







United States, South Africa, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and with arms merchants from France, Holland, Germany, China and several European governments including France, Portugal and Spain in a bid to provide his miniscule army with just about all it needed, always at a price (p. 103).

Chapter 8 of the book gives an account of what the author terms - ‘the Air Bridge’. Venter describes the activities of mercenaries from different parts of the world who were involved in the war on the side of either Biafra or Nigeria. The author points out that, despite the attendant risks to which the mercenary airmen were subjected, such as incessant bombings, explosions, losses in crews and machines, lack of routines, such as routine ‘duty’ or ‘flight times’, the mercenaries kept on fighting possibly because they were assured of their payment. In fact, one of the mercenaries – Jim Townsend – once noted that crews were paid in American dollars – cash-in-hand and nothing as mundane as cheques. This worked for many operators, the majority of whom did not have bank accounts. In this chapter, the author relates a 1995 interview by the BBC with one of the aviators, Fred Cuny, an American World War II disaster relief veteran, who disclosed how he got involved in the Nigerian Civil War and how they referred to Biafra as “the world’s largest flying zoo” (p. 112), where “a mixed bag of people” (p. 112) operated in favour of either Biafra or the Nigerian government.

In Chapter 9, the role of the British in the Nigerian Civil War is aptly described. The author highlights the politics that characterised Britain’s ‘clandestine’ involvement in the war. In British political circles, the Biafrans were classed as “pariahs”, “a group of unprincipled rebels [who] were potentially damaging to British interests in Africa, Nigeria especially” (p. 114). As a result, it was necessary to prevent Ojukwu from achieving his dream of an independent Biafra, which was thought in British circles would have a spiral effect in different African countries that were experiencing or had experienced factional differences. Furthermore, Venter maintains “Whitehall’s link with Moscow in a bid to destroy Biafra did not help matters” (p. 114). He continues, “it was obviously Nigeria’s immense oil resources that gave the Nigerians, the British and Lagos’s newfound ally, Moscow. However, even when the British rejected requests by Nigeria to be militarily involved in the war, the former urged Gowon to seek what was termed a ‘peaceful’ solution. In the end, however, it was obvious that the supply of military hardware to Lagos by London greatly aided Gowon in the war. Venter avers “a word about the one weapon which arguably caused the most damage to Biafran forces in their defence of Eastern Nigeria was the FV601 Saladin, a six-wheeled armoured car [which] cut through Biafran defences like butter” (p. 120).

AJ Venter’s work can be appreciated better if read together with works such as Ogbudinkpa *op. cit.* and JC Korie (ed). *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the politics of memory*, (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2012). Venter provides an important contribution to the burgeoning historiography on the Nigeria-Biafra War. It is yet another eyewitness account by a freelance reporter during the war. Venter’s book is an interesting read for military and war studies students and scholars.

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