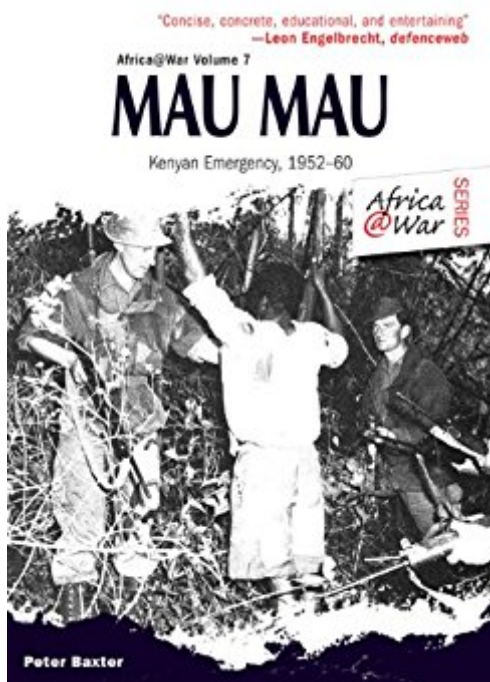


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Mau Mau: The Kenyan Emergency 1952-60 (Africa@war)



Synopsis

The Second World War forever altered the complexion of the British Empire. From Cyprus to Malaya, from Borneo to Suez, the dominoes began to fall within a decade of peace in Europe. Africa in the late 1940s and 1950s was energized by the grant of independence to India, and the emergence of a credible indigenous intellectual and political caste that was poised to inherit control from the waning European imperial powers. The British on the whole managed to disengage from Africa with a minimum of ill feeling and violence, conceding power in the Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone under an orderly constitutional process, and engaging only in the suppression of civil disturbances in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia as the practicalities of a political hand over were negotiated. In Kenya, however, matters were different. A vociferous local settler lobby had accrued significant economic and political authority under a local legislature, coupled with the fact that much familial pressure could be brought to bear in Whitehall by British settlers of wealth and influence, most of whom were utterly irreconciled to the notion of any kind of political hand over. Mau Mau was less than a liberation movement, but much more than a mere civil disturbance. Its historic importance is based primarily on the fact that the Mau Mau campaign was one of the first violent confrontations in sub-Saharan Africa to take place over the question of the self-determination of the masses. It also epitomized the quandary suffered by the white settler communities of Africa who had been promised utopia in an earlier century, only to be confronted in a postwar world by the completely unexpected reality of black political aspiration. This book journeys through the birth of British East Africa as a settled territory of the Empire, and the inevitable politics of confrontation that emerged from the unequal distribution of resources and power. It covers the emergence and growth of Mau Mau, and the strategies applied by the British to confront and nullify what was in reality a tactically inexperienced, but nonetheless powerfully symbolic black expression of political violence. That Mau Mau set the tone for Kenyan independence somewhat blurred the clean line of victory and defeat. The revolt was suppressed and peace restored, but events in the colony were nevertheless swept along by the greater movement of Africa toward independences, resulting in the eventual establishment of majority rule in Kenya in 1964. Peter Baxter is an author, amateur historian and African field, mountain and heritage travel guide. Born in Kenya and educated in Zimbabwe, he has lived and travelled over much of southern and central Africa. He has guided in all the major mountain ranges south of the equator, helping develop the concept of sustainable travel, and the touring of battlefield and heritage sites in East Africa. Peter lives in Oregon, USA, working on the marketing of African heritage travel as well as a variety of book projects. His interests include British Imperial history in Africa and the East Africa campaign of the First World War in particular. His first

book was Rhodesia: Last Outpost of the British Empire; he has written several books in the Africa@War series, including France in Centrafrique, Selous Scouts, Mau Mau and SAAF's Border War.

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Customer Reviews

Review - Mau Mau" The Kenyan Emergency by Peter Baxter" "Mau Mau: The Kenyan Emergency" by Peter Baxter is a very clean, very nice and respectable report on the official actions of the British governmental officials during the years 1950 - 1960. The detail of the official actions of the government are well laid out. The names and personalities of the Kenyan governors and others in power are nicely laid out. Peter Baxter was born in Kenya, now lives in the US, and writes extensively of African history, especially the wars of liberation 1950 - 1960. But, reading this at the same time as reading "Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya" by Caroline Elkins, a Harvard Graduate Student, the difference in the sides of the story told is amazing. Baxter briefly mentions brutality and mental illness, and how the majority of the deaths were in his account black on black. Baxter mentions the pipeline of detainees and forced labor but does not delve into the horrors of these camps like Elkins does. Baxter makes brief reference to the racism

and immorality of the white settlers. Elkins remarks on a Nairobi social club frequently visited by the settlers in which on entrance the members were obliged by their own rules to switch partners and rooms were provided for "entertainment." The screenings of all blacks in Nairobi for Mau Mau sympathy and aid, Operation Anvil, is mentioned in both books. Baxter merely states the men and many women were taken to detainee camps outside the city. Elkins talks of beatings, torture, castration, starvation, exposure to elements and other mistreatment of the blacks taken off the street on the merest whiff of evidence, suspicion, or retaliation that occurred in those detention camps. I also have read Peter Hewitt's personal memoirs "Kenya Cowboy" of his time in the Kenyan Police Force during this same period. Hewitt's account is a retelling of his personal experiences and not of the other problems about in Kenyan at that time. But Baxter quotes Hewitt at length in support of his outlining of the official government actions. Hewitt's account also testifies to the physical state of the Mau Mau after 1955, which was horrible. Hewitt's account is very personal as to his actions and experiences. Hewitt entered Kenya a few short months after the Ruck Massacre, and about the same time as the Lari Massacre. Hewitt does not go into the pipeline or other aspects of the Emergency. The legends in history classes that adhere to the Mau Mau "emergency" are of vague "horrible deeds" done by 1) the Mau Mau, 2) the British officials and army and 3) the loyalists Kikuyu. While Elkins writes with all the indignation of a person who finds her heroes have clay feet, Baxter writes to justify and minimize the episodes of the actual history. I suspect the truth is somewhere in the middle. Both Baxter and Elkins mention the plethora of books on the wars of African Liberation and how they vary in content. Thus one has to consider the violence and virulence of the period and how both sides and the later researchers are all still pushing their points of view. Baxter's book is a good outline of the official actions of the British. Elkins book is researched among the Kikuyu people and well reflects their recollections and oral traditions. Aside from the similarity of the names of people and places and dates, one would not think one was reading of the same people, place and period.

Interesting historical data on this "uprising", and the means used to quell the problem.

Good book on a subject that I have been interested in for years.

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This is another solid effort by Peter Baxter in this Africa @ War series. It provides the reader with a

well written summary of the uprising.

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