

Congo Mission

A Jack Sharp Novel

Scott McPherson



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Congo



Acknowledgements

My desire with this book is not just to entertain you, the reader. I have wanted to write about life on the mission field for years, but I didn't have a way to engage my audience. Having written "A Step Ahead of Death," I found that, in Dr. Jack Sharp, I had a character who fit into the role necessary for this story. In this book we travel back twenty years to see his life as a short-term missionary doctor.

There are many places, throughout the world, where missionaries work and dedicate their lives to serving God. Many are true career missionaries. They live overseas for three or four years at a time returning to connect with family members and friends briefly. Their work has often caused them to miss important occurrences in their families' lives.

Today with modern air travel, the internet, and instantaneous communications missionaries are more connected to home than ever, but they still exist in a culture far different from that in which they grew up. Some missionaries learn to adapt extremely well to a "foreign" culture and lifestyle. Others face crises of culture shock. Their children may also have difficulties fitting in when they return to the United States every few years.

The Congo is a beautiful, but harsh place to live and work. In the year I spent as a medical missionary with my family we experienced some amazing things. We learned a language and

many things about other cultures. We learned how to live with less and still enjoy life. We learned about culture shock and experienced it first-hand along with tropical diseases, lack of air conditioning, and running water. There are so many lessons that we learned it was not possible to write about them all. Some of these can be experienced even in short two or three week mission trips, but living in a place for a year or more is an even better teacher.

My thanks go out to Dr. Tim and Ann Wester and their family who were our partners in Zaire, now known mainly as Congo. This amazing family has continued a legacy of mission work. They have spent much of their lives in Africa. Life has changed there, but not in too many ways. It is still hard to find fresh water and kerosene lanterns light the night, especially in rural areas. Cell phones and the internet have made their way deep into the heart of Africa, but it is rare to see a paved road. Rebellions, starvation, and tropical diseases still abound and HIV has continued to be a terrible problem. Malaria claims lives, especially young children. Many missionaries have been suddenly uprooted because of a change in government with its attendant violence, only to see their property taken and precious belongings looted.

I cannot express in words how much I have come to love and appreciate the people of Congo. I made many friends, some of whom have gone to be with the Lord. In 2008, when I returned to the mission, our group was greeted with a mass gathering of singing, praising people. I met the doctors who now care for the many people who frequent the hospital. Dr. Zach helped me with names and communication about this book. Many thanks to him, the nurses, and staff at the mission hospital.

I thank my daughters Liz for her grammatical expertise and Becca for her graphics skills. I thank my other daughters, Christine, Deborah and Erin for their patience, interest, and encouragement. They have all had cross-cultural experiences which I know have had great impact upon their lives.

I greatly appreciate the expertise of Jeff Beckenbach for his graphic design, photographer, Stephanie Grimm, and promotional and media assistance from Kim Robb. I have many other friends to thank who have given me suggestions and encouragement in this project as well.

People, called to missions, serve the Lord by taking His word into some of the harshest places in the world. God has called many of them to do this and many will continue to devote their lives and energies to serving God in this way. This fictional story is not intended to dissuade anyone from serving God as a missionary. It is just that, a fictional story.

As I reflect on my own time in Congo, the most profound statement came from my good friend, Bama, a nurse who has worked many years as a surgeon. He told me that he was happy that I had come, but he cautioned me that the work would be hard so, “If you come back be sure it is because you love us.”

Prologue

Congo (Also known as Zaire)
Spring, 1988

Blood ran down his arm, mixing with the mud in the light rain, though the wound was not serious. Géle fell backwards trying to get out of the way of the tall, muscular man who had slapped him on the arm with the flat of his machete.

“Get out of the way!” The attacker’s voice burst through the moist air. In his language it took only two syllables to say it. He was known as “Jason,” though his true name was much longer. Tall and muscular, he bent low, not in humility, but to retrieve a prize. The basket dropped by Géle held bread and mangoes. Jason scooped up what he wanted and began tearing at the bread. “Thanks for sharing,” he spat, with his mouth already full. Walking on, he looked back sneering with a laugh lacking in mirth. He had taken, not because he was in need, but just because he knew he could do it.

