

# **Kinetic Air Power in Robust Peacekeeping: the UN Operation in the Congo 1960-64**



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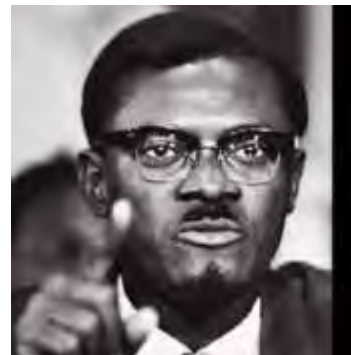
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# Congo 1960

- Independence from Belgium (June 30)
  - Size of Western Europe
  - Larger decolonization process
- Mutiny (July 5)
  - Belgian (re)deployment
- Secession of Katanga (July 11)
- Superpower proxy battles
  - Lumumba and Tshombe



# UN Intervenes (14 July 1960)



Security Council Resolution 143  
(17 July 1960)

Unstated Goals:

- UN *in*, superpowers *out*
- boost Central government *up*,  
push Katangan secession *down*



# Opération des Nations unies au Congo (ONUC)

- Largest and most complex UN op. in Cold War
  - 20,000 troops
  - 234 fatalities
- Forerunner of multidimensional ops
  - Help restore law & order (nation-building)
  - Secure withdrawal of Belgian forces
  - Prevent secession
- Increasingly robust over time
  - Air power: transport, medical
  - Later: kinetic/combat

# US Airlift

50 C-124 transported  
9,000 UN troops in two  
weeks



# Staging Area: Pisa, Italy



Canadian "North Star" aircraft in ONUC service

# Air Supply



Food packages unloaded, Luluabourg airport, 10 August 1960





Canadian Yukon Aircraft,  
Leopoldville, 23 July 1962,  
with Congolese National  
Army Officers

Replaced Canada's North  
Stars on cargo/troop runs  
from Pisa

UN Photo 76016



# Humanitarian/Medical Evacuation



UN Photo 189903

# Transport of Diplomats & UN Negotiators



USG Ralph Bunche with Katangan Interior Minister, 5 August 1960

# Katangan threat

- Backed by Belgian *Union Minière*
- Congolese government demands force
  - Soviet military aid (Illyshin-14)
- Lumumba assassinated 17 January 1961
- Res. 161: “all appropriate measures” to prevent civil war, “force, if necessary, in the last resort”

# Katangan aircraft (1961)

## Fouga Magister

Originally three

- First one captured at Elizabethville airfield
- Second lost due to pilot error
- Third (“lone ranger”): piloted by mercenary Joseph Deulin
  - Attacked UN convoys, troops, transport aircraft & airfields (Elizabethville and Kamina), UN headquarters in Katanga
  - Caused havoc



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# UN Early Offensives

- Operations Rum Punch (Aug 1961)
  - Limited “success”
- Operation Morthor (“Smash”) (Sept 1961)
  - Viewed as “failure”
  - Objection from Hammarskjold
- No kinetic air
- Havoc from Fouga Magister

# Dag Hammarskjöld in plane crash



## *Plane route*

- Detour
- In range only after dark
- Strict radio silence

17 September 1961





Swedish airmen funeral, Leopoldville (Kinshasa)  
Twin-engine transport shot down on 20 September

UN Photo 184408





UN leaders strafed  
during press  
conference by  
Katangan jet

Representative of SG in  
Katanga, Conor Cruise  
O'Brien (on ground facing  
camera in jacket)

September 1961



A C-54 explodes and burns at Elizabethville airport after being attacked by a mercenary of the Katanganese Air Force.



Attacked by a Fougat Magister at Elizabeth airport

Photo from Michael Whelan, *The Battle of Jadotville: Irish Soldiers in Combat in the Congo 1961*, South Dublin Libraries, 2006 (courtesy of John Gorman).



