

United Nations Oral History Project

**Jonathan Dean
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JK Mr. Dean, could you for the record explain what your official position was in the Belgian Congo during the early sixties and what your role was?

Dean Yes, although pedantically I would have to say the country was no longer the Belgian Congo. It was already an independent country when I started work there. I was United States Consul in Elisabethville, then the Republic of the Congo, from the summer of 1962 through 1964. I was there for two years.

JK So, you came to Elisabethville a few years after independence and after Hammarskjold had died.

Dean Yes, that's right.

JK Was U Thant Secretary-General then?

Dean Yes, he was. My predecessor in Elisabethville, Louis Hofacker, is still around somewhere.

JK And he was in Elisabethville just before you?

Dean Yes, he was.

JK There was so much going on at that time. By the time you came on the Katanga Province had seceded. Had the UN forces arrived?

Dean They had arrived and they had already one clash with the Katangan Gendarmerie which came out rather unfortunately for the UN forces. And that first group of UN soldiers had been replaced by a new group. The UN Commander was General Prem Chand, who is now in Namibia for the UN.

There was an Indian brigade under Brigadier Noronah, who has died since, and also Ethiopian forces.

JK Were they primarily around Elisabethville?

Dean They were inside Elisabethville. They had been bottled up in Elisabethville by the Katangan Gendarmerie.

JK Can you explain something about who the Gendarmerie were?

Dean Sure, the Gendarmerie was the renamed Katangan component of the Force Publique, the army of the Congo under Belgian colonial leadership. When the Congolese National Army, Armee Nationale Congolese (ANC), mutinied shortly after independence, Katanga then headed by Moise Tshombe, seceded. The Katangan component of the ANC or the Force Publique, renamed the Gendarmerie Katangese, did not mutiny for a variety of political and military reasons: the units were more cohesive, better trained and, I believe, got extra money from the Belgian mining company, Union Miniere. Their Belgian officers were better, kept fuller control and the Congolese personnel were mainly Lundas from Tshombe's tribe and so did not mutiny and, of course, supported the secession. Subsequently, the United Nations came to the Congo and also came to Elisabethville. And while claiming freedom of movement to carry out their mission, UN forces were in fact bottled up in Elisabethville during the Christmas of 1962, just before I got there, by the Katangan Gendarmes strengthened by a number of mercenaries. Among them, I

believe, was Robert Denard, who is still making difficulties in the Indian Ocean.

JK How were the mercenaries paid and how were they recruited?

Dean Well, I don't have direct knowledge of that. Someone like Hofacker would know that better than I. But, my understanding is that they were paid in hard currency and that they may or may not have been recruited by the remnants of the Belgian officer corps or the Surete, or that is the pre-independence Surete. The Belgian Consul-General in Elisabethville, a man named van der Wal, had been the head of the Surete for the whole Congo before independence.

JK Was the Union Miniere involved in that?

Dean There is no doubt whatever that the Union Miniere supported Tshombe, supported the secession and conferred with him practically on a daily basis. Their directors in Elisabethville wrote many of his speeches and his correspondence. Sometimes this was done by van der Wale. So, they were involved indeed, yes.

JK By the time you came to Elisabethville Lumumba had already died. Do you know of any further explanation of the circumstances around his death?

Dean Well, I heard from various people that he had been severely beaten before he had gotten on the plane in Leopoldville and was further beaten by his guards on the

plane and then was further beaten when he arrived by the Katanga Gendarmes who took him into custody. I would tend to doubt that there was any direct intention by any individual to kill him, but believe that his death was the accumulated result of his mistreatment.

JK It was due to his mistreatment, then. He was not shot.

Dean Not to my knowledge.

JK Was there any Western power complicity?

Dean Not that I know of. I never heard anything of that sort. Again, that did happen before I arrived.

JK To complicate matters there were tribal rivalries.

Dean Yes, mainly between the Lunda tribe on one side Tshombe's family was one of the two main families which alternated the Lunda chiefdom. For example, when I was still there, Tsombe's uncle was installed as chief of the Lundas. The other main tribe, to the north of Elisabethville, was the Baluba tribe, of whom the main political representative was a man named Jason Sendwe. Both Tshombe and Sendwe as schoolboys had been pupils of Bishop Newell Booth, the American methodist missionary who was in the area.

