

Mad Mike's heirs in high demand

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Africa

Jane Flanagan Cape Town

Mercenaries are likely to be thin on the ground at the funeral of "Mad Mike" Hoare, the pioneering soldier of fortune in Africa who died this week. Global demand for their services has never been greater.

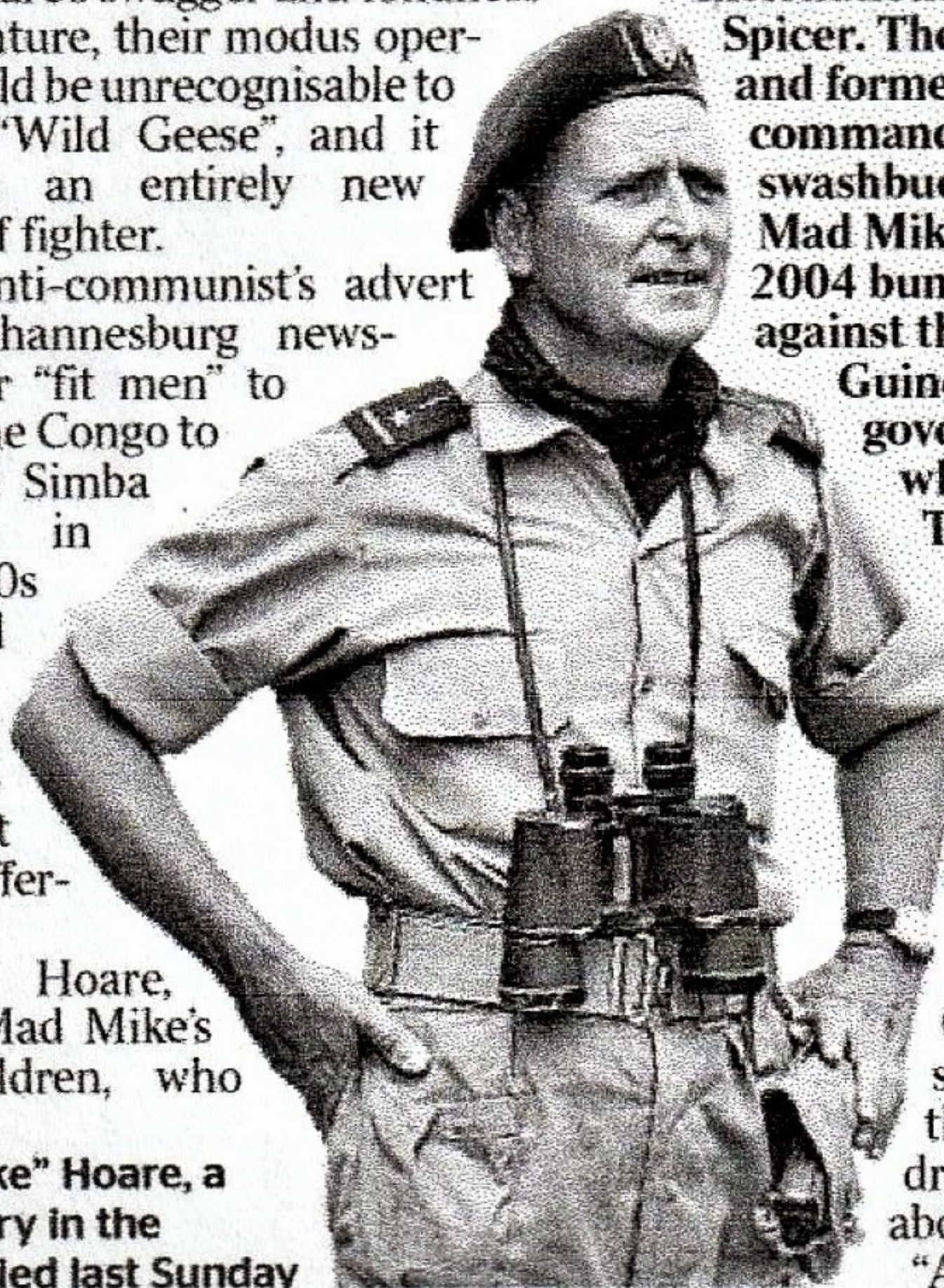
A surge in deployments across the Middle East and Africa has meant that hired guns often outgun rebels and occasionally government forces. The trail blazed through Africa's trouble-spots by Hoare, who lived to be 100, is being trodden by battle-hardened strategists for whom private armies are big business and have a global scope.

Though many of today's mercenaries share Hoare's swagger and fondness for adventure, their modus operandi would be unrecognisable to Hoare's "Wild Geese", and it demands an entirely new species of fighter.

The anti-communist's advert in a Johannesburg newspaper for "fit men" to take to the Congo to fight the Simba rebellion in the 1960s promised good money for "employment with a difference".

