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JK: Mr. Sherry, what was your position during the Congo operation and when did you become involved? You could start with your experience here in New York first.

Sherry: I had been for a number of years an interpreter and then deputy chief interpreter of the United Nations. During that time I was doing my graduate work at Columbia University. As soon as I passed my PhD orals in 1959, I was invited to do some work in the political field which had been my specialty in any case all along, in the Disarmament Affairs Center on a part-time basis, on a loan basis. Then I was watching with fascination the unfolding of events in the Congo in 1960. Heinz Wieschhoff, who was Director of the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs, was at the annual Christmas party. The Disarmament Center where I was doing some papers was in the same Department. And he approached me while we were loading up on ham and cole slaw and potato salad and asked me whether I was interested in what was happening in the Congo. Of course, I said yes. Then he told me, "well, we are doing very interesting work here." Then he pulled out a couple of letters from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Congo, Mr. Kasavubu. He said, "that's the sort of thing we write here." Then he mentioned some of the papers of mine that he had seen and asked me if I would be interested in doing work of this kind. I said,
that would be fantastic. It's the sort of thing I had dreamed of. Then we sort of drifted apart and the next morning I called him up and I said, "remember, Heinz, we met at the party on the 35th floor and you asked me about my interests. Did you really mean it or was that just conversation?" He said, "I certainly meant it. Would you come and see me?" So, I said, "of course." And I was up there in quarter of a second flat. So, he offered to ask for my services on a temporary or tentative basis because I was still an interpreter.

JK: What languages were you interpreting?

Sherry: I was interpreting French and Russian into English. So, I had interpreted all the Russian and French-speaking biggies over the previous dozen years. Anyway, he put me to work within two days. I was up there starting to work my way through the files of code cables and confidential memoranda and so forth. There were quite a few of them because 1960 had been a mad year. Almost immediately thereafter, we got into the problem of the kidnapping and subsequent murder of Patrice Lumumba, who was the Prime Minister of the Congo. So, within a few days of going up there I was drafting cables and notes from the Secretary-General and communications and preparing reports to the Security Council. We were usually working until nine or ten o'clock in the evening every day including Saturdays and
Sundays.

JK: So, you were following events in the Congo on a daily basis?

Sherry: Yes, but of course, in that office unlike some other offices, we didn't follow events, we were also directing the UN operation. It was an enormously interesting and rewarding kind of work. My wife wasn't very happy about my working hours, but, of course, she appreciated that I was doing exactly the kind of work I had been training for. After that I was given the assignment of drafting most of the communications to the Belgian government, which, of course, was very much involved in that. All of this was in 1961. I was also writing analytic papers and lots of reports to the Security Council. It wasn't a full-time job; it was like three full-time jobs.

JK: You later went to the Congo.

Sherry: Yes, what happened was that in September, 1961 -- I think it was the second of September -- the Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, sent two rather crucial letters with regard to the Congo to Mr. Paul Henri Spaak, who was Foreign Minister of Belgium at the time. Hammarskjold himself had drafted one of the letters and he asked me to draft the other one. As I recall he rather liked what I had concocted. Then we were waiting for the final clean copy in French from the editors and typists and so on. So, we were there til about two o'clock in the morning
just waiting on the 38th floor in the Secretary-General's office. We were mostly discussing French medieval literature and medieval political theory, which is an item of great interest to me and which as it turned out Hammarskjold was a great expert in.