JK Did the mission get involved in any of this?

Dean Yes, the mission was very active in support of Tshombe, political support of Tshombe, both in the United states and locally. Bishop Booth himself was very much in evidence during the Katangan-UN confrontation and came to

me often and protested against the United Nations' actions. Many local Belgian businessmen protested against the United Nations' actions. They believed that Tshombe's rule was the only salvation for Katanga and for the Congo. While I was there, the Katangan authorities kidnapped the Italian Consul-General and kept him hidden. The place where he was secretly imprisoned was revealed because the people who were running it were Italians. It happened to be the bordello run for the Katangan Gendarmerie.

JK Was the UN involved in the protection of the tribal people?

Dean Not to my direct experience. Later, after the Tshombe secession was ended, the UN attempted to support the government of Sendwe on Lake Tanganyika in Albertville. But that was orthodox support for a legal government. So, I don't have any knowledge of support for minorities of one group against the other.

JK When was it that Tshombe gave up secession?

Dean He was obliged to. It was a lengthy development. In November of 1962, individual UN soldiers were pushed and shoved and beaten up in the market of Elisabethville. And then around Christmas of '62 . • [pause]

JK Were the beatings done by the Gendarmerie?

Dean They were Katangans, anyhow, including some rather tough market 'women as I understand it.

JK Were the UN soldiers resented by the Katangan people generally?

Dean Yes, to some extent. After all, they were representing a unified Congo to a government that had seceded. They were certainly resented by the Belgian population of Elisabethville including the union Miniere directors who were also backing Tshombe's secession. Their general view was that the Congo in its present state was ungovernable, but that Katanga was being relatively well governed and, of course, continuing to produce copper and that it was foolish to rejoin this well administered segment of the Congo to the anarchy and chaos of the rest of the country.

JK Well, originally, as I understand it, Hammarskjold had said that the UN forces would go in to preserve the peace and establish security but would stay out of the political problem of secession. Was there a policy change at some point?

Dean I'm sure that was his statement. But my understanding of the UN role was that it was attempting to preserve the unity of the country and to prevent it from falling apart. At least, that was our American understanding of the role of the UN, because the United States and many Western countries feared at that time, whether justified or not, that the Congo would become Balkanized into a lot of small states unable to sustain themselves and that

communist influence which was then feared so much, would become predominant in these ministates.

JK Did Tshombe have contact with the Soviets?

Dean No, Tshombe didn't, but, there was a very large number of Warsaw Pact advisers of all kinds, Soviets, East Germans and so forth, coming into Leopoldville. They were becoming more and more numerous at the time when Lumumba was deposed. But there never were any in Elisabethville. Indeed Tshombe had relations with the white government of Rhodesia. Not with the Soviets. To the contrary, in fact, he was anti-Soviet.

JK How was his relationship with the Us?

Dean His relationship with the US was ambivalent because on the one hand conservative Americans like Bishop Booth did support him. There was even a conservative group in the United States that thought well of him. Even my old boss, Ambassador George McGhee, who was Political Undersecretary in the State Department, thought rather well of him. So, there was a division of opinion in the Administration. However, the official policy of the Kennedy Administration as articulated by Assistant Secretary G. Mennen Williams was support for the unity of the Congo. The Belgians, too, were deeply divided, with the conservatives supporting the secession, and the socialist Spaak government opposing it. As a result, Tshombe never wished to entirely cut off relations with

the United States. In fact, he sought to use the American Consulate and the British Consul-General in Elisabethville as a kind of buffer against the UN.

Great Britain had not decided to really back resolute UN action to end the secession. So, superficially, Tshombe was always friendly towards us.

JK At the time that you were in Elisabethville, who was the President of the Republic of the Congo?

Dean Joseph Kasavubu, I believe.

JK Was there much dialogue between Tshombe and Kasavubu?

