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THE IRISH ARMY IN THE CONGO
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The National Army (N.A.) of the Free State (F.S.) had as its forerunner the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.). Many who fought in the Anglo Irish war with the I.R.A. continued their service with the N.A. in the civil war of 1922/3.

Although there was heavy recruitment to the NA at the start of the civil war, the veteran members of the I.R.A. provided the backbone of the N.A. Units such as the Dublin Brigade remained intact from the Anglo-Irish war to become the elite unit of the F.S. National Army. From its inception the N.A. was greatly influenced by the many members of its ranks who had been schooled in the art of warfare in its many facets, and whose influence was felt from its lower ranks to its highest ranks. National army officers, such as Richard Mulcahy, and Kevin O' Higgins, who both fought through the Anglo-Irish war, were to play leading parts in the reorganisation of the N.A. after 1923, which laid the basis for the N.A. and which still regulates the modern Irish Army.

Following the end of the civil war, the Irish F.S. government was eager to reduce the size of the N.A. from its civil war proportions. Its first peacetime reorganisation took place in 1924, with massive restructuring of the various units of the N.A. (this seems to have established a tradition of Irish Army restructures, with further reorganisations taking place in the 1920's, in 1938/39, 1945 and 1959, to the extent that the 3rd Infantry battalion is the only Irish

Army unit in continuous existence up to the 1990's). This , coupled to the massive demobilisation of many N.A. soldiers led to the 1924 mutiny. In this episode, veterans of the I.R.A. in the N.A. played a major part, claiming they were being demobilised while soldiers who had fought in the British Army in World War One were being given posts in the N.A. This was untrue, as apart from a few specialists from the British Army ranks, the Free State government took pains to reserve positions in the N.A. for those who had fought the Anglo-Irish war with the I.R.A. The army mutiny fulfilled the common belief that the greatest threat to a revolutionary fledgling government was its own revolutionary army. In this instance the threat was met by Mulcahy. In so doing he also established the present democratic ethos which guides the modern Irish Army, by subjugating the military arm of the state to the civilian government, (represented today by the Irish President).

This was shown clearly when deValeras' Fianna Fail came to power in 1932, ousting the Cumman na Geal party which had been in office for the previous ten years. Many, among them some Fianna Fail T.D.'s, felt that the N.A. would not allow their civil war enemies to become the government of the F.S. Some Fianna Fail deputies even carried pistols into their first sitting in the Dail in expectation of a military putsch. The fact that there was no such attempt showed the maturity and stability the N.A provided to the Free State. DeValeras' F.S. came to depend on these attributes with the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939.

The N.A. was ill-equipped to provide, on its own, a great enough deterrent against threats of invasion from belligerent nations. The 'regulars' of the N.A. became the core around which the forces of the emergency period were built. From its inception, the N.A. had been designed to be able to absorb and train any large influx of members to its ranks in times of national crisis. Its ability to do so was based on the aim of the military authorities to have each member of the other ranks- privates, gunners, ensigns,-trained up to the level of non-commissioned officers (N.C.O.). If the lower ranks were trained up to this level the N.A. could easily absorb large numbers of new recruits. Due to the lack of facilities, the low army pay, and the lack of equipment, this never happened. This curtailed the N.A.'s ability to train the new recruits in the early part of the emergency, and it was only by the end of 1941 that the combined defence forces in the Irish F.S. could hold maneuvers on a national scale. Even these military maneuvers, held involving units from each command area, showed up the defence forces deficiencies in tactics, training and of course, equipment. By that stage, however, the danger of invasion from Germany and a British counter invasion , had receded with Hitler's 1941 invasion of Russia and the end of the Battle of Britain. The F.S. had been protected, not by its own forces, but by British naval and aerial superiority over Germany.

Demobilisation started at the beginning of 1945, when further recruitment to the defense forces was postponed. Active demobilisation after that went smoothly

as it was applied mainly to those who had been recruited for the duration of the emergency, with the local defence forces being reduced in size and reorganised into the Foras Cosanta Athule (F.C.A.). The Irish Army regulars units were returned to their pre-war numbers which put the regular army understrength once again, as its pre-war level had always been below the level deemed necessary for the army's peace establishment. Even as late as 1966 the Permanent Defence Forces (P.D.F.) stood at 8,249 all ranks, which was only 71% of the proper peace establishment. Throughout the emergency the army was subjected to numerous directions from the Department of Defence which were often contradictory or merely confused. No clear national strategy was formed by the Department at all during the emergency, with the defence forces directed to prepared for invasion from either Germany or Britian, or both together from different directions. This lack of direction from the Irish government did not change in the post-war years. Many members of the Irish army felt they were once again being pushed to the margins, with little evidence of any governmental concern for them. They pointed to the new pay scales adopted by the government in 1946 as evidence of this, with the armys pay level based on a cost of living estimate of £185 per month, while in the same government estimate, the Garda and civil service pay scale was based on a cost of living estimate of £270 per month¹ . The Irish army felt very much the poor cousins of Irish society.

The Irish army found its toughest opponent in the Department of Finance, which in all governments after the emergency, curtailed spending on Ireland's military. The Irish army was crippled in its fight for more resources by the policy of neutrality, adopted seemingly by every government in Ireland since World War Two. Neutrality came to be accepted in Irish society without thought, though deValera had been forced to adopt it by the consensus of public opinion at the time. As an army of a neutral nation, the Irish army lacked a role and increasingly came to be seen as non-essential. The Irish army hierarchy was further frustrated by the attitude of departmental planners who often put proposals from the army on the long finger, or failed to provide the resources for proposals agreed on to be properly implemented. A proposal from the army that, in as far as possible, the general organisation of combat units would be the same in peace as in war-time, was submitted to the Department of Defence in 1961. In 1968 this proposal was still 'under consideration'¹ by the Department. In 1961 the Observer Corp was established without any resources being made available by the Department to activate it. It was not surprising that the army hierarchy should come to welcome Irish involvement in the United Nations (U.N.) peacekeeping activities, as it not only gave the Irish army a practical role, but also gave them a valid claim for increased resources in equipment, facilities and manpower.

Ireland joined the United Nations in 1956, having been members of its predecessor, the League of Nations. The Irish army, however, was ill-prepared

for any large scale commitment to the U.N. peace keeping forces. The army in the 1950's suffered from an overall lack of N.C.O.'s, who are the backbone of any military unit. Continued bad recruitment, due mainly to the poor pay, together with the lack of N.C.O.'s, meant that all Irish army units operated under-strength. For this reason the Irish units that did serve in the Congo were composite units formed for the period of duty in the Congo, and disbanded afterwards. Personnel for these units were drawn from various units of the Irish army, with only one established Irish unit serving in the Congo.