A few days later arrangements were being made for the trip in which the Secretary-General was going to leave for the Congo, his final, fatal trip. Heinz Wieschhoff, my boss, a man whom I admire enormously; we got along famously together and I mourn his untimely passing to this day -- was supposed to go with Hammarskjold. Then Wieschhoff got a very heavy cold and bronchitis; perhaps it was closer to pneumonia. So, he told me, "George, you'll be going with the Secretary-General because I can't do it." He called me from home. He was sick and the group was supposed to leave a few days later. But then, two days before the departure of the group, that is the Secretary-General and his advisors, Wieschhoff came back to the office, still hoarse and he still had a fever, but he said that he felt that he should go with the Secretary-General on this trip. He told me, "don't worry, George, this is just going to be a short trip. There will be a longer trip next month and you will go on that one and then you will remain behind in the Congo in one of the senior posts." I was furious because I was all set to go. I wanted to go in the worst way. Little
did I know, of course, that if I had gone I wouldn’t be here to be interviewed by you. The plane which carried Hammarskjold, Wieschhoff, Fabry, and the others crashed on the 17th of September near Ndola. I remember getting a phone call from the cable office at home during the small hours of the 18th. Then we buried what was left of poor Heinz Wieschhoff in Keene, New York, where he had his summer home.

JK: I was going to ask you some questions about Hammarskjold’s death so, while we are on the subject I will do that now. What were the circumstances around his trip at that point? He was going to meet Tshombe. Was there some suspicion or any evidence that the plane had been sabotaged?

Sherry: There was suspicion. I don’t think there was any conclusive evidence. We did carry out a very thorough investigation and I am personally quite satisfied that there was no foul play involved. The Swedish crew of the plane on which Hammarskjold was flying down to Ndola was exhausted. They had been flying for about nine hours because they had taken a very circuitous route precisely in order to avoid attack and they had maintained radio silence. It does seem that the pilot or navigator must have made a mistake about the airport and the altitude. And so, in going down he set a course for landing at a point about 2,000 feet below the point where he was
supposed to land. So, of course, they hit the trees.

JK: They crashed near the airport.

Sherry: They crashed near the airport, on the approach to the airport. The plane was running under full power and it just hit the trees and cartwheeled and that was it.

JK: And that was at night.

Sherry: That was at night, right.

JK: Did the officials at the airport immediately go and investigate the crash?

Sherry: No, there were a number of misunderstandings because another plane had come in carrying Lord Lansdowne -- I would have to look up the details -- and no investigation was carried out until the next morning, although some people had testified that they had seen a big flash. But the airport people said that they had assumed that the plane wasn't going to land there and had gone off somewhere else. The delay obviously was unfortunate. But, none of this gives any indication of foul play. The conclusion has been that there was no foul play. It was an accident. It was probably pilot error and that was it. It was very tragic.

Then we got going in New York on what needed to be done which was to conclude a cease-fire and stop the fighting that had broken out. The fighting had broken out in connection with the UN operation in Elisabethville which was to see that the mercenaries and political
advisors were removed from Katanga and the Congo territory.

JK: Just to establish a little of what was going on at that time, the Katanga province had seceded from the rest of the Congo, at that time the UN representative in Elisabethville was Conor Cruise O’Brien. In the Leopoldville office it was Sture Linner.

Sherry: And Khiary was his deputy. He was the man in charge of civilian operations. Khiary went down to Ndola immediately to conclude a cease-fire and this was done. We were working on it from the New York end. I remember Oscar Schachter taking care of the legal aspects and we were preparing the report for the Security Council. Of course, we were all incredibly depressed and sorrowful after what had happened.

JK: The Elisabethville office had been asked to remove the Belgian military advisors.

Sherry: Not just Belgian, there were quite a few others. They were a motley crew of various nationalities, French, South African, and a number of others. They were by no means all Belgians.

JK: And that operation had run into some problems. After Hammarskjold’s death you were in New York. How long did you remain in New York?