Irish UN soldier flees  
from the exploding  
ammunition dump,  
Elizabethville: 1961



UN Photo 74151

13 Italian airmen seized and murdered in Kivu by ANC-Stanleyville forces



18 November 1961

13 Italian Airmen – Memorial Service

UN Photo

Centre: SRSG Sture Linner & President Joseph Kasavubu, flanked by Italian officials.



# Creation of a “UN Air Force”

- Hammarskjöld's leadership
  - Armed aircraft: Ethiopia, India, Sweden
- Pres. Kennedy offers eight US jets
  - Joint Chiefs: “seek out and destroy on ground or in the air the Fouga Magister jets”
  - Thant declined





24 November 1961

UN Photo 214006

Council debates before passing resolution 169: force authorized to expel mercenaries

# Ethiopian Sabre Jets



Leopoldville, 3 October 1961



# Swedish Saab J29 Jets



27 October 1961

UN photo 72365

“Flying Barrels “





Wreckage of Saab 29 fighter in the Congo

*Svenn Willy Mikaelson*

<http://larsgyllenhaal.blogspot.com/2010/10/nordic-soldiers-in-congo.html>

# Indian Canberra Bombers





10 October 1961

Indian Canberra Bombers

UN Photo 71337







Source:

<http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/Congo.html>

(5 photos)





Sqn Ldr PM Wilson in the cockpit of a Canberra









<http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/1960s/Congo01.html>

Flying in Formation:

2 IAF B(1) Canberras; 2 Swedish J29s Saabs; 2 Ethiopian F-86 Sabres





Rockets for SAAB jets,  
Elisabethville airport



UN Photo 184390

Captured "Fouga" fighter in December 1961, Elizabethville airport

# Katangan Air Force Expansion (1962)

- Ex-Belgian T-6G
- Harvard IV Fire Assistance Flight  
– Kamina-based



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# 1962

- Aerial “arms race” with Katanga
  - ONUC’s Military Information Branch (MIB) gathers intelligence
  - South African company offer 40 Harvards
  - Both sides also increase transport aircraft
- UN acquires S-29E photo-recce aircraft
- Camouflage colours applied to S-29 after FAK attacks on airfields
- Britain dithers on providing bombs for Canberras
- Limited operations until December

“We are *not* attempting to destroy any aircraft found in the airfield in the vicinity of that area [Kolwesi airfield] because if we do locate one or two aircraft and destroy them, we feel that FAK will react against Kamina Base and also disperse their aircraft from Kolwezi to other airfields, thereby making our task of locating and destroying these aircraft on the ground very difficult.”

- Force Commander General Kebede Guebre to Dr. Ralph Bunche, 24 November 1962

# ONUC Strategy

- Overwhelming surprise attack
  - Avoid FAK hiding aircraft
  - Avoid retaliation in kind
- Obtain Norwegian anti-aircraft battery
  - 200 strong
- Air surveillance radars
  - Installed Aug 1962 in Elizabethville
- Pres. Kennedy offers fighter jets without US pilots
  - Thant defers



# Operation Grand Slam: The Trigger

- Katangan shoot down UN observation helicopter
  - 1 Indian crew member died of bullet wounds
- Continuous firing on UN positions
  - UN escorts Tshombe to site of fighting to show his forces responsible
  - Katangese Gendarmerie Commander ordered bombing of Elizabethville airfield 29 December (radio interception)
  - Gen. Prem Chand convinces Thant for offensive

# “Grand Slam” (28 Dec 1962)

- All “bases loaded”
- 0430 hrs J-29s attacked Kolwezi airfield
  - 20 mm canons
  - cloud cover too low for 13.5 mm rockets
  - 3 UN aircraft hit by ground fire: narrowly missing pilot
- Continued for 4-7 days
  - 76 sorties
  - Target aircraft, petrol dumps
  - J29 patrol skies to prevent introduction of new aircraft
  - Thant does not approve use of napalm



Charanjit Singh's Canberra IF 898 after local repairs to windscreen day after hit by ground fire; back to flying

