

# Force Publique

You are a complicated group. You are a mixture of European officers and everyday soldiers from numerous communities throughout sub-Saharan African. The majority of you are African. You started out working for Henry Morton Stanley as mercenaries (soldiers for hire) in 1879. In 1888, Leopold formally organized you as the Force Publique, an army for his new state. Three quarters of Force Publique “volunteers” died before delivery. Yet over time your numbers swelled to 19,000 officers and consumed half of the state budget. You do most of the killing from the 1890-1910 period. You killed people who were being exploited. You save your own life by committing crimes like murder and torture. You burned villages to the ground. You also attacked freedom fighters who fought back. These rebels represented more than a dozen ethnic groups, including the Yaka, Chokwe, Boa, and Budja. You could have turned on your colonial officers and sided with the rebels. But you did not.