Sherry: I remained in New York until September, 1962. Then I was sent to Katanga. By then the Special Representative was
Gardiner, Bob Gardiner of Ghana. I arrived in Leopoldville. Gardiner put me up in his house. We discussed the situation and he decided that the most productive thing to do was to send me to Elisabethville where the action was. Because by then it was clear that the negotiations for the implementation of the Kitona declaration -- the Kitona declaration had been arrived at in December if I remember correctly -- and under that Tsombe undertook to nullify the attempted secession and to join a newly organized federated Republic of the Congo. He had agreed to that in December, 1961, after Brian Urquhart's stint as Representative in Katanga. Negotiations went on. Brian was kidnapped by the Gendarmerie, was beaten up, and had his nose broken. The negotiations were then placed under the supervision of Jose Rolz-Bennett. He went there as Representative in Elisabethville and in the end those negotiations got into a dead end. It became perfectly clear to everybody, governments and so on, that Tshombe was in no way interested in ending the secession and rejoining the Congo.

JK: So, basically after Kitona, he reneged.

Sherry: Right, he basically reneged on his commitment. So, we all rather feared that there would be serious events in the offing. Also, at that time there was considerable apprehension that we might lose the Indian contingent.
The apprehension was due to the fact that India had got into a fight with China over the Chinese-Indian border in Assam. There was a Chinese invasion and the Indians did not do very well. The thought was that probably the Indian contingent would be withdrawn from the Congo, but in the end Nehru decided to keep it there because the war with the Chinese ground to halt. This is what made it possible for the Indians to stay in Elisabethville. We had about 12 thousand troops in Elizabethville at that point. They were a major component of ONUC. And, of course, they were very important because the Indian government fully realized they would have to defend themselves and they would have to take casualties.

So, I went off to Elisabethville. The man in charge at that time was a Kenyan by the name of Eliud Mathu, a highly experienced, British trained, Balliol College, Oxford, that sort of thing, official who had been in public life in Kenya for bonkers years. I became his deputy in Elisabethville.

JK: What were the conditions in Elisabethville at that time?
Sherry: The UN troops were there and the conditions were tense. At one point an Indian officer was killed in a UN helicopter by fire from below.

JK: He was shot down by the Gendarmerie?
Sherry: Yes, and there were continual incidents, UN troops and the Gendarmerie who tried to deny the UN officials in the
area their freedom of movement. We had freedom of movement from the government of the Congo, except that the government of the Congo was not in the position to exercise its authority in Katanga, which we did not recognize. The very convenient thing was that there I was, writing those blistering letters to Tshombe and he considered himself the President of Katanga and he signed his letters in that way. We, of course, could not address any letters to a President of a Republic of Katanga. However, under the Constitution of the Congo the title of the governor of a province was Provincial President. So, therefore, it was perfectly convenient to address him as Mr. President because under the Constitution he was indeed the Provincial President of Katanga. That's just one of those odd things.

JK: What kind of a man was Tshombe to deal with?

Sherry: Tshombe was a courageous man. He was intelligent. He knew exactly what he was doing. There was no good faith about him. He was easily influenced by the mercenaries, the advisors, and the people of the Union Minière. I remember I had a long interview about two days after I arrived with Assoignon, who was one of the top officials of the Union Minière at that time, just to explore a number of issues that were involved. One was the question of what to do about taxes that were collected by the Union Minière in Katanga and which didn't get to the
central government. The main thing was that the Union Miniere was in effect supporting the secession by financing Tshombe and indirectly advising him on the policies to be followed. It was an interesting interview but inconclusive because the Union Miniere was not about to change its policy. I should perhaps have mentioned that after the death of Hammarskjold I was called in to the office of Andrew Cordier. He was then the executive assistant to Hammarskjold and later to U Thant, and later on Under-Secretary in charge of Assembly Affairs. But at that time he and Ralph Bunche and Narasimhan were left holding the bag, running the house. U Thant had not yet been elected. I'm talking about September 19th or 20th or 21st, 1961, right after the crash. And they informed me that Hammarskjold on the advice of Wieschhoff had decided, just a couple of days before leaving on his final and fatal mission, to transfer me to the executive office of the Secretary-General. I was informed that this was going to be carried out. Also according to Hammarskjold's wishes Ralph Bunche was going to be in charge of the operation. So, that meant that I was going to be working with Ralph Bunche and Brian Urquhart. I was delighted, of course. That is when I was officially transferred from the interpretation service to the political side in the office of the Secretary-General. I remained there until my retirement from the United

JK: You have mentioned that you worked with Ralph Bunche, Andrew Cordier, and Dag Hammarskjold. What were some of these people like to work with, for example, Ralph Bunche?

