

# Sierra Leone Woodcarvers



During the past year I was deployed to Sierra Leone with the Canadian Forces to assist in stopping the flow of 'Blood' Diamonds and advise the Sierra Leone Army. . This country is located on the Western cost of Africa and has been at war for the past 10 years. During my time off I was able to observe some of the woodcarvers of Sierra Leone. If you watched the news last January, you would have seen the battle for Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. What has transpired there in the past 10 years has been devastating to its economy and among the people, there isn't a family that hasn't lost a loved one due to the war. But one thing that wars can never destroy is a woodcarver's drive to create something fabulous out of a single log or trunk of a tree. When I could managed it, I would drive down to the local beach area to a woodcarver's guild run by the Master Carver named Tomba. He is one of the few entrepreneurs of Sierra Leone still in operation and he has 10 woodcarvers working for him. Tomba is considered the Master Carver in his field and has created remarkable pieces of work.

This is a Photo of Tomba standing beside some of the basic carvings displayed in his shop in Freetown Sierra Leone. File( africa09)



One of Tombas wood carvers in action file(africa07)

But the most remarkable thing is the tool's they use. We, as first world carvers, have the money and ability to have some of the best and most expensive tools on the market. But as a Master Carver in an Africa nation, you don't have the ability or the money to purchase such tools that we take for granted. But what they do use is handmade or simple garden tools sharpened to a razor's edge by hand on a local stone from the shore. We would use such tools if we needed to, but would you place the stump of mahogany between your legs and hack at it with one hand? I've tried this but the end result was 18



stitches and not a carving!  
This is a pitcher of the local  
carving hut & lumberyard  
File (africa08)

As you can see, the works of art that they create is incredible, and all with garden tools! To top it all off, the types of wood they use is astonishing. On a good day, and with one of my sharpest tools and a carving bench, I would consider carving Ironwood or African Rosewood, but they use such wood day to day. Some of the pieces of wood or tree trunks that arrive in the carving yard are unidentifiable and they simply have no idea what kind of wood it is nor do they care. All they want to do is create carvings. One weekend I ventured down to see Tomba to spend a couple hours of carving. I decided to give them a copy of an old Wood Carving Illustrated magazine that contained a design and instructions of how to carve a North American rabbit. I thought nothing of it and enjoyed an afternoon of carving. The following week I ventured down to see Tomba again. What do you think was standing in the center of his compound? A small white rabbit, along with every other picture in the magazine, was now duplicated and sitting in the middle of his compound! My first question to Tomba was why a rabbit? His answer was "It's in the book, the boys see it then they need to carve it"



This deer was carved from Iron wood File (Africa03)



standing Vulture clinging to a branch with his nest below being This attacked by a snake was carved from one solid block of IronWood it stands 4.5 ft tall File (africa01)



Local drummer was carver from African Rose Wood it stands 4 ft tall



Sword fish carved from Ironwood it stands 5 ft tall  
(africa02)

So during the next few months I spent as much time as possible visiting Tomba between patrols. And it's something I will never forget- the carvers in Sierra Leone in the middle of a civil war producing such incredible works of art.



During a patrol in Sierra Leone  
By: Gary A Crosby