Jason often made trips to the city, but liked coming back to his home base. The city was where he could find wealth and prey on the unsuspecting. Yet he moved through the forest like a cat, able to find his way even in the dark, needing no compass or light. His knowledge was intimate, handed down from generations past and from time spent roaming through the jungle. Jason was not far

from the village he now called his home. Unlike most people in the Congo, he chose not to live near the place where he was raised. This place was not too far from Kinshasa, the capitol city. In his country one needed money to gain power and through his powerful physical presence and intimidation, Jason had found that he possessed what was necessary to gain both money and power. He had managed to acquire enough money to arm a small band of loyal comrades and could easily gather many more if needed, although arming them all with modern weapons could still be a problem. They all had machetes or knives to use, if he called on them.

Jason had chosen his name because he fashioned himself to be a great leader like the Jason of Greek mythology, about whom he had read in school. He had been the only one in his family to have the privilege of attending school. This also made him one of the fewer than thirty percent of his countrymen who were able to read and write. The school, run by Christian missionaries, had opened up to him knowledge of a world not even imagined by most of his peers. It was a world he fully intended to enter one day, leaving his steamy green tropical forest home far behind. They had tried to teach him other things, about Jesus and God, and he had dutifully learned his lessons and repeated what they wanted to hear. Behind their backs, however, he had scoffed at them.

Jason also knew, unlike his fellows, that if he merely walked out of the forest into the cities he would enter a world dominated by rich white men. They could no longer legally make him a slave, but they would trap him in menial jobs and poverty. He saw this form of enslavement as no better than what his ancestors had suffered, little more than a century before. Jason's idea was to use his knowledge and his powerful physical presence to gain position, power and wealth. Only then could he move into the white man's world on his own terms.

Jason's house was the only one made of concrete blocks in his little village. A diesel generator supplied electricity to his home most evenings when he was present and sometimes during the day.

Derlemo, Jason's first wife, had not given him any children but he graciously allowed her to live near his house in her own hut. She occupied a round mud home whose thatched roof kept out the

rain but allowed vermin to stay close to their human victims. She remained in Jason's good graces as long as she supervised the cooking and the laundry.

His second and third wives, Gubina and Mawame, alternately stayed with him in the concrete home or in their own round mud houses with their children. Three of the children born to these women were boys, and Jason had kept his eyes on them since they were infants, to judge their strengths. When it was time for him to leave, Jason would take only one son and his mother. He would bring his little girls as well, but Jason knew that in the white man's world he would only be allowed to have one wife.

Jason turned on all the lights in his house. He liked to have everyone around see how brightly lit he could make his home. It showed off his prosperity and power. It also proved that he had no fear. Jason peered around with his dark, piercing eyes, looking for one of his wives. He rarely smiled and when he did it was with a snarl, baring his teeth. "Gubina! I want a beer," he called out turning on his television with the remote control. He fashioned himself to be like one of the Americans sitting in their easy chairs, glued to the TV. He had an appetite for all things American. Though he could receive no television signal, he enjoyed watching American movies and programs like "Miami Vice" on his VCR player. American TV shows had helped him to improve his English. Locals were in awe of his high-tech electronics. He sometimes let people come to his home to see his wonders, as if they were touring an American mansion. He lorded it over them, but they all knew that Jason was not one to be crossed. His wrath was terrible. It was better to do his bidding.

Gubina carried out his beer in silence, and he smiled at her. She was his second and favorite wife. Unfortunately, her two sons were the weaker boys. He sighed. "Thank you Gubina. See if Derlemo has anything for me to eat." He had smelled the cooking fire and knew that the women had been fixing his *fufu* and *pondu*. They also had goat and chicken freshly slaughtered, the meat now stored in his tropical freezer. This luxury, another hard-to-find item, had been won in a poker game with a fat Belgian trader.

Jason sat back in his soft chair and put up the footstool. He flicked the remote control and grinned with satisfaction.

CHAPTER 1

Warsaw, Indiana
April, 1988

“Thank you, sir,” Jack finished his conversation as he sat in the middle of the living room in his little apartment. He had begun packing things away and his possessions were piled all around him. Having started with books that he hoped to read, he wondered how much of it he would actually be able to take. Those boxes were already taped up, labeled, and weighed to assure that he would incur no extra charges. Several were close to the limit of seventy pounds per item. In his spiral notebook he started a new list: “Box 5.”

