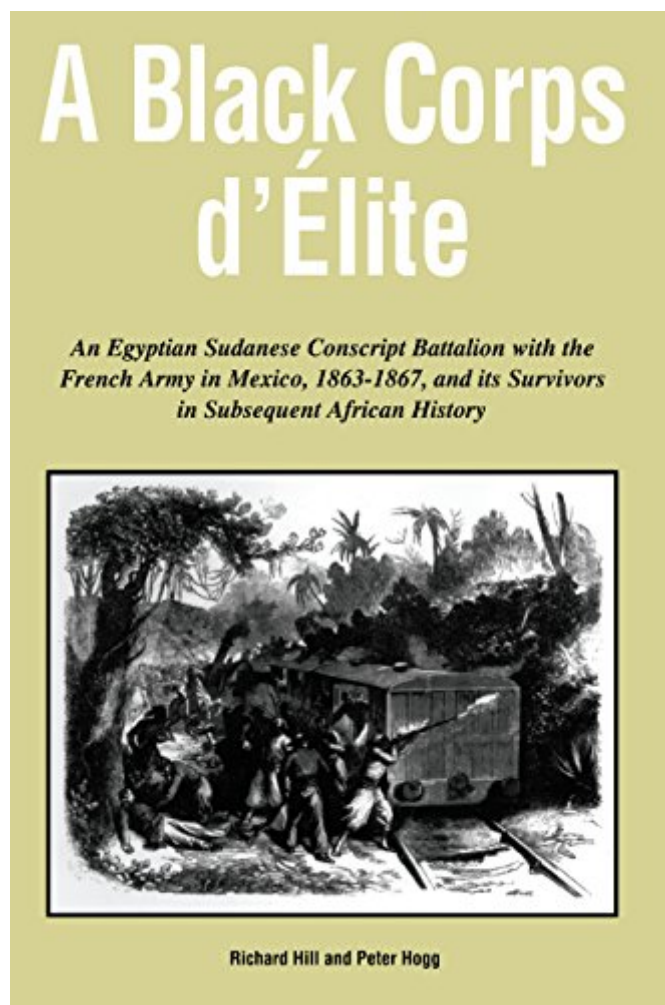


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A Black Corps D'Elite: An Egyptian Sudanese Conscript Battalion With The French Army In Mexico, 1863-1867, And Its Survivors In Subsequent African History





Synopsis

For several years, the armies of Napoleon III deployed some 450 Muslim Sudanese slave soldiers in Veracruz, the port of Mexico City. As in the other case of Western hemisphere military slavery (the West India Regiments, a British unit in existence 1795-1815), the Sudanese were imported from Africa in the hopes that they would better survive the tropical diseases that so terribly afflicted European soldiers. In both cases, the Africans did indeed fulfill these expectations. The mixture of cultures embodied by this event has piqued the interest of several historians, so it is by no means unknown. Hill and Hogg provide a particularly thorough account of this exotic interlude, explaining its background, looking in detail at the battle record in Mexico, and figuring out who exactly made up the battalion. Much in their account is odd and interesting, for example, the Sudanese superiority to Austrian troops and their festive nine-day spree in Paris on the emperor's tab. The authors also assess the episode's longer-term impact on the Sudan, showing that the veterans of Mexico, having learnt much from their extended exposure to French military practices, rose quickly in the ranks, then taught these methods to others.

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Customer Reviews

A strange moment in US, French, Mexican and Egyptian/Sudanese history. I was totally blown away

by the historical even this book depicted. Very academic, though... the author could have spiced it up a bit, told it in a bit more of a narrative flow (especially given the subject matter).

Very good use of the Arabic and French sources. I would have liked more details about the reception in Paris after the return from Mexico. Also intriguing: any follow-up on Egyptian deserters remaining in Mexico? As the author of a book published in 1979 (From Adversaries to Comrades in Arms, West African Troops in the French Army) I fully appreciate the research work. Charles J. Balesi, Ph.D. Un. of Illinois, 1976

Two great experts on the history of the Sudan coordinated a fine study of the only time a force of regular African troops were deployed to the New World. Taking place during the French intervention in Mexico, this is the story of a battalion of Sudanese infantry who fought against Juarez and his Mexican patriots. Hill and Hogg start off with a look at the Sudan during the first half of the 19th century. Then part of an Egyptian empire, they explain why these soldiers would be sent to Mexico, and how this impacted on Egypt's foreign relations. The work covers a wide range of topics, ranging from recruitment, training, deployment, and combat. Also nice is a look at how the survivors played important roles in the failing Egyptian empire of the 1870s-80s. American, French, Egyptian, and Sudanese sources are employed. An interesting work that will probably never be surpassed. Sadly, it was Richard Hill's last book.

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