

United Nations Oral History Project

G. McMurtrie Godley
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JK: Ambassador Godley, for the record would you explain what your position was in the Congo and when it was that you were there?

Godley: I went to the Congo in the spring of 1961 as a DCM, Deputy Chief of Mission. And shortly after I arrived the Ambassador, Timberlake, left and I was Charge for about a year. That was until 1962 and then I returned to the United States and was director of the Office of Central African Affairs, which included the Congo. I was there until 1963 when I went as Ambassador to the Congo replacing Ed Gullion.

JK: You came in 1961 and at that time the Adoula government had not yet been formed.

Godley: Correct.

JK: However, your arrival was after the death of Lumumba.

Godley: Yes, quite a bit after.

JK: At the time that you arrived was there any discussion or any sources of information available to you about the death of Lumumba?

Godley: There was quite a bit of talk about it but we were not concerned with it.

JK: Was there any evidence that there had been any complicity on the part of any of the Western governments or the United Nations regarding his death?

Godley: No. No serious person ever attributed Lumumba's death to anything more than a bitter intra-Congolese affair. And

if anyone was involved it would have been either Mobutu and/or Kasavubu.

JK: So, it was felt that it was a tribal rivalry.

Godley: Yes, tribal plus politics.

JK: You arrived after the change in US Administration from Eisenhower to the Kennedy Administration. Did there seem to be any policy change toward the Congo?

Godley: Not that I was aware of.

JK: What was the US policy toward the Katanga secession?

Godley: Well, we were opposed to the secession. We saw that the secessionists were strongly supported by the Belgians and the French. That would have forced the rest of the Congo to go to the left. In other words, if there were any warfare between the Katangese and the rest of the Congo that would not only be a tragedy but because the Katangese state was so overtly supported by the Belgians, the French, the mercenaries, etc., the rest of the Congo would have to turn to the East. The rest of the Congo would move in a radical direction.

JK: Who were some of the principle actors in the Congo during the time that you were there? Whom did you have contact with at the UN?

Godley: I had a lot of contact with Sture Linner and we became actually very good friends. There were other people in the UN that we saw a lot of and we cultivated them both socially and professionally. On the Congolese side there

was Kasavubu, who was a rather austere goldfish. Then there were others who were more intelligent, quite well versed in politics and business affairs, other Congolese like Bamboko, Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Ndele, who was the banker; Kasongo, I forget what he was. I just remember the name.

JK: Was Ralph Bunche still there at that time?

Godley: No, Ralph came out at the time of the Kitona negotiations, but he was not there when I got there. He had already left. I mainly worked with Linner and Khiary. But, Linner ran the show, a very, very capable man.

JK: How often did you get together with them to discuss issues?

Godley: At least once a day.

JK: Very often, then. Well, Hammarskjold was still Secretary General when you were there. What were the circumstances around his flight to Ndola and his ultimate death?

Godley: That was a tragedy in that we were all convinced that it was, and we know that it was, a pilot error. He was going down to Ndola to meet with the British and hopefully with Tshombe to try to convince Tshombe to give up the secession. They didn't file a flight plan, rather they filed a false flight plan. So, that when the plane was overdue they didn't know where to look. As a matter of fact, we heard about the disappearance at about 8

o'clock that morning. And I went to see Linner and a fellow named Morrison who was a Canadian airman and who was in charge of the UN airforce. We had a very competent air attache who happened to have been in Elizabethville at that time. We had a lot of respect for this American airman. With him doing the investigation we didn't care particularly what anybody else said about it. He was such a competent guy. Actually, he was the one who found the remains of the aircraft right near the Ndola airfield. Matlock went to the aircraft and he identified Hammarskjold's body. Then they went into the compartment, I think it was a C-54, and they checked the landing manual for the C-54 for what pressure it should be and things like that. There was nothing they could find except they were 300 feet too low.

JK: Did there seem to be any indication of sabotage?

