

Jonathan Laverick, *Kalahari Killings*

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Kalahari Killings is a nonfiction historical book by Jonathan Laverick published by the United Kingdom (UK) based publisher, The History Press. Laverick lives in Botswana and has done for many years. He is currently a teacher at Maruapula Secondary School in Gaborone. The book is about the killing of two British pilots, Gordon Edwards and Walter Adamson, who were training to become pilots in military camps in Zimbabwe (then called Southern Rhodesia) during the Second World War. On a routine exercise in October 1943, they got off track, ran out of fuel, and landed in the bush some distance away from Nata in the then Bechuanaland. They leave a note explaining that the plane needs oil and fuel, and that they are going to walk to get help. They were never seen again.

For two months it appeared as if the two young men had disappeared into thin air –but they had not. They had allegedly been murdered by a group of San (Basarwa) people, who initially appeared as if they were going to help the two men, but then changed their minds when they feared the Britons would turn them in for hunting a giraffe. This book is about the events leading up to the murder and the trial that took place in Lobatse in 1944.

There are many things that I adore about this book. In the first section of the book, Laverick alternates chapters between events in the UK and what is happening in Botswana. In a quick and efficient manner, he gives a Botswana history lesson to the many readers who may have had little to no contact with our beautiful country. He does it skilfully and with great detail and in a surprisingly interesting way, no easy job. This is the work of a writer with exceptional talent.

Meanwhile in the UK chapters, we are following our future victim, Gordon, as he makes his way toward his dream of becoming a pilot in the Royal Air Force (RAF). He works first as an aeroplane mechanic for most of the war, until finally managing to pass his health test that allows him to attend pilot school in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe), a school perfectly placed to be out of the enemy's eye. He was on one of his final test flights, just about to finally achieve his dream, when the plane goes down.

I am a sucker for anyone with passion and it is clear that Laverick has huge passion for planes. He knows them inside out and for anyone who is interested in planes too, I would suggest you read this book. But for folks like me, with a love of history and an interest in murder stories of all kinds, this book is a real treat, especially since it takes place in Botswana.

The trial sections in the book are absolutely fascinating. Besides the gruesome details that emerge, there are interesting cultural aspects that come up. I found the barriers of trying to force one language into another especially interesting. The court officials had to take a San language, translate it to Setswana, and then to English; the questions being translated again in the other direction. The restrictions and loss of meaning caused by this can be clearly understood. You also see the ways in which language creates our world, defines it, and because of that either limits it or expands it.

A writer with less ambition would have stopped after the verdict of the trial, but Laverick is completely engrossed in his own tale just as I was. He finishes every storyline, much to my satisfaction as a reader. We learn what happened to the flight schools in Zimbabwe, what happened to Gordon's mother and fiancé, what happened to Twai Twai Molele, the main suspect in the murders.

For anyone interested in law, history, Botswana, airplanes, the Second World War, or just a good story told well, this is the book for you. I highly recommend it; it is one of the best books I have read this year.

Reviewed by Lauri Kubuitsile

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