The army also suffered from a number of other internal defects, not least among them being the so called 'career hump', which officers in 1960 were becoming aware of. The 'hump' was a result of the sudden intake of officer cadets at the beginning of the emergency in 1939. The resultant large number of officers on the same rank meant promotions for these officers, and those below them, were effectively held up or blocked totally. Officer morale suffered in this situation, but the same thing was to happen in 1969 with the sudden increase in I.R.A. activity in the north of Ireland. The 1959 re-organization of the army's peace establishment did not remove these deficiencies, and it totally ignored the problem of relying on the First Line Reserve as the army's main reserve in a national emergency. Due to the Irish army's lengthy period of service, the retired soldiers who made up the first Line Reserve were, on average, too old to be effective troops. By default therefore, the F.C.A. became the first Line Reserve, a role it was incapable of fulfilling. A major aim of the 1959 re-organisation

was to intergrate the F.C.A. and the Permanent Defence Force (P.D.F.), but this proved impossible as the F.C.A. lacked the equipment, manpower or time to have a combat efficiency anywhere close to being comparable to the P.D.F. Even after 1959, the army still lacked a definite policy and was sadly deficient in a range of military equipment. Effective modern anti-tank weapons were non-existent. Some Irish units did not have enough automatic weapons to equip a single platoon, when normally all three of a companys platoons would be equipped with them. Irish infantry units had no automatic rifles, being equipped instead with the Lee Enfield rifle from the second World War. It was only in 1961 that the first ten Fabrique National (F.N.) automatic rifles were purchased and sent to the 35th battalion in the Congo. The army also lacked adequate artillery and radio equipment, with the latter being of major importance as a necessary piece of equipment in the vast Congo.

The Irish army's first involvement with the U.N. peacekeeping forces was in 1958. Five volunteer observers were sent on a U.N. mission to the Middle East, to investigate Lebanese complaints regarding U.A.R. infiltration. This mission rose to number 50 Irish observers before it was wound down the following December. In 1960, Irish assistance was requested for the U.N. mission to the Belgian Congo. On the recommendation of the army, the Irish government acceded to the request. The first unit was quickly raised and designated the 32nd Battalion under Lt. Col. Murt Buckley, and was activated on the 2nd of July 1960. The Congo was to lift the claustrophobia of the Irish army and breathe

fresh air into its role as the army of a neutral state. It would also teach the Irish army some hard learned lessons, lessons which had been learnt by the Irish army's founders in the Anglo-Irish and Civil War.

CHAPTER ONE

CONGO CRISIS

CHAPTER ONE: Congo Crisis

The Congo comprised Belgium's entire African empire. It was larger than Europe and inhabited by a multitude of tribes with no common language or culture. It was divided into six provinces and had three principal cities; Stanleyville in Orientale province, the Colony's capital, Leopoldville, in the province of the same name, and Stanleyville, in Katanga province. Kasai, Kivce and Equateur made up the other three provinces of the Congo. No normal roads or railways linked the three principal cities, the only real link was by air. Much of the country was covered in tropical forests, especially the two northern provinces of Orientale and Equateur. Through most of the country flows the massive Congo river from which the country got its name, until Mobutu Sese Seko changed it to Zaire in 1967. The Irish troops serving with the UN would have being hard pressed to select another country more alien to their own native environment.

Belgium rule in the Congo could not be claimed to have improved or civilised the country to any great extent. Outside the main towns even by 1960, the natives of the Congo often lived traditional lives which post dated the arrival of Europeans to Africa. Under despotic rule of King Leopold I over his Congo empire, the Belgian government had shown little interest in improving their colony in any great measure. The problem of the lack of roads, railways and schools in the Congo, was added to by the attitude of most Belgians, whether settlers, missionaries or politicians: that no matter what you did for the



“African”, at heart he would always be a savage. The Belgian colonial attitude could at best be described as paternalistic, but Conor Cruise O’Brien felt it was “paternalist in the manner of a father who enjoys sneering at a sons’ awkwardness, and keeps impressing on him that he is congenitally and incurably defective”¹.

The Congo’s backwardness was a major factor in its failure to pass from being a colony to an independent state peacefully. Another factor was the haste which the Belgium government showed in turning over political power to the Congolese. The Congolese were aware of Belgian plans to grant independence in the mid- 1950’s, but the Belgian government did not announce a future date for it, or the method by which it was to be implemented. It was only announced in January 1959 that independence would be granted at some date “in the near future”. Later in the same year it was announced that independent elections would be held in mid-1960. This unseemly haste was partly due to the pressure the Belgian authorities were under from native Congoese politicians, and also partly as Belgium saw independence, as a way of granting the Congo political freedom while holding on to their own economic power in the Congo. The determination to keep the economic reins of power coloured Belgiums whole approach to Congo’s independence, and was to play an increasing part in their later dealings with Katanga.

Elections to form the Congo's first independent government were set for May 1960. Elections for the lower communal and territorial councils were to precede these in December 1959. The May elections were to elect candidates to the provincial parliaments in each of the six provinces, and to elect members to the central parliament known as the National Chamber. Most of the Congolese political parties formed to contest these elections had a narrow support base along tribal or ethnic groupings.

Only Patrice Lumumba's political party, the Municipal Nation du Congo (M.N.C.), was a pan-national party aiming to cross tribal lines. With little time to properly canvass throughout the Congo, Lumumba's cause was further damaged when his deputy Albert Kalanji formed a breakaway M.N.C. based in his native Kasai province. Adding to the election uncertainties was the question of the post-election structure of government; was it to be federalist or centralised and what were the powers of the provincial parliament to be? All the Congo's institutions and structures were to be based on the Belgium common law model of the Loi Fundamentale. All other questions could be settled after the election. That this road to independence would prove a smooth one was an optimistic belief on Belgium's part. None of the Congolese politicians had any experience in self-government. Their political parties were, in the main, tribal based, and in the post-election period these parties were expected to reform Congo's institutions, set up new governing structures, and agree on a

constitution. It was small wonder that many in the Congo feared the imminent arrival of independence and were determined to hold on to their own power.

Belgium had encouraged their citizens to settle in the Congo since the early part of the century. Though, by 1960, the European settler population was only a tiny minority in the Congo (European population was 31,887 in 1960, out of a total population of 1,654,200)², they made up the only business community in the Congo and they held the reins of its economic power. They were spread unevenly throughout the country, with the majority living in the province of Katanga. Their businesses mainly revolved around the provision of services to the main areas of Katanga. The European presence in the Congo was made up of these settlers, members of Belgium's colonial beurocracy (army and civilian), and the skilled technicians who worked for the mining companies in Katanga. As Belgium's colonial beurocracy was to be dismantled after independence, and the technicians worked on short term contracts in Katanga, the settlers were the only Europeans who had a long term interest in the Congo, having built their lives there. The method of granting independence to the Congo gave no safeguards to these settlers, and they were highly suspicious of Patrice Lumumba who was regarded as a radical and a communist. European settlers, mainly of Belgium origin, were represented by the organisation "Union pour la Colonisation" (Ucol) established in 1944. In February 1958, Ucol formed the "Union Katangaise" whose policy was to gain the division of the Congo into provinces with firm ties to Belgium. Ucol was against a centralised

rule over the Congo by a black government in Stanleyville, fearing it would leave them with no political power or voice. In August 1958 the Belgium minister, Petition, inspected the Congo situation. Ucol, through Union Katangaise, made representation to him but he rejected these policies. This was a severe blow to them as they now saw they had no support from Belgium. This realisation forced Ucol to look to the Katangaese natives for a wider base of support, which would present Katanga as a solid political group to Belgium, and show Katanga as a less extremist voice in Congo politics.