Katangan soldiers  
shooting into the sky,  
Elizabethville, 1961





UN Photo 167830

Katangan Harvard destroyed on ground by Swedish jets on 30 December 1962

Vampire aircraft destroyed  
by Swedish fighter jets,  
Kolwesi airport







KA DFN destroyed by UN jets, Kolwezi, 6 December 1961

[http://vayu-sena-aux.tripod.com/pix/ONUC\\_destroyed\\_DC-3\\_Congo\\_03B\\_01.jpg](http://vayu-sena-aux.tripod.com/pix/ONUC_destroyed_DC-3_Congo_03B_01.jpg)



Securing road blocks &  
positions around Elisabethville, 3 January 1963

# January 1963

- Tshombe agrees to end his secession & give up military means
  - Meets UN demand/ultimatum
- No UN personnel killed in Op Grand Slam
  - 215 killed in ONUC 1960-64

# Delay would have been costly

- ONUC intelligence (subsequently): 15 FAK aircraft (Mustangs) hidden in Angolan airfields
- Belgian mercenary interrogated:

“If you had only given us four more weeks so that we could have got the Mustangs ready, you would have experienced the same disastrous **surprise** one early morning at your Kamina Base as we experienced at Kengere [Kolwesi] on 29 December.”
- ONUC victory in the nick of time

U Thant with officers from Nigeria, India, Ethiopia (Force Commander Lt. Gen. Kebede Guebre); Thant; India (Maj. Gen. D. Prem Chand, GOC Katanga Area); Sweden; Norway (Gen. C.R. Kaldager, Air Commander); and Commander of the Swedish Air Jet Fighter Unit



8 April 1963

# Conclusions

- Dispels the myth of peacekeeping as non-combat
  - ONUC Air Force: air combat patrols, air-to-air combat, close air support, strikes against airfields, reconnaissance
  - Established and enforced *de facto* no-fly zone
  - US backing but no US fighter planes
  - Importance of precedents & being aware of them!
  - Defence/offense
    - Secured freedom of movement
    - Responded to attacks



# Conclusions

- Showed utility of air intelligence and air combat
- Air Intelligence
  - Utility of aerial recce
    - Limits of aerial recce: Italian airmen case (13 November 1961)
  - Need for gathering intell on air capabilities, incl. in foreign countries
- Air Combat
  - Establish ROEs and Force Directives (*see paper*)
  - Recognize the dangers of collateral damage
    - Accused of bombing a hospital and hotel
    - Mortar fire on a hospital

- Mission challenged and exhausted UN
  - At hq long before DPKO created (1992)
  - Controversial among states and in media
    - Katanga lobby
    - UK, France fears
    - Soviet objections
    - Non-aligned movement
  - Expensive: almost sent UN into bankruptcy
  - Difficulties in field: C2, armaments (bombs), casualties, bad press
  - Messy situation
- No mission in Africa until 1989 (Namibia)

# Back to the Congo ...



UN Photo 200146

Indian MI-35 attack helicopters  
4 deployed to the Congo in 2004



**EXTRA SLIDES**

# De facto No-fly Zone (NFZ)

- “A protocol for carrying out the provisions of the **cease-fire**, including such matters as prisoner exchange and the fixing of troop positions, was signed on 13 October 1961 at Ellsabethville. While the protocol allowed firing back in case of attack, it **prohibited** Katangese and ONUC troop **movements**.
- Meanwhile, the remaining Katanga mercenaries were leading the gendarmerie in a long series of violations of the cease-fire agreement, going so far as to launch offensive air action along the Kasai-Katanga frontier. This was sternly protested by the United Nations, which **warned** that *Katangese aircraft involved - all of them piloted by mercenaries - would be brought down.*”  
(emphasis added)



# Enforcement

- Fighter Ops Order 4

“If any bandit aircraft is caught by UN fighters in the act of committing an attack or is seen to leave the area when an attack has been carried out, [it] will be destroyed.”
- Fighter Ops Order 16 (27 Dec 1962)

“UN Fighter pilots observing Katangese aircraft carrying visible offensive weapons, such as bomb or rockets, should attack these aircraft and if possible shoot them down.”