Chris Hoare, one of Mad Mike's five children, who

"Mad Mike" Hoare, a mercenary in the Congo, died last Sunday



Behind the story

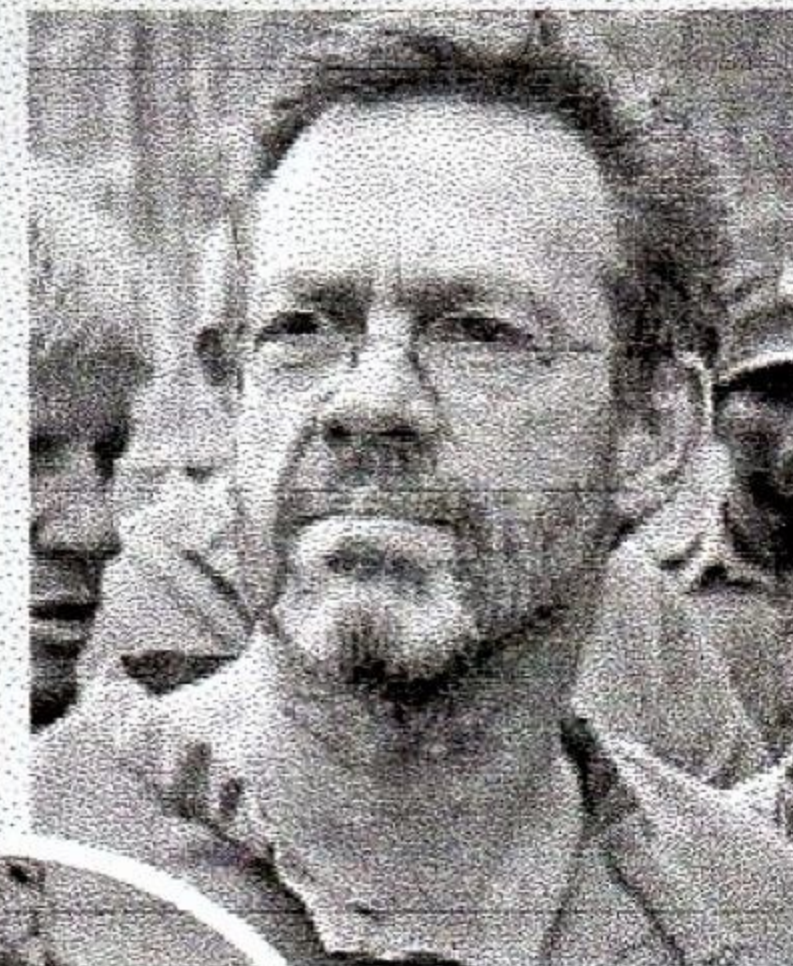
Mad Mike Hoare is gone, but the next generation (average age 63) is vying to fill his boots (Jane Flanagan writes).

SIMON MANN, 67
Built a fortune from Executive Outcomes, the first public mercenary outfit in 1993, which fought across Africa. Set up an offshoot, Sandline International, with Tim Spicer. The Old Etonian and former SAS commander is a swashbuckler in the Mad Mike mould. His 2004 bungled coup against the Equatorial Guinean government, which Sir Mark Thatcher helped to finance, was compared to Hoare's attempted

Seychelles putsch. Mann spent five years in some of Africa's most notorious jails.

EEBEN BARLOW, 63
A former commander in the South African Defence Force who is still active in Africa, most recently training a Nigerian force to tackle Boko Haram. A co-founder of Executive Outcomes, which closed in 1998, he chairs a group that deploys ageing comrades who served with him in South Africa's border wars.

JOHN GARTNER, 68
Enlisted in the Australian army at 19 and was selected for the SAS. Moved to Africa, where he served with the special forces in Rhodesia. He



Eben Barlow, left, and Simon Mann



served in the South African army in the border wars and later in Sri Lanka against the Tamil Tigers. He runs the private security firm OAM, which operates in Africa and parts of Asia. He remains committed to "lead from the front".

TIM SPICER, 67
A former British Army lieutenant-colonel who

served in the Falklands and Northern Ireland. Founded Sandline International and was caught up in scandals in Papua New Guinea. His venture Aegis was involved in shady weapons sales in the Sierra Leone civil war, which led to the "Arms to Africa" scandal. Aegis won a \$300 million contract from the US government to provide security support in Iraq.

ERIK PRINCE, 50
A former US navy Seal who founded Blackwater, which was awarded US government contracts worth \$2 billion between 1997 and 2010. Its fighters shot dead 17 Iraqi civilians after opening fire in a Baghdad square. He sold the company in 2010 and later donated \$250,000 to Donald Trump's election campaign. His sister, Betsy DeVos, is the US education secretary.

would visit his father's Congolese base in the school holidays, recalled that the recruitment drive drew "bums, layabouts and no-hopers". "Anyone decent already

had a job," he said. "After a disastrous raid, he soon realised that he would have to train them up."

The 300-strong force eventually became capable enough for Hoare to send warnings about raids to give targets the chance to escape. "Now, it's a different

type of work," his son said. Certainly Hoare's "have rifle, will travel" approach would not cut the mustard in a modern setting, according to Sean McFate, an American paratrooper who became a mercenary then an author.

"The modern enemy has access to

the same weapons and technology as you," he said. "Mercenaries are being deployed to fight jihadist groups with suicidal tendencies like Boko Haram."

For fighters with special forces training, the rewards — £10,000 a month, not to mention the adrenaline — often prevent them from moving on. Customers appear everywhere, from shipping lines facing pirates to oligarchs needing bodyguards and nations wanting to wage proxy wars.

"Plausible deniability is another reason why the industry is flourishing. When a job is too politically risky, contractors can be disavowed if the mission fails," Mr McFate added.

The rise of the Wagner Group is a case in point. Owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a confidant of President Putin, Wagner has become the face of the Kremlin's ambitions in Africa and its fighters have propped up various fragile governments.

The group is known for putting in the cheapest bids for jobs and paying its young personnel poorly. Reports suggest that the rates are a false economy: it has had significant losses in Libya and Mozambique. Still, there will be no shortage of work, Mr McFate said.

"The market for force is growing at an alarming rate. As the market expands, security will become a good investment and fuel the marketplace in a self-feeding loop," he added.

Which is just as well, since Mad Mike's successors — who have made their own names and fortunes and are mostly of retirement age — show no signs of slowing down.

Their mentor said it was never the money or ideology that kept him in the game. "The mystique is unexplainable — the mystique about soldiering with strong men," he said.