

AK-47: The little weapon that could

By CARL HARTMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Call it an automatic rifle. Call it a submachine gun. Call it "the \$10 weapon of mass destruction" or "the African credit card."

Or, call it what most people do: the AK-47.

Although many names have been applied to the weapon profiled in Larry Kahaner's book, "AK-47: The Weapon That Changed the Face of War," none quite describes it.

It's a rugged, portable killing machine that was designed in Russia 60 years ago and can fire 600 bullets a minute.

With minimum instruction, a child can handle and maintain one, which is often the case in remote areas where outlaw military leaders recruit or force preteen boys and girls into their ranks.

"Unlike the scourge of land mines in the world, the 80 (million) to 100 million AKs manufactured and distributed since the rifle's invention in 1947 pose a more dangerous threat because they can be easily transported, repaired and used by roving bands of assailants," Kahaner wrote.

"The AK has made possible coups in Africa, terrorist raids in the Middle East and bank robberies in Los Angeles."

The AK's distinctive profile, with its banana-shaped magazine curving down and forward next to the trigger, has become a symbol of resistance to authority.

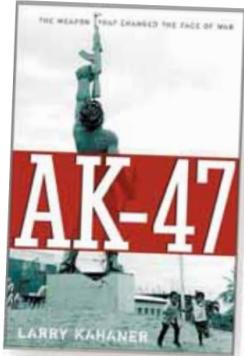
Mozambique put an AK on its flag after it won independence from Portugal. It's also on the banner of the Muslim militia Hezbollah in Lebanon, and in the hands of a Sandinista fighter in a statue erected in Managua, Nicaragua's capital.

Though Russia no longer makes the AK, other countries, including China, do. Unlike the curbs on land mines, efforts to limit the trade of AKs have made little progress.

Mikhail Kalashnikov, tank driver and self-taught engineer, designed the AK after mulling the Soviet army's needs as he lay wounded in a hospital toward the end of World War II.

The "K" in "AK" represents his name while the "A" is for the Russian word for "automatic." The Soviet army adopted it in 1947, hence the number.

Kalashnikov said, sometimes, "I wished I invented a lawnmower."



"AK-47: The Weapon That Changed the Face of War" by Larry Kahaner

Tale recounts triumphs, tragedies on mountain

New book details 'greatest generation' of Everest climbers

By JERRY HARKAVY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAPE ELIZABETH, Maine

Clint Willis dreamed of pursuing the kind of extreme mountaineering pioneered by a rag-tag band of climbers, most of them British, who brought their sport to a new level in the three decades following the conquest of Mount Everest.

To help reconcile those unfulfilled yearnings, he detailed the astonishing accomplishments and heart-rending losses of Chris Bonington and his circle of climbers whose high-altitude expeditions in the Alps and the Himalayas have become the stuff of legends.

Willis' new book, "The Boys of Everest: Chris Bonington and the Tragedy of Climbing's Greatest Generation," whisks armchair adventurers onto such climbing challenges as the Eiger in Switzerland, Mount Annapurna in Nepal, the K2 in Pakistan and on the Nepal-Tibet border, Everest, where climbers battling treacherous rock faces and unforgiving weather met glory and doom.

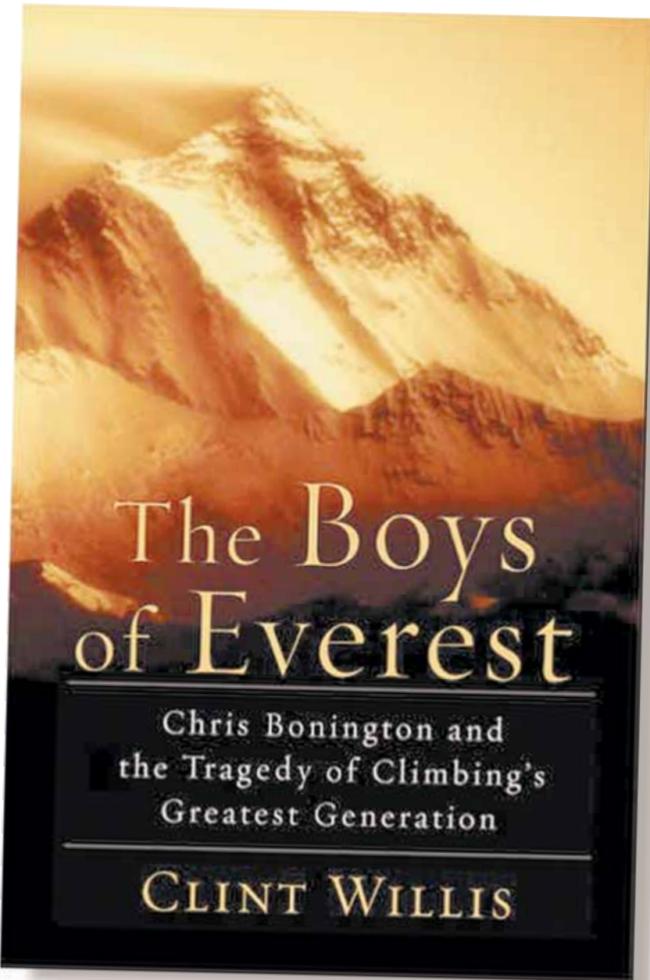
Bonington survived those expeditions and went on to win a knighthood in 1996. But roughly half the climbers associated with him perished over the years as they stretched themselves to their limits and beyond.

"Part of the reason I wrote this book was to work through my own sense of not having taken certain chances, done certain things, that I was on one level drawn to do," said Willis, a longtime rock climber. "At the same time, these guys paid such a high price for their climbing that there's some wisdom in finding alternative ways to find meaning in your life."

After Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers to successfully reach Everest's summit in 1953, some people were left wondering whether there was anything for mountaineers to achieve after the planet's tallest peak had been conquered.

Bonington and the dozen or so climbers who became known as Bonington's Boys answered that question by gradually jettisoning the siege-like tactics of Hillary's generation, an Oxbridge-educated group that employed armies of porters and used tons of equipment and thousands of feet of fixed rope.

The new breed of climbers, drawn largely from the working class, looked for newer, more difficult routes that had



"The Boys of Everest: Chris Bonington and the Tragedy of Climbing's Greatest Generation" by Clint Willis

never been scaled or attempted. Climbers ventured out in small teams that could travel lighter and faster, sometimes without supplemental oxygen.

As they knocked off such first-ever achievements as a direct route up the Eiger's North Face, Annapurna's South Face and the Southwest Face of Everest, Bonington and his companions became household names in Britain, gaining the kind of status afforded rock stars.

It was a different story in the United States, where Bonington remained largely unknown to the general public, his achievements followed only by climbers and others caught up in the sport.

Willis, however, was captivated early on. The 49-year-old New Orleans native acquired his lifelong love of rock climbing at age 10 at summer camp in the mountains of North Carolina. By

the time he was 15, he had immersed himself in Bonington's writings and dreamed of following a similar path.

Instead, Willis pursued a more conventional career. He went on to college and moved to New York, developing his writing skills with a 10-year stint on the staff of Money magazine. Married, with two children, he settled in Maine in 1993, seeking a change in lifestyle and launching a writing business.

His passion for climbing resurfaced 15 years ago, and he now climbs regularly in New Hampshire's White Mountains and Wyoming's Tetons in the summer.

Bonington said in an e-mail that the book covers a time "when we were pushing the barriers though the cost in human life was high, but in a way this was something we all accepted. We ... understood the risks but were prepared to take them."

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