Such an alignment, black and white, was possible in Katanga because of the rising tribal tensions in the mining areas of Katanga. Native Katangans were alarmed at the number of migrants flocking into Katanga, mainly from south Kasai province, looking for employment in the mines of Katanga. These “strangers”, mostly of the Baluba tribe, provided unwanted competition for jobs, and this allowed the mining companies to lower wages. The Balubas also retained their ethnic grouping in Katanga and this made them politically powerful, unlike the native Katangans.

This was seen in the 1957 municipal elections in Katanga which saw a majority of Kasai Balubas elected. The only representative organisation of native Katangans was the ‘Association des Classes Moyennes Africaines’ (Acmaf) led by Moise Tshombe. Acmaf represented the ‘evolues’ which were, in theory, the Congolese middle class. In practice the evolues were badly educated Congolese

who worked only in the lowest ranks of the Belgian colonial bureaucracy. Ucol turned to Tshombes' organisation because it was good propaganda. A grouping of 'educated' blacks and European whites who be irristable to Belgian public opinion, especially as most other Congolese parties were black dominated and tribally based. On the 4th of October 1958, the "Confederation des Associations Tribales du Katanga" (Conakat) was formed by European right wing elements and Katangan natives. It stressed the importance of recognising the individual traits of the Congo's separate provinces, and from the outset, it also stressed to the Belgian authorities the danger of secession if they ignored this threat.

In December 1959, the communal and territorial council elections were held. Eighty-two per cent of the electoral population voted in Katanga, -the highest turnout in the Congo, reflecting the politisation of Katangan society. Conakat gained 427 seats out of the total 484 seats available, with its main rival being the Baluba party of Katanga (Balubakat). The independence elections to form the Congo's provincial and central governments were held in May 1960. In Katanga Conakat carried eight out of sixteen seats in the National Chamber, and twenty-five out of sixty seats in the provincial government. Conakat gained support from the various tribal chiefs elected to the provincial government, who feared a centralised government would remove their traditional power as head of their tribes. With this support, Conakat controlled thirty-eight votes in the provincial government and was able to vote their leader, Moise Tshombe, to the

position of President of Katanga province. On the first of June the first Provincial Assembly was held, but Conakat was blocked from forming a government, as the Belgian Loi Fundamentale stated a quorum of two-thirds was necessary for a parliament to pass legislation. Conakats' rival parties, mainly the Balubakat, had refused to sit in parliament as they claimed the election had been fraudulent. With its hands tied at provincial level, Tshombes' Conakat found itself isolated at national level in its fight for federalism in the Congo. Pre-election round table talks among all of Congos' political parties had seen the idea of federalism rejected, but Tshombe did gain the right of each province to control its own mining concessions.

This was of major importance to the European settlers, who at this stage were still a large power in the Conakat party. Katanga was a mineral rich area whose mining production accounted for 75% of the Congo's total. In 1960, its main minerals were copper, zinc, silver, germanium, platinum, radium, uranium and raw zinc. Altogether the Katanganese economy contributed 5.25 billion Belgian francs out of the Congo's economic turnover of 11.2 billion, and close to fifty per cent ³ of Katanga's mining concessions were controlled by the Union Miniere du Haut Katanga. British and French companies held some stock in this company, but the principal stockholder of Union Miniere was the Comite Special du Katanga (C.S.K). Before independence, the C.S.K board of directors was made up of six people ; four designated by the colonial authorities and two from the Belgian Compagnie du Katanga. With the granting of independence,

this meant the new Congolese government would be entitled to appoint four of its members to the C.S.K board. To avoid this the stockholders of Union Miniere dissolved the C.S.K on the 27th of June 1960. The board was reduced to three seats, one each appointed by the Congolese central government, the Katangan provincial government, and the Compagnie du Katanga. By doing this, Katanga's mining concessions were kept out of the Central government's total control, and more importantly the European interest in Union Miniere could be safeguarded, as by allying itself with either the Katangan government or with the Central government, the Compagnie du Katanga and its' European stockholders could, in effect, continue their control of Katanga's mines. That this policy was to the forefront of the Belgian authorities minds could be seen in their later dealings with Tshombes' Katangan government.

On the 14th of June, the Belgian parliament changed the Loi Fundamentale ruling on the issue of the parliamentary quorum. They reduced the quorum, enabling the Conakat party to form Katanga's provincial government without the presence of its opposition parties in the parliament, who were still boycotting the parliament on the grounds that the election had been fraudulent. By 30th of June, the Conakat had formed its government of Katanga with Tshombe as its President. This angered the Congo's Central government under Patrice Lumumba, who saw the ruling as evidence of Belgium's ambition to continue their control over the Congo by limiting the Central government's authority over its provinces. Belgium's control over Katanga

became more marked when, on the 4th of July, the black rank and file of the Force Publique -the 'pride and joy of the colonial regime' ⁴ - mutinied in Katanga against their white officers, over the lack of 'africanisation' in the Force Publique army. By the 8th, the mutiny had spread to Elizabethville. On the 11th, Tshombe, with white settler backing, declared Katanga independent, but also declared it bound economically to Belgium, whom Tshombe appealed to in order to restore order over the mutineers. Commandant Weber of the Belgian forces in Katanga put his "para-commandoes" at the "disposition of Tshombe to protect the persons and goods of all" ⁵. Katanga needed a return to law and order to prove to western powers, and especially the Europeans in the Congo, that Katanga was a good place for investment and 'an oasis of peace which warranted aid and assistance'. The importance of Katanga to the Belgians was shown by their reinforcement of the Belgian troops there on the 15th of July. The Belgian Minister of Defense ordered these reinforcements to occupy the towns of Kolwezi, Sakania and Dilolo, -towns through which Katanga exported her copper.

Lumumba felt Belgium's actions blocked him from regaining control of Katanga, as he was powerless in the face of Belgium's military presence there. On the 14th, July he broke off diplomatic relations with Belgium. This in turn cut Lumumba's government off from Belgian aid and also made public opinion there more inclined to favor Katanga over the Congolese government, especially as their interests in Katanga were more substantial. On the 16th of July, the

Belgian Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens stated 'our co-operation is assured to Katanga' ⁷. To this end, the Belgian Technical Mission to Katanga (Mistebel) was set up and came to be the real power in Katanga. Lumumbas' response was to appeal by telegram to the United Nations to provide military aid on the 12th of July, after Tshombe had declared Katanga totally independent. The Belgian and European settlers in Katanga felt Mistebel and the Belgian military presence would force any U.N. mission in the Congo to keep out of the Katanga. This belief was boosted by the report of the U.N. representative in the Congo, Ralph Bunche, who recommended that the U.N. should not operate in the Congo due to the opposition of its gendarmery and native warriors. Eventually, pressure put on Belgium at the U.N. by Afro-Asian states and the United States forced them to tell Tshombe not to resist the U.N. forces which began operations in Katanga on the 31th of August, 1960.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNITED NATIONS IN

