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Andrew C.A. Jampoler, *Congo: The Miserable Expeditions and Dreadful Death of Lt. Emory Taunt, USN*. Annapolis: Naval Inst. Press, 2013. Pp. xii, 256. ISBN 978-1-61251-079-8.

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This latest book by prolific historian and retired naval aviator Andrew Jampoler is hard to categorize. Rather than military history per se, it is an engaging biographically centered US maritime/diplomatic history chock full of eclectic tangential information.

In his first seven chapters, the author describes the life and career of Emory Taunt, from his service as a US Navy lieutenant through his court-martial in 1887 to his time as US consul and commercial agent at Boma in the Congo Free State (1888-91). The first two chapters concern the nineteenth-century exploration of Africa generally and the history of US naval involvement on the continent's Atlantic coast specifically. Chapter 3 covers the emergence of Belgian King Leopold II's murderous regime in the Congo Free State through the involvement of the American observers at German chancellor Otto von Bismarck's *Kongokonferenz* of 1884-85 and the first visit of US agents to the Congo basin. Chapters 4-7 concentrate on Emory Taunt's personal story within a rich cast of characters (including Henry Morton Stanley) and competing interests in the US Navy and the Congo Free State. I would have liked more detail on Taunt's service as consul and the nature of central African exploration and commerce vis-à-vis the United States. By contrast, the too abundant background and contextual information can be disorienting when it extends far beyond Taunt's own story in time and space.

Unfortunately, once Taunt dies his "dreadful death" at a young age in 1891, Jampoler must tell most of the Congo Free State story (1891-1908) without his leading protagonist, and the book loses focus as a result. In his final chapters (8 and 9), he dredges up George Washington Williams, Joseph Conrad, Mark Twain, the Congo Reform Association, and other principals in the struggle to expose Leopold's brutal management of the Congo. All of this lacks pertinence to Taunt's story and Jampoler is reduced to outright conjecture: "It's possible, but confirmed nowhere, that late that year [1890] Joseph Conrad met Emory Taunt in the Congo, while Taunt was in his last few months as the U.S. commercial agent in the Congo Free State (and his last alive) and Conrad was back on the lower river from Stanley Falls" (175). This is tantalizing but improbable and in any case, as Jampoler admits, unsubstantiated.

In his interesting final chapter, "Epilogue," Jampoler reports on his own visit to significant places in the Congo's (and Taunt's) history in 2011, using the style of a lively travelogue. He provides his own photographs of places and memorials relevant to his cast of characters (particularly Stanley), and in the process he makes various references to Congolese history since the era of Taunt and his contemporaries. On a discordant note, however, Jampoler makes only two passing mentions of Joseph-Desiré Mobutu (Mobutu Sese Seko) in connection with the post-Leopold legacy, without any comment on the involvement of the United States, Belgium, and France during his long and vicious rule. Given his commentary on other aspects of present-day Congo, the author's reticence here is odd.

Jampoler's penchant for inessential detail is most obtrusive in the last few chapters of the book. For example, he discusses the obituary for Taunt's widow (d. 1934). This is well and good. But in so doing, he devotes a full paragraph to the life of Horace Greeley, solely because the obituarist mistakenly named him instead of Adolphus Washington Greeley as the subject of an Arctic relief expedition that involved Emory Taunt early in his life. Such attention to the irrelevant and inconsequential crops up too often, however interesting such details may be.

*Congo* also suffers badly from poor proofreading by the author or his copy-editor. Far too many sentences are run-ons, fragments, or a full paragraph in length. At best, these are distractions; at worst, they are serious impediments to grasping the author's meaning. Worse yet for scholars is the deficiency of source

citations in the hit-or-miss endnotes. Too often, a researcher wishing to consult the source of a quotation will have to infer it from the context or the “Selected Bibliography” at the end of the book. Conversely, the maps and images are well chosen and attractively reproduced.

Despite issues with production values in terms of the text, Jampoler’s book is a valuable investigation of a little-known facet of the Congo tale, namely, American involvement there during the Free State period. In addition, the presentation of Emory Taunt’s tale is entertaining and engrossing. For readers with little prior knowledge of the subject and a tolerance for meandering, stochastic narrative, *Congo* has much to offer. Specialists, however, will find it more frustrating than rewarding to consult.