Sherry: They were extraordinary people, every one of them.

JK: Were they truly international civil servants?

Sherry: Totally international civil servants. Bunche was super brilliant, a man of incredible integrity, an incredibly hard worker, but a man whose sunny disposition never left him. His intellectual power was incredible. I remember seeing big power senior ambassadors waiting to see him and nervously going through their briefs because you couldn't put anything over on Bunche. If anything was wrong he would pick it up immediately. The man must have had an astronomically high IQ. He also was a wonderful human being. He gave a lot of leeway. He listened to advice. He listened to criticism. He was helpful. He was creative. He was extraordinarily creative politically. He was a tremendously powerful negotiator. I had the opportunity of seeing that in action. There is really no experience like it, except, of course, similar experience with Brian Urquhart, who was indeed a worthy successor.

JK: What were your impressions of Dag Hammarskjold?

Sherry: He was a Swedish aristocrat, a super blue blood Swedish
aristocrat, a man of extraordinary brilliance and erudition. I mentioned his erudition in political philosophy and theory, and French medieval literature. The whole intellectual world was his oyster. He was very active in the selection of Nobel Prizes for literature. That was one of his interesting side occupations. His exchanges of letters with friends in Sweden were very interesting. He did not suffer fools gladly. I saw him just take off with those blue eyes of his at somebody who had done sloppy work without raising his voice, very courteously, but he made his point very clearly. I was awed by him. At the same time I found him to be an extraordinarily congenial and courteous human being, a man of utterly unimaginable brilliance. I only wish I had had a longer opportunity to work with him, but it was not to be.

JK: He had anticipated that there might be trouble in the Congo with independence and had asked Ralph Bunche to watch it carefully. He also exercised the use of article 99 in connection with the Congo.

Sherry: That was already in July 1960, when I was not involved in this except that I was an interpreter and I was in the Security Council when those things happened. I was right there.

JK: Why was it that he had to use article 99 and what was the significance of that?
Sherry: The significance was that the Congo was faced with the mutiny of the Congolese army, was faced with the secession of Katanga which meant the disintegration of the Congo. The Congolese government, that is President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba, had first applied for help to the United States. The United States was reluctant and told them to get in touch with the United Nations. The Congolese did so, and also approached the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union sent some planes and some assistance. The big fear among the Washington Cold Warriors -- and I felt then and I feel today that was always an exaggerated fear, I understand the fear but I did not think that the Russians were going to overextend themselves by getting into a mess in the Congo -- but the fear that the Russians might do it provided a tremendous incentive to get the United Nations involved in the sense that the Western powers could find a common ground with the Russians saying that, right, there is this mess in the Congo and we are going to establish a United Nations peace-keeping force to take care of it. In so far as a peace-keeping force was established that would produce two effects: on the one hand the UN force would take over the security duties because the Belgians had reentered the territory of the Congo which they were not supposed to do under the Friendship Treaty except at the request and with the consent of the government of the Congo.
They went in, they said, because of the emergency situation, because Belgians were being killed by the army mutineers and believe me the Congolese Army were not diplomats. There was a lot of violence going on at the time. Women were being raped and it was a terrible thing. Many of the Belgian officials who were supposed to run the country, because they were the only qualified people, had fled. So, the understanding was that since the UN force was going to take over the security responsibility, this would mean that the Belgian troops would be withdrawn. There was a commitment from Belgium to withdraw its troops once the United Nations force had taken over the security duties which the Belgians had gone in to perform, or reentered to perform, meaning that they had just left the Congo the week before.