Godley: No, not at all. That was all malarchy. Then Matlock went in the cockpit and he had the manual for the C-54, or whatever the aircraft was, for what the pressure would be and all these things. Everything was perfect except the altimeter was 300 feet too low.

JK: At what point then did U Thant take over for Hammarskjold?

Godley: I don't know. I was out of the Congo by that time.

JK: Did you work with other embassies and consulates while you were there?

Godley: Yes, I worked very closely with the British, the French, the West Germans, the Belgians, of course, very closely.

JK: The British, what was their attitude toward the Katanga secession?

Godley: They thought the same way we did. But, London was a little bit nervous about it and they were not as definite as we were about supporting Leopoldville against Elizabethville. The Belgians, of course, in Leopoldville were not as pro-Katanga as Brussels. But, they were not as strong supporters of the UN as we were.

JK: Then the US Embassy was a strong supporter of the UN operation?

Godley: Yes.

JK: And the British were not as strong a supporter?

Godley: Right.

JK: Was there a time at which they changed their attitude and became more supportive?

Godley: Not that I was aware of.

JK: Were you involved in setting up the meeting in Kitona?

Godley: Very much so.

JK: Could you explain how that meeting came about and your involvement in that?

Godley: Well, the meeting came about by the desire of Washington to seek an end to the hostilities brought about by the secession of Katanga. President Kennedy had been

very much involved. We got Tshombe to agree to come up to Kitona. And the UN was the agency acting as mediator between Leopoldville and Elizabethville. We were very active in supporting the UN but, actually much of the impetus came from us.

JK: So, it was the US Embassy that brought the meeting together.

Godley: I didn't say we brought it together, but, we helped in every way we could, logisitcally and otherwise. Ed Gullion and I went there and did what we could in support of Ralph Bunche who came out for the meeting. We were helping with the Leopoldville elements as well as with the Katanga elements. There were no other non-UN foreign people at Kitona.

JK: Tshombe and Adoula were both there.

Godley: Yes.

JK: What kind of agreements were reached? The fighting continued after that.

Godley: I don't remember. You'd have to check the state department records for that. It's all there. You ought to check the telegrams in Washington.

JK: As a part of the Embassy were you involved in informing the UN, or the ONUC operation there, on political developments either on the US side or internationally?

Godley: We shared our information with the UN and similarly they shared theirs with us. We worked very closely. There

was 100% cooperation.

JK: What kind of logistics for the Congo operation did the US supply?

Godley: Well, we supported the UN financially. We were one of the major contributors. We didn't have any aircraft under direct use by the UN. You'd have to check the records on that.

There were very few Americans on the UN staff in Leopoldville.

JK: Did the US supply any support outside the UN channels?

Godley: No. But, of course, there were missionaries and people like that there who were Americans. Purposefully we funneled as much of our assistance as possible through the UN. We avoided any overt bilateral aid programs because by so doing we could keep out the Soviets. If we did it through the UN then we could get the UN to tell the Soviet government to go through the UN. Actually we got the Congolese to tell the Soviets to do it through the UN.

JK: So, you didn't want to establish a precedent for bilateral arrangements because then they could go to the Soviets in the same manner. Are there any comments you would like to make about your time in the Congo or in the State Department back in Washington?

Godley: Well, it was a fascinating time. It was a very demanding job. Of course, we were very much concerned about the

American far Right, Thomas Dodd and men of that ilk, the Senator from Connecticut, a horrible man, a filthy person.

JK: What kinds of problems had Senator Dodd created?

Godley: He was supporting Tshombe against the policy of this government. He made speeches to Congress on behalf of Tshombe and the Katanga secession. And he was in very close touch with Tshombe's man in this country, Michel Stoulens. And Stoulens was actually writing some of the speeches Dodd gave on the Senate floor.

JK: Did he have much influence in the Congress?

Godley: In the Right, he had some support.

One group we saw a lot of was the Israeli Embassy. The Israeli policy at that time was identical to ours. And they were very helpful and extremely intelligent, professional diplomats.