Dean No, they didn't have any contact, although Tshombe had been among the leaders in the period leading up to independence. And it was clear that he could play an important role in the united Congo. He often told me that yes, he could play a leading role but "they" would get him. Indeed, he later became Prime Minister of the Congo and then fled the country to live in Europe, and indeed, "they" did get him. His aircraft was taken off course by its own pilots when he was flying from Barcelona. They landed in Algeria and he was placed under house arrest and subsequently died. The official statement was that it was food poisoning or something like that, but it was generally believed that he had been murdered and had been poisoned.

JK Back to my earlier question, what were the circumstances around Tshombe's giving up the secession?

Dean There had been fighting between the UN forces in Elisabethville and the Katanga Gendarmerie in December of 1962 in which the UN forces were unable to break out of the city, break out through the Gendarmerie belt. The UN forces were changed as a result. Another military episode took place in December of '63 the following year. I was there. It began with an apparent Christmas celebration by the Katanga Gendarmerie. Some of them got to the top of the great big sinter heap from the copper mine. They were pretty drunk with their Christmas ration of beer and started falling down the slope of the heap and firing off their rifles in joy. Some of their pals thought that they were under fire from the UN forces inside the perimeter. Firing broke out all around the city on both sides and continued til morning. When the Gendarmerie stopped firing, the UN forces continued and vice versa. That was Christmas day. Tshombe was then summoned or asked to come to the office of Mr. Mathu, a Kenyan Kukuyu who was the UN local representative. Robert Gardiner, a **Ghanan**, was in overall charge at that point in the Congo. Tshombe insisted that I and the British Consul- General, Derek Dodson, accompany him and we both were present during this interview.

JK Who was at this interview?

Dean Mr. Eliud Mathu, General Prem Chand, General Noronah, Derek Dodson, the British Consul-General, myself, and of

course, Tshombe. Mr. Mathu and General Prem Chand told Tshombe that firing had been going on and the UN forces had to have freedom of movement -- that was part of their charter -- and the Gendarms had to remove their blockades from the various roads leading out of Elisabethville that, in fact, was hemmed in, so to speak. The Gendarmerie must be removed by three o'clock that afternoon. Tshombe said he could not do this on his own and that he would have to confer with his cabinet. So, the UN Representatives urged him to confer with his cabinet on the radio. And he did talk with them. I understand that there was a subsequent translation of his conversation -- in Lunda -- which indicated that he was just stalling and that he was not really prepared to do anything at that point.

JK So, when he was speaking on the radio he was speaking in Lunda and so the rest of you couldn't really understand what he was saying. Later you had an English translation?

Dean Yes, in any event, he did not remove his forces by the time the deadline came. Then the UN forces moved out and they were much more resolute than the original contingent had been. The Indian brigade which bore the brunt of the action were very fine soldiers. They broke out of the encirclement and actually pursued the Tshombe forces, which were withdrawing in the direction of the Angolan

border. At this point, there was a problem with U Thant, because he had committed himself to the Belgian Ambassador at the United Nations that the UN forces would not cross the Lufira River which was on the outskirts of the next larger town, a place called Jadotville, where they also had a copper refinery. But the UN forces did pursue the Gendarmerie, much to my satisfaction. I thought it was the right thing to do, because to leave the Gendarmerie intact would only assure continuation of the problem.

JK Were they stopped at any time by some kind of pressure?
Dean Well, they stopped for a time, but the issue was that they were withdrawing in complete good order and that they could have maintained the secession for an indefinite period if the UN forces had not pursued them and exploited their military victory. I was asked what my opinion was and I told them that I thought it was a good idea to keep going. This caused a problem because at the UN, the Belgian Ambassador's main desire was to prevent loss of life of Belgian civilians. And two were, in fact, killed as they attempted to run a road block in the town of Jadotville during the next couple of days.

JK Two Belgian civilians?
Dean Yes, the two Belgian civilians were killed. I have no doubt whatever if they had stopped at the road block that nothing would have happened. But they attempted to run

the road block in an automobile and they were killed, which caused considerable uproar in Belgium. So, there was a question about whether the UN troops should have gone beyond the Lufira. Mr. Ralph Bunche came out to have a chat with me and others as a result of this.

JK Previous to this there had been several incidents where Belgians had been badly treated.

