



BOOK REVIEW

54 Days in Luano

End of the Mailoni Brothers' Menace

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Abstract: Victor Simukonda's narrative non-fiction book's strength is based on secondary data sources and conversations with local residents and military personnel who participated in the operation to gun down the Mailoni brothers. The book is written from the military perspective. From a peace and conflict viewpoint, the book sheds light on how particular places' social and economic isolation may create extreme criminals. The author has exhaustively researched and analysed natural and human-caused elements that led to the killings continuing. He delves into the social, psychological, and biological variables that may have contributed to Mailoni Brothers' proclivity for violent crime. Simukonda's book contributes significantly to Zambian military history. The book will inspire and serve as a springboard for researchers interested in documenting post-colonial Zambian military history.

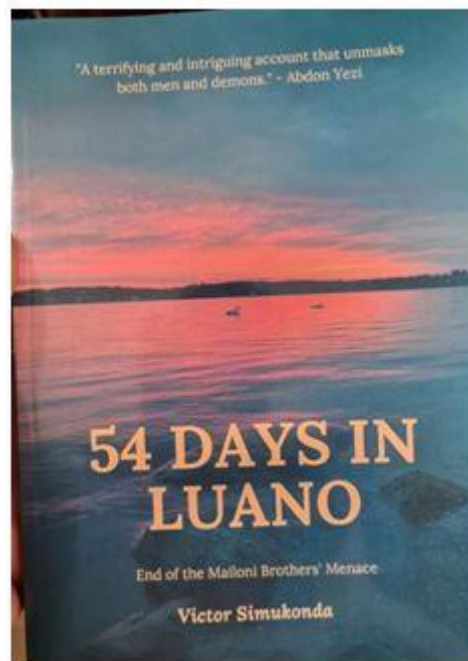
REVIEW

The story of the Mailoni Brothers created an atmosphere of dread and terror among Zambians, more so the people of Luano Valley. The book, '54 Days in Luano,' is a story of the end of the Mailoni Brothers' menace in the Luano Valley from a military perspective authored by Captain Victor Simukonda, a military historian, researcher and peace scholar serving as Staff Officer at Policy, Doctrine and Strategy Branch at Zambia Army Headquarters. It is a narrative non-fiction book. The author is building his scholarly reputation by writing this book after co-authoring another book with Colonel Jethrow Chipili, *Soldiers of the forgotten Army: Northern Rhodesian Askari and the two Great Wars (2021)*.

A one-hundred-page book begins with a well-written introduction and preface that explains the book's purpose. The strength of the narrative is informed and based on the secondary data sources and interviews with the locals and military personnel who took part in the operation. These sources are complemented by the author's military knowledge and experience. It is an easier to read book divided into seven parts with captivating titles. It shows a reader the challenges military personnel encounter in their pursuit of peace and security. It is a valuable contribution since military operations in post-colonial Zambia remains an under-researched area among scholars. The book gives insights into how certain regions' social and economic isolation can breed hardcore criminals from the perspective of peace and conflict.

Simukonda describes how the Mailoni Brothers' grisly killings between 2006 and 2013 stunned a community in Luano Valley, Central Zambia. Some Zambians have always wondered why it had to take the Zambia Army to bring down the three diminutive men who had no conventional military training. To his credit, the author recounts the contributing factors and justifies why it became necessary for military intervention after other security wings failed to capture the brothers. It is worth noting that the Unit (3 Mechanised Battalion from Chindwin Barracks in Kabwe) deployed in Luano Valley has a rich history in military operations. The author gives an account of the successive deployments of Task Forces (between 2011 and 2013) and the challenges they had to contend with during their military operation before gunning down the three brothers. However, in justifying military intervention, the author could have addressed why the brothers could not be classified as insurgents and what constitutes insurgency.

One of the intriguing questions surrounding the story of the Mailoni brothers was why it took so long to either capture or gun them down. The book answers this question as the author has comprehensively identified and analysed natural and human-induced factors that contributed to the failure to end the murders. The factors varied from the expansive nature of the area of operation to the brothers' mastery of their environment, among other things. To summarise the challenges, the author quotes Task Force Commander Major Mpezele, who aptly said, *it was like looking for a needle in a football pitch*.



It is human nature to wonder why an ordinary man can commit atrocities as the Mailoni brothers did. The author explores the social, psychological and biological factors that could have predisposed them to commit violent murders. Others, for example, speculated that the killings might have been motivated by witchcraft. However, there are disputes to such assertions. Some factors suggested that the brothers were victims of circumstances and a product of the environment they were brought up.

The author does not leave the reader to speculate or wonder how the brothers executed their murderous activities. He has painted a vivid picture and chilling account of how each victim was murdered. He has described the weapons and tactics used in committing the atrocities. The sad part is that some of the victims were family members or related to the murderers. Despite their actions, the author provides evidence through the brothers' writings that they had a strong belief in God and affection for their mother. However, their conduct affected their mother's lifestyle and stay in Luano Valley.

Despite that the author's focus was the military perspective to the Mailoni brothers story, he has given an account of the efforts made by the locals to capture the brothers despite successive failures. Locals thought that supernatural intervention, whether via witchcraft or the use of a witch doctor, might put an end to their issues.

The narrative on how the brothers were cornered and gunned down reads like a fiction story though it is true. The atmosphere surrounding the killing of the infamous brothers has been presented in a manner that may invoke a sigh of relief after reading it. It also serves as a reminder of God's omnipotence since the villagers and troops focused their celebrations on praising God for his intervention. Nevertheless, some human rights campaigners had expressed concern that the Army had used disproportionate force against the brothers only armed with spears. Therefore, the author could have addressed this issue in his analysis.

One unanswered question is whether the Mailoni brothers situation was politicised, given that some killings happened in 2011, an election year. Politicians tend to bring in politics in such matters and could have affected the military operation. However, the author has stated that the brothers did not

have any support from big sponsors, which could have changed the character and nature of their acts of local terrorism.

Overall, the book's narrative and plot are easy to read and follow since the authors used regular English and military terms that laypeople can easily understand. The book answers most of the intriguing questions surrounding the life, acts and killings committed by the Mailoni brothers. It is hoped that the book will inspire and act as a launchpad for scholars to document post-colonial Zambian military history. For instance, there are no scholarly historical accounts on the killing of Mshala and the end of the infamous *gassing incidents* from a military perspective. Simukonda's book makes a significant contribution to Zambian military historiography. Scholars, security professionals, and the general public will benefit from this work.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Brigadier General Kennedy Sialoombe, is currently serving as Director General Education, Libraries and Museums Branch in the Zambia Army. He holds a Masters in Peace and Conflict Studies with specialisation in Human Rights, Governance and Peace building from the Copperbelt University (CBU) and a Bachelor of Arts with Education from the University of Zambia (UNZA). He also holds a diploma in Defence and Security Studies from UNZA and has done several courses in military studies. His research interests include military history, civil-military relations, housing, human rights and socio-economics, education, governance and peace building.

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