

Raise a mug to Mad Mike

Michael "Mad Mike" Hoare, my favorite mercenary, has just been let out of jail in South Africa and I'm delighted.

Four years ago, this feisty Irishman and 40 other mercenaries tried to overthrow the left-wing regime of the Seychelles, an island group off Africa's east coast. They arrived disguised as rugby players, claiming to be members of "The Ancient Order of Foam Blowers." But customs found a gun and all hell broke loose.

Mad Mike shot his way out of customs, commandeered a plane and forced its pilot at gunpoint to fly him to South Africa. There, the last of Africa's famous "Wild Geese" soldiers of fortune was thrown into jail.

Thinking of Col. Hoare brings back a legion of memories from the early 1960s, a time when the vast Congo (now Zaire) was just emerging from Belgian colonial rule. Out of this true heart of darkness, rent by tribal warfare and foreign meddling, burst a collection of nightmare characters unrivaled in modern fiction.

There was Patrice Lumumba who went from schoolteacher to president of the Congo in a year. Spouting fiery Marxist rhetoric, he became the darling of the international left and the bane of Belgium's mining interests in the Congo. So a plot was cooked up and Lumumba was arrested by lugubrious Vice-President Joseph Kasavubu, turned over to Belgian mercenaries, and shot.

Off in the mineral-rich province of Katanga, Belgian corporations financed the secessionist revolt of the ebullient Moise Tschombe. The powerful Belgian mineral firm, Union Miniere de Haut Katanga, thoughtfully supplied a tough bunch of French mercenaries and former SS soldiers. These cutthroats, known as Les Affreux, battled Indian and Irish UN troops sent by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold to put down the Katanga rebellion.

While on a trip to Katanga, Hammarskjold's plane mysteriously crashed: To this day no one really knows if it was an accident or the result of a secret Belgian-inspired air attack or bomb. Whatever the cause, the UN lost its only great leader.

Meanwhile, out of the Congo bush came Albert Kalonji, the diamond king of Kasai province, with his own mountain of precious gems and lust for human blood. Then there emerged the two most

ERIC MARGOLIS



horrifying creatures of the Congolese night: Pierre Mulelle and Antoine Gizenga, chiefs of the dreaded Simbas.

Bodies painted, befeathered, armed with spears, bows and rifles, the Simbas only plan was to kill whites. Hopped up on palm wine and marijuana, carrying juju amulets that supposedly made them invulnerable to bullets, the Simbas set about on an orgy of rapine and murder that horrified the civilized world.

A column of Simbas led by Mulelle occupied Stanleyville; other white settlements and mission stations were seized by Gizenga's savages. White men were roasted alive over slow fires; women and children were raped and tortured for weeks. Nuns were favorite victims — and meals — of the Simbas. In many isolated Belgian communities besieged by Simbas, men often killed their own wives and children to prevent them being taken alive by the Simbas.



MAD MIKE HOARE
Soldier of fortune

It was at this moment that good old Mike and a few hundred white mercenaries got into their jeeps and roared off into the bush. They fought their way through the entire Simba army, routing the feathered savages by the thousands. And they rescued the besieged Belgians to the cheers of the entire world. They used captured Simbas for pistol practice.

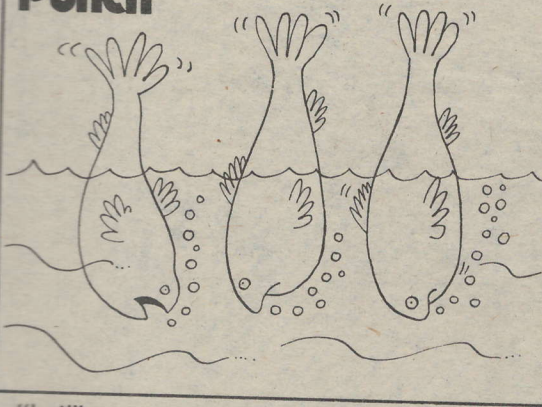
After this glorious little epic, the Congo settled back into a carnival of mayhem. Simbas, Belgian paratroopers, CIA agents, communist and anti-communist Cubans, mercenaries, UN troops, Egyptians, all blasted away at each other across the Congo's immensity. Finally, almost everyone packed up and went home except for Mad Mike and some of his boys.

They went off looking for new wars, some to the mountains of North Yemen to join the royalists fighting the Egyptians; others, including Mad Mike, went off to Biafra to fight in its war of secession against the Nigerian federal state.

The Congo marked the last golden days of mercenaries. Many were thugs, criminals or psychopaths, yet a few still managed to embody personal heroism, high adventure and panache, qualities that have almost disappeared in our age of push-button, impersonal warfare.

Back in the Congo of the early 1960s, it was still possible for a few daring men, modern conquistadors, to knock an entire nation on its ear. Let's drink a beer to Mad Mike and the Wild Geese.

Punch



"I still say synchronized swimming is grossly overrated."