Dean During the earlier military action in 1962, the Ethiopian troops, who were hard to control once they got started, had killed some Belgian civilians including the mother of one of the Union Miniere directors. That, of course, caused great problems. These were Ethiopian UN troops under the command of a man who later became the chief of staff of the Ethiopian army and was himself executed when the Mengistu group took over.

JK What other UN troops were involved at that time?

Dean They had an Irish battalion, some Swedes, those were the ones immediately there. They also had some Italian aviators some of whom were killed in Kindu, and they had some Malays. But the ones in Elisabethville were an Indian brigade, three battalions under General Noronah, and the Ethiopian brigade.

JK So, there was quite a mixture. I understand that in the beginning Hammarskjöld had tried to keep it more African.

Deant That's true, but it was not possible to do. They had Nigerians in Leopoldville.

JK So, the UN forces pursued Tshornbe's forces.

Dean They pursued Tshombe to the edge of Katanga where it bordered Angola, then still Portuguese Angola, and that broke the back of the resistance. A week or two later General Mobutu appeared and formally took over. That was the end of the secession.

JK What followed after that in terms of the reunification?

Dean They had a commissioner from the Congo, the central Congolese government, and he ran the place for a time. Then they had new elections and a gentleman named Edouard Bulundwe was elected as President of Katanga Province. Then, of course, they had the Simba uprising which came down from the north and came fairly close to Elisabethville. The Simbas did take over Albertville and killed Jason Sendwe, who was the local governor there. That was the furthest extent of their action.

JK So, there was still continued unrest.

Dean Unrest, definitely. This was a rebellion of disappointed expectations. But, the UN forces in Katanga were not very active in that.

JK What forces were involved in resolving that rebellion?

Dean The Congolese Armee Nationale.

JK How much was the UN involved in Katanga Province and in Elisabethville in the infrastructure after many of the Belgians left who had been running that part of the country?

Dean Well, there were still quite a number of them left. The UN and also the United States brought in quite a bit of food stuffs after the secession was over. I think we brought in white corn meal. I can't remember if it was white or yellow, but it was different than the corn meal that was normally used by the local population. They claimed that it was poisoned or designed to make them sterile. It was sort of like what the Germans said when we brought sweet potatoes into Germany right at the end of World War II. They'd never seen it before.

JK So, there was a lot of suspicion.

Dean Right.

JK In terms of running things, then, it wasn't as necessary in Elizabethville for the UN to get involved?

Dean No, not to the extent that they were doing in the other parts of the Congo.

JK Who were some of the important people that you worked with that were most vocal or influential in resolving the issues?

Dean Resolving?

JK Well, dealing with the issues, shall we say?

Dean I dealt mostly with Tshombe, his Foreign Minister, Evariste Kimba, who was later executed in Leopoldville for treason after the secession was over and not in connection with the secession, and with the UN, the Belgian Consul General, with the British and the French.

They were the people there actively.

JK You had mentioned that there were a lot of criticism of UN actions. What were some of those objections?

Dean The main objection was that the UN and the United States which supported the UN were not aware of the consequences of what they were doing. They were breaking down the only working structure in the Congo, namely the Katanga, and using force to do this against the desires of the local population. Then there were complaints about the behavior of the UN troops because some civilians were killed. Well, let me put it this way. I think your inquiry should be directed to the question of whether the UN force was completely responsive to U Thant. I did tell you about the crossing of the Lufira River.

JK They crossed in pursuit without his authorization?

Dean I don't know what the formal instructions were. They asked me for my opinion and I gave them my opinion that I thought it made more sense to pursue the Gendarmerie. Then when Dr. Bunche came out, he clearly had been sent by U Thant to find out what had gone on. He advised me that in the future, that I should keep my recommendations to American channels and not pass them on to the UN locally. Let that be done by governments.

JK Were there other incidences of differences between the UN forces there and the Security Council or U Thant?

Dean NO, I don't think so. I think that Robert Gardiner and

Dr. Bunche, and possibly U Thant were quite unhappy about the poor performance of the first Indian UN brigade that was in Elisabethville there which had allowed Tshombe and his secession forces to have the upper hand and to frustrate the United Nations. As a result, the reputé of the United Nations peace-keeping operations seemed to be pretty much in the balance. They were in Elisabethville, could not move, were locked in and were not effectively carrying out their mandate as they had been defeated and were surrounded by the Gendarmerie.