THE GONGO

CHAPTER TWO: The UN In the Congo

The United Nations (UN) mission to the Congo began while Dåg Hammarskjold of Sweden was secretary general of the UN. For the mission in the Congo he had the support only of the United States and the African and Asian members of the UN. The United States feared the Katangan recession might prompt a series of communist backed secessions in the Congo, while the African states saw the crisis in the Congo as endangering and unsettling the entire region of Central Africa. Therefore, both were eager to end Katangan independence. Britain, France and Belgium, the first two being members of the supreme council of the UN, were antagonistic to Lumumba's central government as they felt he was a communist radical, and, while Belgium activity supported Katangan independence, Britain and France merely provided a measure of moral support for it, mainly by constant criticism of UN actions in Katanga. Since both the enemies and allies of Katanga in the UN saw communism as a factor in the crisis, the Communist block in the UN never had a large measure of influence on the United States for continued support of the UN mission in the Congo. This was necessary as the United States was also the major financial contributor to the UN coffers.

The United Nations missions are commonly called peacekeeping missions but the only form of conflict control mentioned in the UN charter is "peace by persuasion" in Chapter VI "Envisioning Enforcement". Dåg Hammarskjold felt that a new chapter was needed- to be numbered "six and a half"¹. The precise role of the UN mission in the Congo was to prove

problematic for UN representatives there. The UN mission in the Congo, the Organisation des Nations United au Congo (ONVC), had its role defined by the UN Secretary General, in the way he felt reflected the attitudes of the UN Security Council. This role was then implemented by the UN representative in the Congo as he felt the Secretary General wished it to be implemented. Often the various chains of command of the UN emphasised their own main concerns in the actions the UN forces carried out. This confusion was further shown in the resolutions of the Security Council which were meant to guide the ONVC. At the time when UN troops first arrived in Katanga, the last Security Council resolution of the 9th of August 1960 stated "the United Nations force in the Congo will not ...in any way intervene in or be used to influence the outcome of any internal conflict" ². Yet on 20th September, the Security Council adopted a resolution which requested the Secretary General to assist the central government restore their authority throughout the Congo, including Katanga. This was hard to reconcile with the resolution of 9th August, a resolution which the General Assembly of the UN at the same moment fully supported. This confusion over ONVC's aim in Katanga not only angered Lumumba's central government, but also affected the ONVC forces who had to carry out an ill-defined role in dangerous areas.

In Katanga, Tshombe had managed to replace departing Belgian regular troops with his gendarmery under the Belgian Major Crèvecour. Many Belgian officers were seconded to this new force from the Belgium army. By August 1960, Katanga was under severe pressure from Baluba tribesmen coming from Kasai, and units of the Central government's Armée National Du

Congo (A.N.C.) advancing into Katanga. Brussels provided arms and equipment to Katanga's gendarmery and pressurised the ONVC to stop the A.N.C.'s advance. Tsambe's strength gradually increased due to this aid, and the revenue from Union Minières' continued production which was paid only to the Katangan province. On the 5th September, the President of the Congo, Kasavulu, dismissed Lumumba as Prime Minister. Belgium welcomed the new "moderate" central government and covertly began to extend its influence in Stanlyville, which meant that their concern for Katanga gradually lessened. Joseph Ileo became Congo's new Prime Minister, and was known as a moderate with federalist leanings. In north Katanga there was increased violence by Baluba tribesmen who were often drugged on hemp.

The first Irish Battalion to serve as UN troops in the Congo was the 32rd Battalion. This was deployed in the quieter province of Kivu, where deficiencies in tropical clothing and wireless equipment were soon discovered. In Kivu, the Irish found their role of peacekeepers relatively straightforward, with no attempt being made to disarm native armed forces, mainly because there was no existing conflicting forces as there were in Katanga. Irish army units patrolled constantly, and although there were tensions between the native forces and the Irish, no shots were fired. The 32nd Battalion learned many lessons about kit and conditions which were passed on to the next Irish battalion to arrive, the 33rd Battalion, in August 1960. The 33rd Battalion became part of the buffer zone of the UN units in north Katanga whose role was to stop A.N.C. incursions into Katanga and to end clashes between the Katangan Balubas and Tshombe's gendarmery. This proved to be impossible,

as the UN forces were too few in number to either stop A.N.C. units slipping through their zone, or to patrol all of north Katanga ending the often bitter Baluba-gendarmery clashes. The problems of the UN's ambivalent mission in the Congo has its result in the ambush of an Irish patrol under Lt. Kevin Gleeson at Niembia in November 1960. Eight members of the patrol were killed, one later died from wounds, and two survived. The patrol in two pick-up trucks ran into a roadblock of felled trees, manned by drugged Balubas. In line with their orders only to fire when fired upon, the patrol held its fire and Lt. Gleeson called out a greeting, only to be answered by arrows. In spite of this tragedy the Irish continued their activity in north Katanga with its morale intact.

Elsewhere in the Congo the Central government under Ileo saw its authority reduced to the province of Leopoldville as a new element of Lumumbist supporters spread violence throughout the Congo. Lumumba had been kept a prisoner by Ileos' government after his dismissal. The ONVC didn't recognise Ileos' government in Leopoldville as they felt it was unconstitutional, as it had never been voted in by the National Chamber. This meant Ileo got no UN support or aid from Belgium. In February 1961 the position in Katanga was further complicated by Tsombes' hiring of foreign mercenaries to serve as the backbone of his gendarmery. Their number was mainly made up of British, Rhodesian and South Africans, but later the mercenaries were mainly French, especially after deGaulle granted Algerias' independence. Strengthened by about 400 white mercenaries, Katangan forces were very successful against the A.N.C. and Baluba warriors, as they employed even greater terror than the bitter Congo conflict had already seen. At this stage Katanga was the powerful

province in the Congo, a power exercised by Tsombe when he allowed Lumumba to be killed when the Leopoldville government turned him over to Katanga's control, in January 1961.

This however, proved to be the zenith of Katangas' control over Congo affairs. From September 1960, the Belgian government had been drawing closer to Ileo's central government, at the same time withdrawing from Katanga and exerting pressure on Tsombe to accept an accord with Ileo. This turnaround drew bitter comment from Katanga , but Belgium increasingly felt its interests could be better safeguarded by the Central government. ONVC's actions were a factor in this, as Belgium saw that the ONVC had come to regard Katanga as its major opponent. The gradual cutting of Belgium's ties with Katanga forced Tshombe into heavier reliance on the more radical elements of his government, such as Munongo, the Katangan Minister of the Interior, and on the terrors inflicted by "les after", his mercenaries.