Jack put down the phone and announced, “I just got the word. I have all my support for a year!” The excitement was hard for him to contain. David Charbonnaugh and his wife Hannah smiled ruefully at him, their hands full of books. They had already spent a year trying to bring in their support and were back in this small, northern Indiana community where Jack had recently finished a course of seminary education. They had come to celebrate with him before heading out again across the region for more support raising. A married couple, they were going to the mission field for four years, so their support needs were considerably higher than Jack’s. They were also traveling to Europe where the cost of living was significantly greater than

where Jack was heading. Nevertheless, they had found it difficult to generate interest in their work. David would be teaching Bible classes, and they were going to live as dorm parents in a school for missionary kids. Jack, traveling as a single medical missionary, had raised nearly twenty thousand dollars in less than four months. David and Hannah needed more than that each year for the entire four years.

Jack, David, and Hannah were all about the same age, in their mid-twenties, and had been friends since the first day of classes at seminary. David had followed a different course, finishing a semester ahead of Jack.

Jack was tall, above six feet, and had sandy brown hair and hazel eyes. His lips seemed always to form a smile, even when he was just thinking. His easy-going manner attracted others. David was shorter and heavier than Jack and spoke with a slight lisp, and could make everyone laugh. Hannah, who loved her husband with all her heart, knew that their mission presentations just didn't induce excitement about their work. Her own voice carried better than her husband's despite her much smaller frame, but, as "the wife" she was expected in many churches to merely smile while her husband spoke.

Jack was suddenly aware that his pleasure at receiving support could be upsetting to this couple, whom he had grown to love dearly.

"Well everyone sees the need for medical missions," put in David. "You've got the flashy job. Healing the sick gets more attention than baby-sitting missionary kids."

Jack sat back on his heels, knees bent. "David, I'm sorry. I don't mean to gloat. Maybe you just have to approach them right. When you go to a church, tell them about the medical missionaries and the Bible translators and ask the people, 'Where would they be without a school to send their children?' Without folks like you a lot of missionaries wouldn't stay overseas. The missionaries need faithful, trustworthy people caring for their children when they are off in the bush. Remind them that it takes everyone, from the people in the field and the teachers and dorm parents at the mission schools, to the supporters at home partnering together to see God's work accomplished."

Lovingly putting her hand on David's arm, Hannah smiled sweetly at Jack. "It's okay, Jack. We knew it would be hard to raise our support." Her grin widened. "Maybe you should come speak at our next church visit."

David's response was more pensive. "I don't think our home office would be too thrilled since he's from another organization."

Jack winked conspiratorially. "I won't tell. Hey! How about some pizza?" That pronouncement brightened David up considerably, and Hannah clapped her hands. They all stood and left things as they were in Jack's apartment. They climbed into his Chevy Citation, Jack's favored acquisition, a bright red front-wheel-drive car. He liked the way it handled compared to the more common rear-wheel vehicles. First made in 1980, this "X" car came with a slightly underpowered four-cylinder engine and manual transmission. It was a newer model now about two years old, but with only two doors. Jack wasn't sure if he would be driving for the next year, but would miss his special car. Hannah, citing her shorter legs, offered to crawl into the back seat letting the men sit in front. Jack backed out of the drive, and they were off to the best pizza spot in town.

CHAPTER 2

Kinshasa, Congo
June, 1988

“Well, mate, it’ll take longer than you thought,” Randall said in the thickest Australian accent he could muster. He was actually from South Africa, but he had successfully kept that fact from being known for six years. His voice was going out over a short-wave radio transmitter.

“You said four days,” came the tinny reply. Even through the interference Randall could sense the agitation.

“Too right, mate. But that was before you told me where it was coming from and how much I’m taking. The security alone is costing a bundle.”

“You’ll get paid!” It was practically shouted. “Just get it there!”

Randall smiled. “No problem, mate, but it’ll take five days, at least.”

A long pause greeted his response. “Very well. Five days.” Then all he heard was static.

Randall Carnhan’s real name was Michael Adriaans, but he had left that behind in South Africa with many of his troubles. He didn’t like this current deal too well, but he laughed out loud. It was riskier than some, but he knew how to manage risk.

Nevertheless, he knew, too, that he couldn't enjoy the fruits of his labor from the grave. Still, the money was good and in the long run, he had decided that the payday made the risk worthwhile, a judgment he made nearly every day.

Randall moved from behind his desk where he had been musing about the deal. He unfolded his thin, six-foot-three frame from the cramped spot and felt at his belt for the holster that he knew was strapped to his side. It was a comforting feeling. He had never shot a man but in this country, if you didn't look strong, you got stepped on. "Duba!" he called out through his door.

"Yes, Boss?"

"Let's go to the compound and see how things are going."

"We have a new customer coming soon."