JK: There was a lot of criticism of the UN operation from many sides. What were some of the criticisms?

Godley: The major criticism we were conscious of was again from the American far Right that was supporting the Katangese secession which the UN was trying to suppress. And the military operations by the UN were criticized again by the far Right.

JK: Did you feel any of those criticisms were well founded?

Godley: The policy was that we were one hundred percent in support of the UN. There might have been some instances

of poor administration. But, any organization has that including our own.

JK: Were you able to observe how the UN troops conducted themselves?

Godley: Not personally, but Jonathan Dean was in Elizabethville and knows a great deal about that.

JK: In general, though, was it felt that the UN troops were well disciplined?

Godley: It depended. The Irish troops weren't any good. They were great people for fighting in bars but when it came to shooting, they weren't very good. The Ethiopians left a lot to be desired. The Swedish air force, of course, was outstanding. The Canadians had a few good people. The ones that were really first rate were the Indians and the Nigerians. The latter did most of the policing in Leopoldville. They also had one or two battalions of Nigerian troops who were first rate. But, again they had British company officers and the head man would be a Nigerian. But, the company officers to a large degree were still Englishmen. They were first rate.

JK: Was there any problem with your personal safety or the safety of other foreigners in Leopoldville?

Godley: Well, except for the Nigerians who were the police force, there was no security in Leopoldville and there was a lot of vandalism. There were various incidents involving Europeans. The Danish Embassy was burglarized one night.

They went in and stripped the bed clothes off the Ambassador's bed. He and his wife slept in the nude. They were both scared stiff and rightly so. The Americans had one or two incidents. One American shot a robber and we got him out of the country pretty fast. Then we had the tragedy of the army attache who was shot. That hit the press here in a rather lurid fashion.

If you can imagine a country approximately one third the size of the United States with absolutely no law and order except for that provided by the UN. Then you had the tragedy of the poor Italian aviators who got eaten. And no one was ever brought to court. The American who was killed, they never found out who did that. There were several incidents just before independence. The guy was sexually deranged. He shot at a missionary who was in bed with his wife. He was arrested but he got out with independence when they broke loose the jails. They think that it was possible that the same man may have been the one who shot the American, the military attache.

JK: Did the UN try to get personnel into positions to gain some control over the law and order situation?

Godley: They had some units scattered throughout the country particularly in the big cities. They were spread out pretty thin.

JK: Was the US involved in helping to establish law and order or was that solely left to the UN?

Godley: We couldn't be involved because if we were involved the Soviets would want to come in on the same basis that we were there.

JK: Did the Soviets have representation in Leopoldville at the time that you were there?

Godley: No, they were thrown out.

JK: And they did not come back?

Godley: No.

JK: The operation took longer than had been originally anticipated. Were there things the UN could have done better or was the situation just impossible?

Godley: We all felt the UN did a really remarkable job. The radio, the communications were all run by the UN. The Post Office, the telegraph, and the weather forecasting was all UN personnel. The medical care that there was, was UN. WHO, the World Health Organization, was there. The UN FAO got involved with agriculture, and so forth. They sent UN teachers out there. There was a Swiss medical team and the UN helped them.

JK: In your opinion what was the quality of the UN personnel involved in the Congo?

Godley: By in large, remarkable. . . . dedicated, and brave.

JK: What period of time were you back in Washington?

Godley: 1962 to 1964.

JK: And then you went back to the Congo?

Godley: Yes.

JK: When you returned to the Congo did you see an improvement, for example, in law and order?

Had the Congolese moved into any positions to take over the running of the country?

Godley: No, not really. They didn't really have a clue about how to run the place. The only thing they were interested in was money. The avarice was just incredible. And, now, of course, it's really a tragedy. You saw that article in the New York Times four days ago about Mobutu? The tragedy was that we were against graft. We were also for budgetary control. Your biggest element in a budget in a newly emerging state is salaries. So, we would tell them to try and keep the salaries down. But, then say a policeman was getting about five dollars or ten dollars a month. His salary might buy enough food for one or two people but he probably had five or ten kids. So, the temptation to take a bribe is great. The situation was terrible.