The ONVC relationship with the Congo's central government changed when Ileo's government was replaced. A government led by Adoula was voted in by the National Chamber in line with the Congo's constitution. This closer relationship between the Congo government and ONVC left Katanga isolated. ONVC soon became Katanga's main opponent in its fight to maintain its secession attempt. Calls from ONVC to Katanga to expel its foreign troops were ignored by Tshombe, as his gendarmery couldn't perform so well without the direct assistance of its Belgian officers or its white mercenaries. The ONVC's role in the Congo was once more dramatically

changed when the Security Council of the UN adopted the resolution on the 21st of February 1961, which directed the ONVC to take measures for the immediate withdrawal of all Belgian and other military personnel, including mercenaries. Katanga was militarily very fragile in the face of this resolution if it were implemented. On the 21st of November, a further resolution, authorised the use of the “requisite measure of force, if necessary”³ to enforce the February resolution.

The February resolution coincided with the arrival in Katanga of Conor Cruise O’Brien as the new representative of the UN there. He saw his first job as ensuring the implementation of this resolution. On the 2nd of April an Indian Battalion of troops arrived as reinforcement for the UN in Katanga. Increasingly Tshombe came under pressure from both Conor Cruise O’Brien and UN forces ,who intervened to stop Katangan military operations or to intercept its units to expel foreign troops. This marked the start of the ONVC becoming more active against the Katangan government, especially since ,on the 17th of April ,Adoula’s Leopoldville government had accepted the February resolution and requested ONVC aid to reorganise the A.N.C. forces. By June the ONVC had helped Adoula to reopen the Central government’s parliament. Katanga continued to boycott this parliament ensuring that it would be orientated “against” Katanga. The final mark of Tshombe’s isolation came in April 1961, when the new Belgian government led by Lefèvre and Spaak started to disengage from Katanga in favor of Leopoldville.

The failure of ONVC to make any great headway on ridding Katanga of foreign troops led to its first offensive operation in the Congo : Operation Rumpunch. The operation was designed by Conor Cruise O' Brien, together with the Swedish Colonel Bjorn Egge and the Commander of all UN forces in the Congo; General Sean Mac Eoin of the Irish Army. Rumpunch was the apprehension and expulsion, by UN forces , of all foreign military forces in Katanga, together with the occupation of the post office and radio station in Elisabethville. Rumpunch was a sweeping success netting 338 mercenaries out of the estimated total of 443. The one hundred who escaped however were actually the most dangerous elements - mainly French ex-Foreign Legion troops who had been involved in the mutiny against deGaulle in Algeria, and whose activities in Katanga were the most bloody. Those who had been caught were mainly Belgian officers who were less dangerous to the ONVC. Rumpunch did however, force Tshombe to immediately "Africanise" his Katangan forces, thereby weakening them.

The Irish units involved in Rumpunch were the 1st Infantry Group under Colonel John O'Donovan, and the 35th Battalion under Lt. Col. Hugh McNamee. Col. Eugene O'Neills' 34th Battalion had served from January 1961 up to June before operation Rumpunch and had departed after handing over to the 35th Battalion ,having had a quiet tour in Elisabethville. Before Rumpunch ,the 1st Infantry Group defended Kamina airbase which was some 200 miles north of Elisabethville. During Rumpunch ,the 1st Infantry Battalion along with units of the 35th Battalion were involved in defending Katanga airport in Elisabethville against strong attacks mounted by gendarmery and

white mercenaries. During this action the gendarmes lost twenty dead and over fifty wounded, with the Irish also coming under fire from Katanga's lone air force jet - a Fouga aircraft. The 35th incurred no casualties and managed to capture seventy three white mercenaries.

The partial success of operation Rumpunch didn't force Tshombe to back down or negotiate. By this time Tshombe was controlled by radical right wing white settlers, and also by the enigmatic Munungo, whom Conor Cruise O'Brien suspected of killing Lumumba with his bare hands. Lack of progress lead to a second military operation by the ONVC, instigated by the ONVC representative in Leopoldville, Khiary, and carried out by Connor Cruise O' Brien in Elizabethville. This was operation Marthar, which began at 4am, on the 13th of September. ONVC's aims were the arrest of Katangas' leading politicians, among them Tshombe and Munongo. ONVC forces were to secure the post office and radio studios, and raid Katangas' offices of the Ministry of Information. In effect, the ONVC was to stage a coup d'etat' in Elizabethville, opening the way for the arrival of a Commissaire d'etat from Leopoldville who would assume power, on the behalf of the Congo's Central government. Operation Morthor, however, failed ,as the ONVC's lack of an effective intelligence network meant all but one of three intended targets escaped. Some of them, like Munongo, had been expecting the ONVC's attempt and had been already staying away from their personal residences. In all events, the failure to arrest Tshombe meant his gendarmery and the mercenaries would continue to harass UN troops in Elizabethville, as they received no cease-fire order from him. Over the following week, while UN forces secured Elizabethville in the

face of Katangan opposition, pressure mounted on Dag Mammarskjold at the UN headquarters to call off ONVC operations, which the Western media portrayed as bloody and high-handed. On the 20th of September a cease-fire was signed by Khiary and Tshombe, which returned the situation to its pre-Morthor position, and the Katanga secession was maintained.

The Irish unit involved in operation Morthar was once more the 35th battalion. Their task in Elizabethville was to arrest the Katangan minister of finance, Kibive, and they were the only UN unit to actually accomplish the arrest of their target. They were also directed to size and establish a road block at the railway tunnel, as well as securing the refugee camp on the outskirts of Elizabethville. "C" company of the 35th battalion came under heavy and sustained fire in establishing their road block on the railway tunnel, but no casualties were suffered. In all, casualties from the operation in Elizabethville amounted to only eleven UN troops dead, with Katangan forces suffering some fifty dead. . The morale of the ONVC was dealt a severe blow on the 17th of September when news of the surrender of 184 Irish troops in Iadotville reached Elizabethville. These troops, making up of the 35th battalions situation was shattered by the sudden arrival of fresh mercenary reinforcements which ended the fraternising and forced the unprepared Irish to surrender. "A" company had been caught just as they had almost turned around their bad state of affairs. They were taken into captivity by the mercenaries, and were released only after the cease-fire for operation Marthar had been signed.

The failure of operation Marthar resulted in the resignation of Connor Cruise O'Brien and the replacement of General Sean MacEoin as commanding officer of ONVC forces. Dag Hammarskjold was also a victim of Morthar- he was killed in a plane crash in North Katanga. He was replaced by U Thant as acting secretary general of the UN. The situation in Elizabethville continued to deteriorate, with Katangan forces denying ONVC troops freedom of movement and sniping the headquarters of the Irish battalion in the city. Operation Unokat was carried out on the 15th and 16th of December to end this harassment.

The 36th battalion landed in Katanga just in time to take part in this Operation. The 36th and part of the 35th battalion, as part of the ONVC's 1st brigade, were to attack and capture Camp Massard and block roads out of Elizabethville before moving to end Katangan resistance in the city. The 36th first came under fire as they landed in Elizabethville to rotate with the 35th battalion. Further missions were carried out by the 36th to secure road junctions on the flanks of the Swedish battalion who were preparing to move on Elizabethville. The Irish part of this attack was to seize the railway tunnel and they accomplished this mission- named operation Sarsfield- suffering a number of casualties, among them three dead. Following the taking of Elizabethville, the 36th battalion had to organise patrols to control looting. Some days later, a platoon of "C" company from the 36th, under Captain Keyes stopped a riot at bayonet point, which had developed in the refugee camp outside Elizabethville. For the rest of their tour the 36th reverted to keeping the peace by active patrolling, manning road blocks and controlling refugees.