JK Was there adequate communications between the field and headquarters?

Dean I think they had adequate communication. The local representative, Mr. Mathu, was very much in a quandry as an African. He did not want to see the use of force against fellow Africans and yet he was the representative of U Thant. My feeling was that he was at war within himself and he may not have been a clear voice either way. But, that certainly was not true of Robert Gardiner who knew what he wanted which was to end the secession and restore the unity of the Congo.

JK In general, in peace-keeping, UN forces are not allowed to fire unless fired upon. But in this case that policy changed. Is that correct?

Dean They were fired on. This was self-defense. They were being fired upon in this incident at the copper mine.

Whether they were still being fired on when they decided they had to move out is another matter. But I consider that they made the right decision. They had been fired on and they were being impeded by this military force which was not the legal arm of the government of the Congo. I consider that they acted properly.

JK After the UN forces had gained control was there any trouble removing the mercenaries?

Dean No, most of them took off on their own seeing what the situation was. A few of them joined the remnant of Tshombe's forces in Angola right over the border and were there for quite some time. You may be aware there was later a French action in support of the Congolese forces when they again clashed with these remnants.

JK When did that take place?

Dean Several years thereafter.

JK Were the mercenaries primarily African?

Dean No, they were Western. There was one British man, Mike Hoar, but most of them were Belgian and French.

JK Hammarskjold died before you were in Elisabethville. Was there any suspicion of foul play surrounding his death?

Dean Yes, there was. The version that I heard, however, was that, for one reason or another, the pilot of his plane had been using aviation maps of Ndola in Angola, which was near sea level, and not the Ndola in Rhodesia, where the crash occurred, which was several thousand feet above sea

level. I don't know if that is the case. Other than that, I don't have any particular knowledge of the circumstances. But, as you know, this entire matter led to the Uniting for Peace resolution, the effort on the part of the United States and other member states to run peace-keeping through the General Assembly instead of through the Security Council where it was often blocked, although tolerated at the outset, by the Soviet Union. This then led to the selling of bonds and the non-payment by the Soviet Union of their arrears to keep this up and all that. This was a high water mark of peace-keeping or of a claim by the United Nations towards having some at least fragmentary independent executive authority of its own.

JK As you said at the beginning there had been support within the Security Council.

Dean Someone in the Soviet Government seems to have been asleep at the switch when the original resolutions on the Congo were passed, so they let them through. But then, the Soviets returned to a negative position. So, the United States and others sought to shift decision-making to the General Assembly.

JK Were there changes in the Republic of the Congo, also? Hadn't Lumumba turned to the Soviets which he hadn't done before?

Dean That was the fear and, of course, this increasing number

of Warsaw Pact, East Block advisers caused people to fear that the country could be taken over by the Communists. To what extent that was a realistic danger I cannot assess at this point.

JK So, at that point the Secretary-General turned to the General Assembly.

Dean As did the United States, but that is a different chapter, of the institutional history of the UN. My understanding of the United Nations principle was that, once having been invited into a country to help and provide order, the UN then retained the right of free movement throughout the country until the Security Council decided otherwise. This was the issue on which the fighting actually took place in Katanga. But Lumumba had asked the UN to leave several times, so, the question is, were the UN forces a power unto themselves, still demanding free movement throughout the country and refusing to leave. Of course, the UN said that the Security Council had not reversed their mandate, and that was correct. These developments raise a lot of very interesting issues for the long term future.

JK What kinds of issues do you see coming out of that?

Dean With the Security Council now moving toward a situation where it can function again and could send peace-keeping forces in, in some circumstances, if this line of thought were followed, the UN could for a time be the controlling force within a country. I personally am not

opposed to that and am interested in it from an institutional growth point of view.

JK Getting back to some of your experiences in Elisabethville, was there any fear for your safety?

Dean There was a lot of shooting at all times throughout this confrontation. I was threatened with the kidnapping of my family by Kimba, then Tshombe's Foreign Minister. There was an organized demonstration with rock throwing surrounding our consulate. They did kidnap the Italian Consul General, so there was a good deal of agitation. Then there was a lot of loose gunfire going on almost every day.