JK: So, there was a major problem with corruption.

Godley: Yes, and it got worse the higher up.

JK: What about the education level of the Congolese?

Godley: Contrary to most people's impressions the Belgians had provided the broadest base of education of any colonial power in Africa. But, they just went up through the fourth or fifth grade. There was a higher rate of literacy in the Congo than in any other African country.

But they never moved up. For example, in the army there were six black sergeants. That was all. The British and the French had native officers and moved some blacks up one administrative level, but their educational base was narrow.

JK: Was the US involved in trying to improve the educational system?

Godley: Very much so. President Eisenhower gave as an independence present to the Congo many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of scholarships to American Universities.

JK: To bring the Congolese to the United States to study?

Godley: Right, to bring them over as freshmen, but also high school students, too. Then Ike changed all that because it was counterproductive. These young Africans would come over and get involved in all our racial problems. They would get involved with American girls. Some of them would marry these poor girls and they'd go back to the Congo and live in a mud hut with the mother-in-law ruling the roost. So, what we did, we still had some scholarships left over, we made it just for postgraduates, people who already had a college education and were happily married with families in the Congo. And there we had better luck. And they knew where they wanted to go, for example, if they wanted to go to MIT to study under professor so and so, or Yale or any other. So, that worked better. Sending the kids, well, they

would be lost.

JK: Did any of these Congolese postgraduates then come back and serve in the government?

Godley: I don't really know.

JK: When the UN troops left the Congo in 1964 did other UN personnel stay on?

Godley: They were greatly reduced in size and budget but they were still there when I left in 1966. And there is still some UN presence there today, WHO, FAO, etc.

JK: During the period 1965 and 1966 had things improved in Leopoldville, for example, in terms of law and order?

Godley: It wasn't as bad as it had been in 1960, but there weren't many honest policemen even today there aren't.

JK: After the UN troops had left there was an uprising in the Stanleyville area.

Godley: Yes, there was the Gizenga civil war.

JK: Were you involved in the air drop that took place at that time?

Godley: Yes, very much so. There are some good things written about this by military men and if you are interested you should get a hold of these. Dragon Rouge (Red Dragon) was the code name of the air drop. There is a lot written both in Belgium and in this country by the military.

JK: What was your involvement? What were the circumstances?

Godley: We were involved in the planning, the military strategy, and we supplied the airlift. The Belgians supplied the

troops. We made some recommendations. One of our primary concerns in the Congo was security. That involved the army. I would say the principal objective during the whole time I was there was to improve the quality of the Congolese army which was a very difficult thing to do. The Congolese officers in the military were trash. No one knew what being an officer meant. But, we kept trying to improve their quality.

JK: How did you go about trying to improve their quality?

Godley: Send them to schools. Sending Americans out there to conduct classes in the Congo and bringing them to military schools in the United States. Trying to get good candidates for these schools was difficult. Then we tried to get other countries to do the same. The Italians sent an air mission there. They were training Congolese airmen. The Israelis were training parachutists and training some officers in Israel. Developing a military establishment was one of our major objectives.

JK: So, at the time of the airlift then you did not feel the Congolese army was capable of running such a mission?

Godley: No, you can't imagine how awful the Congolese soldiers were. They were terrible.

JK: So, they did not offer protection for the foreigners that were still living there. Were many foreigner taken out of the Congo at the time of the airlift?

Godley: No, only those who were wounded. No more than at other times. There were about 50 who were wounded and they were taken out.

JK: Well, unless you have anything else you'd like to add I have completed the questions.

Godley: No, it takes some time to get my thoughts together on this.

JK: Thank you very much for participating in the interview and we will send you a transcript as soon as it is ready.



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