The succeeding 37th battalion under Lt. Col. Don O'Broin arrived in May 1962. Its tour was relatively quiet and its role consisted mainly of patrols and security. The relative calmness of Katanga was due to the meetings held between Tshombe, Ralph Bunche, representative of the UN in Katanga, and the American Ambassador Guillion at Kitona on the 20th of December 1961. At this meeting Tshombe recognised the authority of the Congo Central government and agreed to move to end Katangas' secession. Although Tshaobe had entered into this agreement, it was necessary for the Katangan council of ministers to also accept it. They, however, declared themselves incompetent to decide this issue and sent the case to the assembly which commenced deliberations. Eventually the assembly accepted the agreement in February 1962, and Tshombe commenced talks with the Congo's' Prime Minister Adoula. These talks dragged on from February to June, and despite huge ONVC encouragement, facilitation's and "good officers" the talks finally broke down on the 26th of June 1962, as Leopoldville felt Katanga had not moved its position significantly, with the major stumbling block being the question of control over Katangan resources and revenue.

After this failure, the ONVC and the United States sought to pressurize Katanga by means of economic sanctions and the carrot of a fund for Katanga's redevelopment. This was known as the "U Thant plan", and the Secretary General declared it was non-negotiable and strictly to a time scale. The time scale was important as the ONVC effort in the Congo had become a major financial strain for the UN, and its operations there could not continue much

longer. Tshombe, however, was still looking for time, and on the 15th of December 1962, he refused to continue talks along the lines of the U Thant plan. U Thant decided on a final show of force, and on the 28th of December, ONVC forces went on the offensive, dismantling Katangan military road blocks and clearing Eliyabethville, once again, of Katangan forces. ONVC operations continued into January 1963, by which time Tshombe and his remaining mercenaries were in the town of Koliveyi in south Katanga. From there, the last town under his control, Tshombe issued a statement declaring he was "ready to proclaim to the world that the Katangan recession is ended". While his mercenaries fled into Angola, Tshombe surrendered to the ONVC. On January 23, Minister Ileo entered Elizabethville as representative of the Congo Central Government.

The 38th Battalion, under Lt. Col. Paddy Delaney, served from November 1962 to May 1963, and played a major part in later ONVC military operations. In the opening phase of the last operations, the heavy mortar troop of the 38th Battalion provided vital support to the Indian Brigade in its attack on Elizabethville. The Irish also took part in the attack on Kibushi, which, due to artillery fire from the supporting Ethiopian 3rd Brigade, was captured easily. From there, the Irish advanced and took a number of towns along the Benguela Railway, entering the deserted Kalweyi along with other ONVC units on January 21, 1963. The 39th infantry Battalion, under Lt. Col. Pat Dempsey, took over from the 38th Battalion in April, and it maintained law and order in its sector through vigorous patrolling. The 39th Battalion was understrength compared to the 38th Battalion, and it was badly stretched in trying to maintain

the same area as that maintained by the 38th Battalion. The 2nd Infantry Group was the last Irish unit to serve in the Congo as the ONVC started to phase out its operations during the term of the 2nd Infantry Group. It served from October, 1963, when the 39th Battalion left, until May 26, 1964, when it returned to Ireland. The 2nd Infantry Group was led by Lt. Col. Redmond O'Sullivan, and was based in the mining town of Kalwegi, where, as well as maintaining law and order, it managed to settle a strike in one of the Union Miners' mines. On June 30th 1964, the ONVC completed its military withdrawal from the Congo.

CHAPTER THREE

ON THE GROUND

CHAPTER THREE: On the ground

Approximately 3100 Irish troops served with the ONVC forces in the Congo, from July 1960 to May 1964. The Congo was not only a new experience for the Irish army as a whole but also a novel experience for its individual soldiers, who found there, an environment quite alien from their native country. The culture of the Congo, and its heat and hostility, were felt most dramatically, and on a first-hand basis by the foot-soldiers of the Irish units. How they reacted to these, and the events which enveloped them, is a story less well told than that of the political history of the Congo. The following interviews attempt to give an insight into the daily travails of the rank and file Irish soldier. These interviews are in the soldiers own words, and show the concerns uppermost in their minds. They also show their perception of the situation in the Congo, which was often at odds with that of the ONVC hierarchy.

The interviews were granted to me on the condition that the interviewees remained anonymous. Thus the names used are fictitious, but their stories are a true record of the memory of the experiences of two members of the Irish army who served with the United Nations peacekeeping forces in the Congo. I respect their wish for anonymity, as the views expressed here by them may not reflect, or may may be at variance with, the published version of the experiences of the Irish army in the Congo.

Interview No.1

Joe joined the Irish army in 1940, and served until 1967. He was part of an artillery unit before his Congo service, and he served as part of a mortar platoon with "B" Company of the 37th Battalion in the Congo. He was in the Congo from June until November, 1962, with the rank of sergent.

"The units that went out to the Congo were made up of a number of different units — there weren't specified artillery or other units. They were grouped together in companies, and there was a mortar platoon with each company. The make up of each company in the Congo came from all ranks from different home-based units.

We had a comparatively easy time. Though there were skirmishes in different areas, we were never directly involved. What actually happened was when there were skirmishes, we would be drafted in overnight, from one end of the Congo to the other. We (the 37th Battalion) were shifted from the Congo to the Southern province of Katanga, but things had quietened down by that time, and there weren't any skirmishes after we arrived. The previous Battalion (the 36th) had trouble all right, but we only had slight trouble. We were never based in Elizabethville, shipped there by plane because the roads were bad. We were later sent to North Katanga to a place called Felicoville Farm, where the King(Leopold 1) used spend his holidays.

Our patrols- our day to day activity- were to keep apart the rival factions. Road blocks, barriers or something like these were used by us to stop them moving around. We did not have the manpower to guard all areas, but we could stop road transport. It was to stop the factions coming in to contact mainly. We always knew when Tshombe was coming- he had fifty motorbikes with him blowing their horns as he swept past. Some of us

met him after a football match against another unit at which he was present. We were introduced to him after the match, and I was talking to him for a minute or two. He was like most "big people"- well rigged out in the best clothes. When they are in command they go out to look the part whether they are the part or not.

In one area where we were, we had mercenaries under guard. I was guard commander, and I remember them well — we knew who and what they were all right. there was an American, but mostly they were French-Algerian, and we had some of the most important ones as prisoner under armed guard. I think they were later shipped out of the Congo, but it was so easy for them to turn around and walk back in again, and this was a huge problem with the mercenaries.

We had, to a certain extent, problems with the settlers. You see, the young people were all right to us, but the older people were different. They were there with the Belgi, while we had only arrived. In general, while there were tensions, there was no real trouble — we got on O.K. We were free with them — like we were never under curfew around them. In an ordinary day, you could go into town and have a drink with them, or go to a restaurant. the only danger was from factions of the Gendarmerie, but in regards to the ordinary people, we got on well with them. Mostly, settlers had left when the trouble started, especially outside Elizabethville and the mining towns. They left their houses and an awful lot else — and incidently, in some of the places we went in Katanga, it was their houses that we occupied —it was very good accommodation. If they still had been there, we would have had to encamp and so fourth.

