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Book Review

Christopher Cyr

The Rwandan Patriotic Front 1990-1994 by Adrien Fontanellaz and Tom Cooper is the second of a two volume series, which provides insight into the regional conflicts involving Uganda, Rwanda, and their neighbors during the second half of the twentieth century. This volume contains numerous photographs, maps, and imagery to compliment the text. Adrien Fontanellaz is a Swiss-born military historian and author. His co-author, Tom Cooper, born in Austria, is a military-aviation journalist and historian, and a prolific writer and contributor within the field.

Fontanellaz and Cooper give the reader a cursory yet accurate historical account of the political, cultural, and ethnic conditions to provide the necessary context of the environment that led to the rise of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) during the Rwandan Civil War and the genocide of 1994. However, the main contribution and aim of their work is to present a detailed illustration and examination of the military complexities of the conflict, aspects of the events not thoroughly documented in prior literature.

The authors provide the reader with a concise understanding of the history of Rwanda. They briefly explain the implications of its colonial ties to Belgium, its independence in July of 1962, and antagonistic tribal relations between the Hutu and Tutsi populations. The authors are able to illustrate the significant impact that Belgium had on exacerbating the divisions between the Hutu majority and the Tutsis who represented the ruling elite. Although the authors articulate the divide between the Hutus and the Tutsis, they make little mention of the role played by both the Catholic and Protestant churches in aggravating the divisions between the two groups that help to incite the violence.¹ As the primary purpose of the volume is to document the military operations and materials employed during the period, the book is an easier read for those with a military background, although that is not essential. The inclusion of a glossary facilitates a lay reader's understanding of the acronym-

rich text.

The focus on the military operations of the Forces Armée Rwandaises (FAR) and the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the military wing of the RPF, allows the reader to develop an appreciation of the ferocity of the conflict whether or not they understand the tactical or doctrinal intricacies of warfare. The authors effectively provide the reader with an understanding of the realities of armed conflict and the chaos that ensues. At times, it is difficult to keep track of the specifics of the units and their equipment as detailed in the book, but this does not detract from the overall intent to define the conflict into its moving parts. Also to their credit, the authors allow the reader to understand the implications of protracted war and the need for militaries to maintain those elements essential to war fighting. They articulate the effects of attrition and the ability to not only maintain morale and the continued will to fight, but the consequences of ineffective training on discipline. They successfully convey the imperative of strong leadership and the repercussions when it is lacking.

Fontanellaz and Cooper's in-depth account provides the reader with an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the tragedy that was the Rwandan Civil War. The work is apolitical in nature, focusing on events and outcomes rather than evaluating intent of the participants. Their detailed depiction of the military environment and all that it encompasses leaves the reader with a deeper and clearer picture of the intricacies, tragedies, and realities that impact outcomes of the numerous wars within the African continent, not just within the Rwandan context.

Notes

1. Alison Liebhafsky Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch), 1999.

Bibliography

Des Forges, Alison Liebhafsky. *Leave none to tell the story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999.