"Right. Soon means 'any day now.' If they come while we're gone, they'll wait."

Duba nodded. He didn't want to anger his employer or tell him his business. The man had said he had a good deal for Carnahan, but wanted to speak to him personally. Duba replied in as even a tone as possible, "Only, we missed him before."

Randall looked at Duba a little uncertainly. Then the light came on in his mind. "Oh, that customer. Why didn't you say so? I guess our little side trip can wait. What time did he say?"

Duba smiled. He felt a great sense of accomplishment whenever he was able to change Randall Carnahan's mind. "Sir, he will be here in an hour."

Randall thought a second. "I guess that gives me just enough time for a spot of food. If they arrive before I get back, come get me at The Rubies."

"Yes, Boss." Duba knew that it wasn't just the food that his employer was looking for at The Rubies. The woman who owned the small restaurant, Ruby, attracted the eyes of every man who saw her. Not surprising, Duba reasoned. Her long dark hair and fair skin reminded him of a pearl in the black shell of an oyster. The Rubies was too pricey for a man like him, but Carnahan had been spending a lot of time there lately, and Duba suspected that she was the main reason for the visits. He put his employer's sidelines out of his mind and went back inside to try to tidy up the shop a little before their important guests arrived.

CHAPTER 3

Over the Atlantic
June, 1988

Jack was tired and restless at the same time. He hadn't slept well in the roach-infested New York hotel where he had stayed the night before. The noise of the raucous band, and the constant yelling and banging on the walls had kept him awake almost all night. His medical background did nothing to reassure him. He was certain that he had been bitten by bed bugs or something. There had been no breakfast, and the taxi had taken its time arriving. When they finally pulled up in front of the international terminal, he gave in and asked for help. Maneuvering his eight boxes of supplies as well as his personal luggage was too much to do alone. He had hoped to ship his years' worth of supplies separately, but had been told by his mission organization that it wasn't a good idea. At best they would arrive weeks or months later and, at worst, he might never see the boxes again.

He was glad once all the boxes had been checked through, at least until he saw the charge for the extra cargo.

He had been assured that he would be able to check the boxes without significant cost so he hadn't planned on the expense. Jack didn't have a credit card, but had remembered to stick in his check book. It took some scolding from the airline manager, and a lengthy phone call to the bank back home to confirm that he had the funds to cover the check. Jack felt humiliated.

Finally sitting in his seat on the transatlantic leg of his journey, he could doze. This would have been ideal except for the fact that he had been placed just ahead of an exit row. In this row the seats did not recline so Jack tried, unsuccessfully, to sleep. His knees were cramped, and his feet were tucked up under his seat. "So much for me being adaptable," he said to himself.

The long flight had given him time to reflect on his life up to this point. It was almost as if this was a total transition of life "before" and life "after" Africa. During his last day in Indiana at the clinic where he had worked, he had walked around, looking at all that was available to him. He could get almost any laboratory test and do minor surgery with disposable instruments. He had antiseptics, anesthetics, antibiotics close at hand. He had learned some things about the mission station where he was headed and knew that it would be far different there. Could he adapt?

He had already spent six years in the military, having served in the Air Force. His three years in his Air Force family practice residency had given him a good taste of the military life and the last three years had helped him decide that he didn't want to make it a career. Yet he had not severed his ties completely remaining on inactive status with the Air Force Reserves.

Now, at twenty-six he believed he was as prepared as he could be for the work he was going to do.

The flight over the ocean was nearly complete, but he knew he still had a lengthy journey to come. Scheduled to land in about an hour at the international airport of

Dakar, Senegal, he felt anticipation for his first experience in a Francophone country. He was nervous because he had not learned even rudimentary French. His last two years had been spent in seminary, and he had had no time for additional studies. His current plan was to just follow the crowd and hope for the best.

Glancing out his window, he noted that it was now night time, though back home it would be the middle of the day. He could see no lights below, but the stars above were brilliant. The amazing beauty of the heavens helped him to remember his purpose in making the journey. He was here to do God's work. He was going to make a difference and be a servant. God would take care of him. He didn't expect to miraculously be capable of reading the French language, but he believed he would make it through. Surely there were other travelers on this flight who did not know the language.

Jack felt the plane begin to descend and the light for seatbelts flashed on accompanied by a pleasant bell tone. An accented female voice came over the intercom saying, "The captain has illuminated the seat belt sign. Please extinguish all smoking materials and fasten your safety belts. We will be landing shortly."