Even after the Niemba ambush, morale was quite high — no matter where you served, morale was high. In fact, the Irish were noted for their high spirit, and they were always well liked by the people of the countries they go to with the UN. Discipline was never very tough —

overseas discipline had to be of a high standard as the soldier there is coming across new situations all the time. The Jadotville episode was a real worry for the army. Though I wasn't there at the time ,I had a friend who was actually among the captured there. If they hadn't been released soon after, the Army would probably have made an attempt to get them out. My unit had spent some time in Jadotville, in the refugee camps there — mostly Balubas who had been evacuated or who had fled the Katanganese army. There were thousands, literally thousands — it was terrible it was so crowded there, horrible conditions, and so little we could do for all of them.

The Congo was a culture shock, a completely different environment. You were going from a peacetime environment, and most of the Irish army had never been in a battle, though they had been preparing and preparing, and in the Congo, they did not know what to expect. Of course, the groundwork for us had been made by previous battalions, and we had been briefed and everything had been outlined to us. Our role in the UN was as peacekeepers, to negotiate and not to take sides, which was important. We acted as the buffer between factions to stop clashes. Of course, in the Congo, this was often hard for us to do as they were all black, and so it was hard to distinguish between the factions. It was Ok when white mercenaries led them, or with the Baluba warriors who wore three white stripes down their cheeks. Of course some of our UN contingents were also black, such as the Indians, but they had certain features differences to distinguish them from the African blacks.

The Army, as at home, was subject to certain rules about opening fire. You were only allowed to fire to, say, stop yourself being forcibly disarmed. In all, there were five occasions which allowed you to use your weapon, and that order was the same in the Congo as it was at home. We had only got just basic equipment, unlike today . Old Lee Enfield rifles and a few machine guns, with the F.N. rifle not coming in until later when they needed an automatic. With uniforms ,the original set-up was that

the Army went out with the uniform they wore here. Then they designed a uniform for them overseas in the hot weather. The first battalion to go out went out in what was termed "the bulls wool", but later battalions got green and off-green uniforms, one for walking out in and the other for combat.

All in all, the Congo was a very good experience for the army, in that it was the first overseas assignment of entire battalions. It prepared them for the future UN tours. The whole standard of training was changed due to overseas service. Battlewise, they were better prepared in dress and equipment. it was a great experience for them, and, as members of the UN, they had to be better trained and equipped. It was the best thing to happen to the Irish army. If you look at recruitment and the many thousands fighting to get in , it shows you the attraction of overseas service for a lot of people, with the added danger factor. the army was never so popularize a career before it started its UN duties than it was after."

Interview No. 2.

Paul joined the army in 1959, and served for 12 years. He finished with the rank of sergent, but his rank in the Congo was that of corporal. He came from a home-based unit of the 2nd Battalion to serve two tours in the Congo, the first with the 35th Battalion, and the second with the 2nd Infantry Group. Altogether, he served in the Congo from June to December 1961, and from September 1963 to May 1964.

“Trained in Cathal Brugha(Barracks). Spent some time in 2nd Battalion, transferred into 5th in Collins(Barracks). From there, went out to Glen of Imal for special training and from there to the Curragh.

Went out (to the Congo) to the 35th infantry Battalion attached for special services, the idea being if the Battalion got into trouble, they sent for us. There was exactly one platoon of us, and anywhere the Battalion got into trouble we'd be sent in to sort it out, and then leave the mopping up to the Battalion. I served with the 35th for their tour, came home for a months leave, and then went back out there again. After our month in Ireland, training, we went back out with the 2nd Infantry Group. we were there four weeks before they arrived.

With the 35th, we were based in Leopoldville, the Battalion being based in Jadotville. When I went out the second time, I was based in Kahwegi with the 2nd Infantry Group. That group was out for 9 months. There was a Battalion of Gurkas, and some Canadians who did signals ,in Kahwegi also. In Kahwegi, we were based in a place called Camp Ruai.

The kit itself was bloody lousy. It was designed for Irish conditions — for fighting any possible war in this type of country. It was never designed for tropical use, apart from the uniform itself — the walking-

out uniform, which was the only part designed for tropical use. It was bloody ridiculous.

We came into contact with perhaps eight of them, caught two, and they were immediately handed over to the Gurkas. Them buggers were armed to the teeth — any sophisticated weapons going. We had Gustavs and Bren guns MK5, that sort of thing, but these guys had very sophisticated weapons. It was like trying to run a Mini up against a tank. Our whole platoon was chasing these guys for eight days, while they were laughing at us the whole way down. They could pick us off any time they wanted. One day, they'd be in front of us, the next behind us — nobody had a damn clue. You got to understand that these were the first experiences of coming under real fire for most of us. Its all very well for guys to go up and fire at targets, or going down to the Glen of Imal and have officers shooting over your head. You knew in your heart them guys won't go anywhere near you. Its a different story when they're really shooting at you and you're half shitting yourself. We were all kind of, how would you say, "hold me back and let me at them" kind of way — you want to be held back, but you'd also want to let go at them, because them buggers were letting go at you with real weapons. But having said that, once you got your orders, you would go out and give your best, because you had no choice — it was you or them. That was the only frightening experience we had. The tribes themselves weren't anywhere near armed — old Lee Enfields and arrows. If some of them fired off a round, you were more at risk from rust poisoning than from the bullet itself. We had three or four incidents. We had a riot in Kohwey over a sack of flour. Somebody robbed a sack of flour and a riot erupted when they tried to stop the thief, with all his relatives coming out to help him. Everybody was related out there. That was with the 2nd, and whoever was in charge just let it burn itself out. I think it went on for six hours. Then he sent us in to mop it up. We were termed the 'heavy mob' — went in, kicked a few butts and left the rest to the Battalion.

The Belgian settlers were fantastic to us. They were eternally grateful to have us around. You could feel that they were praying for you to stay there. I remember , just beyond a mine shaft some way from Camp Ruai, there was a Belgian community, and every time we went up there ,they'd give us wine, food and literally anything we wanted. They supported the mercenaries as well, seeing them the same as us — protecting the whites, which, when you really looked into it, was what we did. The mercenaries, though,would change sides in thirty seconds without batting an eye.

After events such as Niemba and Jadotville, everyone was down for a while, but w realised there was nothing you could do about it, and you had to get on with it. Morale was always pretty high. If you got into a spot of bother, for a day or twoyou'd be on a highafter your shooting exercises, but there would always be someone to break the spell and bring you down to earth. Apart from that, morale was always high, because you were depending on each other — you were depending on them and they were depending on you — real teamwork. I was a Corporal, in charge of a squad of eight men, three squads in a platoon. You were depending on them for anything you overlooked, and they looked to you for leadership and guidance, because everyone was in the same boat. There were guys there that I didn't meet until the Curragh just before we left (for the Congo), but instantly, once the squad was formed, there was instantaneous rapport, and the squad was bang on. It just jelled together because we knew we were going away and what we had to do. All three squads became like three different guys, each squad a mate who depended on each other, but could act on its own.

