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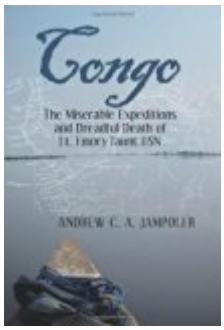

Andrew C. A. Jampoler. *Congo: The Miserable Expeditions and Dreadful Death of Lt. Emory Taunt, USN.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013. xi + 256 pp. $44.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61251-079-8.

Reviewed by Ryan Tickle

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The story of Belgian King Leopold II's Congo Free State is a tragic and complicated one. After staking his claim to the already occupied land during the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, Leopold turned the Congo--nearly eighty times the size of Belgium--into a personal plantation for harvesting ivory and rubber. Millions of Congolese died from the resulting violence, starvation, and disease.[1] Much of Andrew C. A. Jampoler's *Congo* examines the broad cast of characters responsible for permitting such abuses and the activists who later condemned them. In other words, the title of Jampoler's book is a bit of an understatement; this is the much larger story of late nineteenth-century colonialism and global politics told through the story of one man's life. The author profiles Lieutenant Emory Taunt, whose personal and professional shortcomings represent the larger missteps taken by the United States and European powers in the Congo and Africa more broadly. The fifth book from Jampoler, a retired naval aviator and alumnus of the U.S. State Department Foreign Service Institute's School of Language Study, *Congo* is the gripping story of a region that was (and still is) caught in a tangled web of violence and greed.

Congo's first three chapters sketch a historical background on scientific racism and U.S. Navy expeditions to West Africa, of which there were ten between 1873 and 1887. Jampoler illustrates why American expeditions such as Taunt's in the 1880s were on shaky ground by peppering his work with mini biographies of men like Henry Morton Stanley, the famed explorer who almost singlehandedly convinced world leaders that Africa was ripe for exploitation. "The expectation was that millions of nearly naked black Africans who possessed practically nothing would in quick time become eager consumers of everything the industrialized world" had to offer (p. 38). Stanley used creative math to demonstrate how sales of everything from clothing to knives would skyrocket; however, Jampoler argues that 1924 marked the first Congolese census, therefore, "Stanley had no scientific basis for his population estimates ... [and created] the illusion of a huge market waiting to be tapped" (p. 39). Misinformed and misguided,

American officials agreed to investigate the alleged business opportunities that awaited them over six thousand miles from home.

In the next three chapters, Jampoler describes Lt. Emory Taunt's life as a roller coaster ride consisting of a few minor successes followed by drunken disasters. The author moves forward in time, from Taunt's application to the Naval Academy, where he stood just 5'3" and weighed in at 115 pounds, to his graduation four years later. After receiving twenty demerits for consuming liquor on campus, Taunt finished sixtieth in his class of seventy-eight. According to Jampoler, Taunt participated in a highly publicized rescue of a U.S. Army expedition to the Canadian Arctic in 1884 for which he "received too much credit" (p. 66). In other words, as the author argues, "little in Emory Taunt's career in the U.S. Navy suggested that he would be a good choice" for such an "extraordinary mission" to the Congo (p. 60). Regardless, Taunt successfully completed a solo trip up the Congo River in 1885 to assess the potential for U.S. commercial development. Artifacts from this trip remain in the Smithsonian as part of his legacy.

However, alcohol continued to hamper Taunt's personal life and eventually ended his lackluster career in the navy. Through official reports and personal letters, Jampoler illustrates that Taunt's alcoholism was no secret to his wife, friends, congressmen, and even presidents of the United States. In short, Taunt liked very few people and was liked by even fewer. Through his analysis of court records, newspaper stories, and personal missives, Jampoler takes readers into the courtroom for Taunt's court-martial trial for an unauthorized two-week drinking binge in New York City. As usual, Taunt made excuses: fever and an enlarged liver altered his thinking; however, according to the final witness for the prosecution, any illness of Taunt's was "very largely if not wholly the result of excessive indulgence in alcoholic stimulants" (p. 129). It came as no surprise then that Taunt's second voyage to Africa ended in disaster and the third ended his life, his body never to be found.

An excellent--and perhaps unintended--history of media influence emerges from Jampoler's research. Newspaper op-ed battles raged between Leopold and his U.S. critics and between Henry Morton Stanley and Willard Tisdel, a U.S. commercial agent.[2] After Stanley boasted of the Congo's trade potential, Tisdel visited the area and reported he was "dumbfounded with the conditions of things" there and that "there is no food in the country for oxen" or humans (p. 52). Moreover, Tisdel recognized that most of the tribes in the Congo "do not like the white man; and while they are glad to have his cloth and gin, they would much prefer never to see a white man within their domain" (p. 53). This was hardly the report American officials wanted to read so Stanley returned fire in the form of a ***New York Herald*** editorial in which he asserted that Tisdel's report contained "more than fifty errors" (p. 56). Following a protracted battle of "counterpunching paragraphs," ***Herald*** editors announced a draw between the two in 1886 and declared the argument a harmless difference of opinion. However, the ferocity of these public debates over the Congo speaks to the region's importance for businessmen and government officials in the late nineteenth century.

Although the final two chapters describe the reform efforts of celebrities like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mark Twain and Leopold's eventual relinquishing of the Congo to the Belgian government, Jampoler stops well short of providing a fairytale ending.[3] To bring Taunt's story into the present, the author and his son spent the summer of 2011 traveling 1,400 miles down the Congo River. In his epilogue, Jampoler's candid and sobering observations illustrate the very real and enduring impact of European colonialism in Africa; his commentary also speaks to the more modern problem of corruption among native African lead-

ers. Violent conflict and political instability combined with severely lacking infrastructure makes today's Congo as perilous to travelers as it was more than a century ago.

Congo is not without its flaws. Just fourteen pages of endnotes leave much to be desired and sudden back-and-forth temporal shifts will cause slight confusion for the quick reader. These shortcomings do not, however, limit the usefulness of the work to academics and lay readers of naval history, African history, and anyone interested in global politics at the turn of the twentieth century. Without bogging the reader down, Jampoler injects morsels of naval history. For example, it seems every officer had a suggestion for visitors to equatorial Africa on what combination of whiskey, port, and French wine best staved off tropical disease. Jampoler also includes figures like naval pay rates and officer population numbers as he moves forward through time from the 1880s Readers will also take an interest in the geographic and logistical difficulties that navigating the Congo River presents for travelers. Moreover, Jampoler supplements his lively writing with more than thirty photographs and illustrations, in addition to five maps. Jampoler is to be commended for supplementing the story of a rather forgettable man with research that overlaps several boundaries of historical study, including military, media, and diplomatic studies, into a readable, informative biography.

Notes

[1]. See, for instance, Adam Hochschild, ***King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*** (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); and Neal Ascherson, ***The King Incorporated: Leopold the Second and The Congo*** (London: Granta, 1963), which dedicate much attention to the brutality with which Leopold enforced his slave regime.

[2]. Jampoler's book makes a nice companion to Matthew G. Stanard, ***Selling the Congo: A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism*** (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), which explores Belgian media manipulation, focusing on the period after Leopold II's reign. See also Kevin C. Dunn, ***Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity*** (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) for another quality analysis of Belgium, the Congo, and propaganda.

[3]. Some of the best works on the Congo Reform Association and its movement come in the form of biographies. See John Hope Franklin, ***George Washington Williams: A Biography*** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); and William E. Phipps, ***William Sheppard: Congo's African American Livingstone*** (Lexington, KY: Geneva Press, 2002).

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