The other side of it was the Russians also wouldn’t come in. The understanding was that all security responsibilities in relation to the Congo were going to be assumed by the United Nations force, which meant that with the United Nations force in, the Belgian forces would get out and that is what the Congo government wanted and the other Africans and the Russians wanted that. And on the other hand the Russians would not come in either because the request for their services was withdrawn. So, that was the quid pro quo at the time.

Now, as I said I had then and I have now doubts as to
how deeply the Russians were going to get involved and whether the fear that was held in Washington that they were going to take over the largest country in Africa was justified. I have doubts about that. I had doubts then and I have doubts now. Indeed, I think that if they had wanted to do that it would have been virtually impossible for them to do that because of the nature of the situation.

JK: Were there political differences within the Security Council?

Sherry: No, the Security Council adopted its first resolution on the Congo without dissent and the second resolution unanimously -- this commended the Secretary-General for what he had done. Those resolutions were adopted unanimously. Then came the business that the Belgian troops were in fact withdrawn very rapidly from everywhere except Katanga. Then came the question of Katanga. Lumumba said that the mandate of the United Nations force, which was to assist the Congo until it was able to take on its own responsibilities, meant that the United Nations should help the Congolese government reassert its authority over the whole nation’s territory which included Katanga, which meant, in other words, to bring the Katanga secession to an end by force. And that was against the Hammarskjold interpretation of the nature of the UN mandate. And so, Hammarskjold refused to do
that. The Soviet Union and the United States were as one initially when the Congo operation started. The first report of the Secretary-General was approved without dissent. The disagreement occurred later over the desire of Lumumba to have the United Nations use force to put an end to the secession of Katanga. That is when the Soviet Union first abstained and started vetoing Security Council resolutions concerning the Congo, whereupon the General Assembly started dealing with the Congo Problem. However, this does not mean that the Security Council had lost its jurisdiction. The authorization for the operation was still the Security Council authorization. The Security Council did indeed, such as in February, 1961, after the Lumumba episode, and in November, 1961, adopt additional resolutions strengthening the Congo mandate. So, it is not correct to say, as certain authors of books on the subject have said, that the Assembly took over. It did not. The main responsibility was still the responsibility of the Security Council. It was at certain stages unable to exercise it, but the existing authorization was still in effect.

JK: Were the Soviets involved in planning the operation in any way or were they skirted around?

Sherry: No, that's not the way a UN operation works. There is no way that the Russians, the Americans or anybody else can be involved. The operation was run by the United
Nations, by the Secretary General.

JK: But there were many Americans in the Secretary General's office. The Soviets were concerned about that.

Sherry: The Soviets were concerned about that. I suppose they were. And there was the problem of the status of the Soviet international civil servants at the time, which is happily no longer the case. It was assumed that they were acting on behalf of their government which was not the case with American international civil servants. I can assure you that neither Cordier, nor Bunche, nor I, while working for the UN, ever considered ourselves Americans or ever had to take instructions from the US government. I know that both Bunche and Cordier occasionally disagreed with the US government and told them, "well, sorry, that's your view. Here's what we're going to do." Which was the sort of thing that was compatible with the status of international civil servants.

JK: So, the Soviet criticism of that was actually brought about by their own political habits.

Sherry: It was in part a measure of their own political problems that they were not kept informed. They did have a lot of information about what was going on. There was no great secret especially during the initial stages when the Soviet Union was very much in favor of the operation.

JK: The problems with the Security Council being unable to
come up with a resolution at times and the General Assembly assuming some that responsibility, did that create political problems that then affected the operation itself?

Sherry: Yes, it did create political problems because the General Assembly was in session at that time and there were a lot of heads of state that showed up including Khrushchev and that was when there occurred the shoe banging incident. Those were the days when I was still an interpreter. I was working part-time in the disarmament section. I was not yet with the Congo operation. I will never forget the shoe banging by Khrushchev. What I remember best about that episode was not just Khrushchev, and I saw him from the interpretation booth, taking off his shoe and banging the table with it. What impressed me was the gloomy and positively mournful expression of Gromyko, who realized how gauche this whole thing was. Then a faint, jaundiced smile appeared on Gromyko’s dour face and he started banging the table himself, not with his shoe but with his hand.

