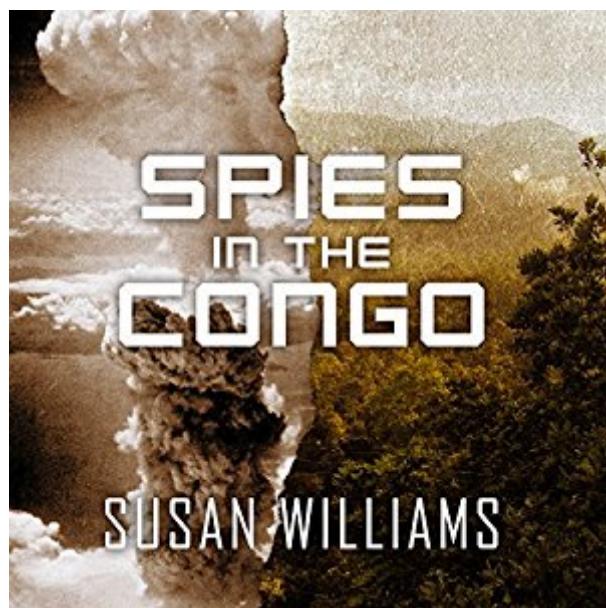


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Spies In The Congo: America's Atomic Mission In World War II



Synopsis

The Shinkolobwe Mine in the Belgian Congo was described by a 1943 Manhattan Project intelligence report as the "most important deposit of uranium yet discovered in the world". So long as the United States remained in control of this mine and its supply, it had a world monopoly on the primary material needed to build an atomic bomb. The uranium from this mine was used to build the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Given the possibility that the Germans were also working on an atomic bomb, it was a priority for the United States to prevent Congo's uranium from being smuggled to Germany. This task was given to the newly created Office of Strategic Services, later known as the CIA. Although much has been written about ALSOS, the secret intelligence mission created to investigate the German atomic project, so far nothing has been written about the intelligence mission at the source of uranium - the Belgian Congo. Spies in the Congo is based on a mass of newly released (and formerly top secret) archive material in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Belgium; personal testimonies; and a range of audiovisual materials, including a set of 8mm films taken by the lead spy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What a terrific story -- how the United States surreptitiously moved the world's greatest and richest uranium ore out of the Belgian Congo in the early years of World War II for eventual use in fabricating the atomic bomb. So much has been written about the Bomb, but relatively little about the elements that went into the making of that awful weapon and the people around the globe who, wittingly or unwittingly, had a hand in helping make it happen. But I learned

very little about uranium, bomb making, or the Congo in "Spies in the Congo/America's Atomic Mission in World War II." First and foremost, this is a book about spying. Lots of spying. And there are so many names in this book that the author or publisher wisely included a seven-page "cast of characters" at the beginning of this book to help the reader along. I found the abundant, and at times confusing, number of names and personalities introduced in this story to have compromised the narrative story line. It's hard to see the big picture when it's clouded with so many little stories and back-stories. Readers will have to contend with a lot of detail and minutia and tedium as they hack their way through the dense Congo underbrush and Belgian bureaucracy of "Spies in the Congo". I was also disturbed by the publishers' inclusion of 32 pages of historic photos that, while intensely interesting, are almost illegible because of over-inking on inferior paper stock. Many of them are dark, grainy, and blurred; I surmised that the inferior quality of some of the nearly 80-year-old photos may have been due to their age, or poor composition or reproduction in their originals. Until I turned the last page and discovered a contemporary 2015 photo was equally dark and blurry. Albert Einstein's famous 2-page letter to President Roosevelt in 1939 at the beginning of "Spies in the Congo" is almost unreadable, too. A simple Photoshop correction would have solved this need, and it's a pity they didn't choose to do it. All of these photo deficiencies in the book are not the fault of the author, but of Public Affairs/Perseus Books publishers; apparently they chose to produce this book on the cheap, and it compromises the text. A final constructive suggestion: sometimes books by British authors that slavishly maintain the British spellings of common words are navigable by American readers and sometimes they're not. While not a big issue with this book, there ought to be a simple editing software package that could scan manuscripts and self-correct draft galleys to eliminate an aspect that can sometimes prove tedious or off-putting to American readers' eyes, just as books by American authors might be translated into British English, for audiences there. It's just a courtesy that makes reading less of a challenge.

The author knows her subject. It is well written and tells a story that has not been told in as much detail. I appreciated the way the Americans and English always referred to diamonds so that no one would know they were talking about uranium. Even the 007 novel Diamond's are Forever, was actually based on MI-6 in Africa intercepting uranium smugglers but always referring to it as diamonds. If you are interested in the OSS and MI-6 operations during WWII then you will find this a book well worth skimming. If you are looking for a spy thriller then this is not for you. My personal pet peeve was that there was much detail and discussion of personalities that documented the day

to day activities but did not help explain anything. The next book for Ms. Williams would logically be to track down and interview those in Washington who were making the decisions and moving agents around the world to acquire all of the weapons grade uranium for the Manhattan project while preventing the Nazis from getting any without giving away how important it was.

I had no idea that the USA's uranium supply depended on intrigue in the Congo. It was was great read.

It's an unknown saga that's been told very well. Most of the book is about spying which is understandable. But I was disappointed to note the utter absence of local color - people, landscapes, food, anything. Initial parts of the book read very much like redactions from the protagonists' diaries or correspondence. The photos look cheap. But the book does great justice to the main topic of uranium and its importance to the Manhattan Project. It also shows a great deal of understanding of the governmental minds of those days. On the whole, a very readable book.

Excellent research on important period.

Good, but plainly written.

Interesting description of WW2 in far away Congo. I was hoping much more on the 50's and 60's.

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