarship on mercenaries that I intend to exploit and build upon with my dissertation.

In addition to the histories I have acquired for my research, I will also be making use of several first hand accounts and memoirs published by mercenaries who fought in the Congo during the Congo Crisis. The primary author of these accounts is Mike Hoare, who is primarily known for commanding Commando 5 during the Simba Revolt of 1964 and 1965¹⁷. Two of these memoirs "Mercenary"¹⁸ and "Congo Mercenary"¹⁹ deal with his time operating during the aforementioned revolt. While I have not had chance fully engage with either source, my initial impression of "Congo Mercenary" indicates a level of depth not found in the histories I have been studying and a wealth on information that will be useful in making my case about the effectiveness of the mercenaries. The other memoir I will be using is that of "Mad dog killers" by Ivan Smith, who was a mercenary in Commando 5²⁰. This particular memoir is far more focused on an average mercenaries' first-hand experience of the ground fighting that took place as opposed to Hoare's mix of this and commanding the whole operation. Either way, all of these memoirs are what I believe will allow me to exploit the seeming lack of scholarship on the mercenaries' role in the Congo, and expand upon existing scholarship by others, via exploring what they did from those who were there.

However, the current research I have completed has given me pause in some areas. For example, I have been made aware that while the Congo Crisis itself is marked as ending after Mobutu's coup d'état in November 1965²¹, mercenary activity does continue in the country until 1969, with the majority of activity taking place in the form of continued operations

¹⁶ P. Tickler, *The Modern Mercenary: Dog of War, or Soldier of Honour?* (Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens Ltd, 1987).

¹⁷ A. Mockler, *The New Mercenaries*. (London: Corgi Books, 1986). 83.

¹⁸ M. Hoare, *Mercenary*. (London: Corgi Books, 1978).

¹⁹ M. Hoare, *Congo Warriors*. (London: Robert Hale, 1991).

²⁰ I. Smith, *Mad Dog Killers: The Story of a Congo Mercenary*. (Solihull: Helion & Company Ltd, 2012).

²¹ A. Mockler, *The New Mercenaries*. (London: Corgi Books, 1986). 110.

against rebels and an attempted mercenary revolt²². Thus, there is an area to expand my research into if the need arises.

To conclude, as of the writing of this report, I am beginning to make good headway with researching my dissertation topic. While I do have a substantial amount of scholarship to both read and further research, my initial research leaves me confident that my proposed investigation into the role and effectiveness of mercenaries in the Congo Crisis was not poor one. As I have stated throughout this proposal, this topic area offers a rich and prevalent amount of interest to both academic scholars and those wishing to examine a multitude of past and current events.

²² Ibid. 134.

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