There was a certain amount of friction between us and units like the Gurkas, because it always seemed,whether it was a result of their training or our training, they always seemed to be better off than we were. They got the better rations and the better camping ground. The first time I

was out there ,I spent five months on a camp bed under canvas, and that's an experience in itself, with all the dirt and God-knows-what. It was the camaraderie, though, that kept the morale high.

We had no losses, only a sprained wrist being the worst thing we had. I have since lost my eyesight in one eye, and the cause was traced back to the dust in the Congo, which affected my eye in later years, blinded it.

The experience of the Congo did improve the Irish army — they learned some important lessons from it anyway. It made Cyprus, which was pretty rough in the beginning regarding facilities, easier to handle due to the Congo experience. The army also learned a lesson in relation to the officers role - — it had always been a case of us and them, and I think this was the most basic lesson taught by the Congo. The other one was that what matters here in Ireland in regards to marching and parades, out there meant nothing. There was no need for it. They tried that with the first consignments to the Congo, but it didn't last for long, especially as between twelve and three, the sun was directly overhead, and nobody could lift a bloody finger in the heat. It was like an oven with the heat full blast on. You couldn't move. But they learned their lesson.”

CONCLUSION

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After Katanga's secession had been ended by ONVC, Moïse Tshombe went into exile in Spain. His exile was brief, for on the very day that ONVC finally withdrew its troops, on June 30th 1964, Tshombe was brought back to be designated Prime Minister of the Congolese Central Government. He was brought back to put down a separatist movement in the Eastern Congo of the sort he himself had started in Katanga. This time, Tshombe had the backing, not only of Belgium and Union Minière, but also of the Western powers, including the United States. A totally new menace, far more appalling to Western eyes than that of Katanga, was sweeping the country. Simba rebels, led by Pierre Mulele, who 'baptised' them to protect them from bullets, and dedicated to the dead Lumumba, had put the terrified A.N.C. to flight. Tshombe quickly recalled his mercenaries and put the Irishman, Mike Hoare, in command. Hoare commanded the mercenary army, which he called "5 Commando", from July 1964 to November, 1965, and played a major role in ending the bloody Simba revolt. The end of the Simba revolt saw the end of Tshombe's reign as Prime Minister. Having outlived his usefulness, he was overthrown by General Sese Seko Mubutu, who, on November 25th, 1965, seized power in a bloodless "coup". Hoare was dismissed, and, by the beginning of 1965, Mubutu had got rid of the remaining European mercenaries after they had attempted, and nearly succeeded, in staging a "coup" against him. Mubutu then declared himself "President for Life", and the Congo crisis finally ended.

The crisis had been precipitated, to a great extent, by the Belgians handling of the Congo. Independence was granted far too quickly, with no safeguarding structures. Belgian support of, and aid to, Tshombe's secession attempt, was critical, as without it, he would never have made the attempt. Belgium had opposed and hindered the ONVC effort in Katanga, and it was only when it had disengaged from Katanga in favour of the Congolese Central Government, that the ONVC could effectively end Katanga's secession. On its side, the UN headquarters had hindered the ONVC effort from the outset by not properly defining the role it was expected to play in the Congo. The political battles fought in the UN also caused casualties in the ONVC, notably Conor Cruise O'Brien. O'Brien clearly felt his role was to implement the UN resolution of February 21st, but when this proved too costly in political terms, he was forced to resign. In the end, Secretary-General U. Thant used the same forceful and "high-handed" tactics to end Katanga's secession that O'Brien had tried to use in "Operation Morthar". In the short term the UN was successful, but this proved to be only the first chapter in the Congo's battle for stability, a battle fought for years after the disengagement of the UN from the Congo, and without further aid from it.

For the Irish, their experience in the Congo had a number of "firsts". "Operation Morthar" was the first time the Irish army had mounted an offensive against an organised enemy since the Irish Civil War. The 1st Infantry Group, which served in "Operation Rumpunch", was the first unit of its kind --- two infantry companies instead of the normal three in a battalion --- to be commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel with a small headquarters staff. The Congo

also gave Irish staff officers their first experience in the logistics of equipping, maintaining and planning tactical operations for a large body of Irish troops in a conflict situation. Throughout its period in the Congo, the Irish army performed well. After a few minor problems, it learned valuable lessons from its experience there, earning the respect of its fellow UN units which was reflected in the UN invitation to the Irish Army to serve in Cyprus in 1965. Connor Cruise O'Brien felt the UN forces in the Congo consistently outfought their mercenary opponents and the gendarmerie whose "armament was often....superior to that of the UN forces. For example they had the Belgian NATO model FN rifle, whereas the Indian rifles were 1918 style. They had modern Mercedes armoured cars, where the Irish had 1940 makeshift models, made in Carlow". Also "the UN forces suffered from the great lack of any clear concept of what they were supposed to do".¹ Despite this, Irish morale remained good throughout its Congo experience, due mainly to the tight discipline within its units which came from "the paternalistic and protective approach"² of officers towards their men.

The Irish Army overcame equipment and armament deficiencies to play a leading part in ONVC activities, and in so doing, it helped define the role of future UN peacekeeping missions. As pioneers of the UN peacekeeping role, the Irish Army influenced how other trouble spots throughout the world were handled, such as Cyprus in the 1960's and currently in the Lebanon. Lessons learnt in the Congo were swiftly applied by the Irish Army hierarchy. Less emphasis was placed on traditional "square bashing" in training, and more practical training was instituted. Officers, previously trained to remain

aloof from the lower ranks, were now instructed to become more closely involved with the lower ranks- a lesson learnt in the hostile situations faced in the Congo where it was soon discovered that under fire, a unit was all in it together regardless of rank and had to rely on teamwork to achieve success. At home, the Army's involvement in the Congo gave rise to a great sense of national consciousness, which was witnessed in the outpouring of grief throughout the nation, at the funerals of the victims of the Niemba ambush in 1960. UN duty not only provided a much needed outlet for the Irish Army, it also raised its standing in Irish public life, with the Army finally gaining the support it deserved from Irish society. Its higher standing was seen in the huge increase in demand for recruitment places in the Army, which started to rise in the 1960's and continued to this day. Though the public's support in the Army has increased, this has not been reflected to any great extent in government circles. Successive governments have paid much lip-service to the Army, but have failed to significantly upgrade the F.C.A., or to bring Army pay scales on to an equal level to other civil-service or state bodies. Though much has been done in regard to equipment changes, much remains to be done. The Congo mission proved to be one of many successive UN peacekeeping missions undertaken by the Irish Army, and its unstinting service to the cause of peace made the Irish Army fully deserve its part of the 1988 award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

1. John Cogan , 1990. History of the Irish Army. (published 1990) p164
2. Ibid. p248

Chapter 1

1. Conor Cruise O'Brien, 1962. To Katanga and Back. (published 1962) p161
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