JK When did that begin to settle down?

Dean After the Gendarmerie encirclement had been broken through, then it was over except then it started up in the north with the separate Simba uprising.

JK In summary what do you think were the causes of so much conflict after independence and was there anything the UN could have done to help things go more smoothly?

Dean The immediate cause of the problems was the mutiny of the Congolese army, which had not been trained for independence by Belgium. And as I recollect, the former Commander of the Force Publique, General Janssens, explained to an assembly of the new army, none of whom had been more than sergeants before, that their situation had not fundamentally changed after independence. Then the new Congolese

Parliament gave itself big salary increases and also gave the civilian bureaucracy big salary increases but did not do so to the army. That was the immediate cause of the mutiny.

JK So, there was resentment.

Dean Yes. Well, what lessons from the experience? Well, in the fall months of 1963, many people seemed to think that the confrontation between the Gendarmerie and the UN forces would come to a head in fighting. I reported that it would, probably do so, and that the UN forces were getting ready for a showdown. But, you would have to go to those who were dealing with the UN in Leopoldville, that is to Robert Gardiner, to Ambassador Edmund Gullion, or Mac Godley, then our Deputy Chief of Mission, to get the picture from there. I went down infrequently to our Embassy and I am not privy to what went on in that regard.

JK Did you have any direct contact with U Thant?

Dean No, the only UN official I talked with was Robert Gardiner aside from those locally, Mathu and General Prem Chand, and later with Ralph Bunche.

JK Was there anything that the UN could have done early on to make things go smoother? Were there mistakes that could have been avoided?

Dean Well, I think they corrected one major mistake, which was to have an inferior unit there in the first place.

JK In Elisabethville?

Dean Yes. They allowed themselves to get surrounded and besieged. I have been told that if they had had a better unit there in the first place, this would not have happened to this extent and the secession would have ended earlier and the whole thing would not have been drawn out to the point where the United Nations troops were prisoners in Elizabethville and the credit of the United Nations operation was becoming rather questionable.

JK Did the leader of those troops have some ambivalence about his role that led to this?

Dean Mathu was not there at that time, but I think the Indian brigade Commander who was there at the time of the first clash might have had some ambivalence. I don't think the unit was the best quality one, but the Indian forces decided that was not going to happen again and they sent very good troops the second time. They rotated them. General Rikhye was in Leopoldville at the time. But, in any case, it was a very successful operation -- there was very little loss of life -- very well conducted by very excellent professional soldiers. The Indians were in the forefront in the move across Katanga. The Ethiopians were there but it was harder to focus them.

JK Were there discipline problems?

Dean Yes, within the Ethiopian forces, the officers were not always in control even when there wasn't fighting. When

there was, the Ethiopian soldiers were quite fierce once they got cranked up and going. But, I'm sure that it is difficult for the UN central administration for peacekeeping to make a selection. They have to go to countries and ask them for contingents. They can't say we want your "A" number one fighting unit because things might get tough here. I suppose in the future they could be more clear about their requirements, but then, people were feeling their way.

JK Did you have any information about where Tshombe was getting his supplies, weapons, etc.?

Dean Well, he didn't have very many heavy weapons and he didn't have any aircraft. He might have had a few light aircraft for surveillance purposes but he didn't have heavy weapons. He only had what the Force Publique had before. It was the stiffening of their fighting capacity through these mercenaries that added the decisive military element to the first encounter. This was infantry action. The Gendarmerie may have gotten some ammunition from Rhodesia.

JK Is there anything else yOU'd like to add?

Dean As I have pointed out, there were lots of important political issues involved, but by and large it was a successful operation for the UN and for the Congo. There is a question in my mind today as to whether there was a real Communist threat at that time, but our government

thought there was. Moreover, there was a general feeling throughout Africa that to let countries fall apart and secede would be very bad for many African countries, most of which had arbitrary boundaries drawn by colonial powers. The Lunda were in northern Rhodesia and also in the Congo, for example.

JK So, that tribe had been split up and others might be grouped with other tribes that didn't get along well.

Dean Yes. Given what the UN started with, it was a successful operation in the end.

JK Thank you very much for giving your time to do this interview.

Dean I was glad to do it.



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