JK: It is interesting also because of your Russian speaking background. It is very interesting to hear your interpretation of some the political problems at the time. What kinds of effects did these problems within UN headquarters itself have on the operation?

Sherry: It made things difficult. At that point the Russians
wanted Hammarskjold out and they ceased to have any dealings with him. They wanted the Secretary-Generalship replaced by a troika, representing the West, Socialist World, and the Third World. This was a major controversy which made things extremely difficult at Headquarters and you had to just finesse a lot of things. Nevertheless, it was done. Then came the tragedy with Lumumba, which made things again even more difficult. I was not involved with Lumumba. I started working on the Congo just about a few days after he was kidnapped. I remember drafting communications about Lumumba because we still hoped to get him out. Some of the first documents that I drafted had to do with the efforts to get Lumumba released.

**JK:** So, the UN was making an effort to get him released.

**Sherry:** Yes, it was making enormous efforts because we knew it would be disastrous if, as it happened, he was killed.

**JK:** Could the UN have intervened in any way?

**Sherry:** No, it would have been impossible. We would have had to get a major army to move in there. A peace-keeping operation cannot and is not authorized to use force, except in self-defense. And don't forget Lumumba was killed by Tshombe and Munongo and his people in Katanga, but he had been handed over to them by the central government of the Congo, by Kasavubu and Mobutu and his people. Lumumba was almost dead from beatings
administered on the plane that was carrying him to Katanga. So, it would have meant essentially undertaking military action against the Congo government and the Katangese because they were allied in their hatred for Lumumba. We didn't have the troops, or the facilities, or the mandate because a UN peace-keeping operation cannot take military initiatives or go to war against the host government.

JK: Were the Soviets criticizing the UN for looking the other way?

Sherry: They were not looking the other way. Lumumba at the time had been living in a house in Leopoldville under the protection of United Nations troops. As long as he stayed in that house he was safe because the UN troops in self-defense could protect him. They were surrounding the house. He was a free man. He was free to leave at any time if he wanted to take the risk of doing that and he did. He knew perfectly well, and this had been made very clear to him, that if he left the house we would not be in the position to go out and protect him. We didn't have the capacity nor did we have the mandate because that would have meant engaging in combat with the government of the Congo. This was still in Leopoldville. He chose to disregard the warning and he went out. And indeed he managed to get out of Leopoldville. He was not immediately apprehended. He stole out in the middle of
the night and he went toward Port Francqui and that is where his enemies caught up with him. He was making speeches. He was trying to get to the North, to Equateur Province, to Stanleyville, to rally his supporters. So, he was arrested and that was it. Then he was put on this plane which took him to Katanga and in Katanga he arrived half dead and he was dead very soon thereafter. That was it.

JK: When you were in Elisabethville you had contact with Tshombe. Did you also have contact with Munongo?

Sherry: Yes, I did.

JK: What was the relationship between Tshombe and Munongo?

Sherry: Well, Munongo was the extremist. But they did work together and I was not aware of any tension between them. But mind you, a few days after I arrived the Belgian government undertook to see to it that all the Belgian mercenaries were removed.

JK: At that point they were being more cooperative.

Sherry: They were now being more cooperative. We are now talking December, 1962. That is when the fighting started. The fighting started when the gendarmerie in positions in Elisabethville started shooting at United Nations troops.

JK: As a matter of background information, who was the American Consul General in Elizabethville at that time?

Sherry: Jonathan Dean was the American Consul General and we got
along very well even though we were far from agreeing on all things relating to Congo policy. I must say for Jonathan Dean that he did set forth American policy and the American position very clearly and very openly. But he never tried to exert any pressure on me. But he knew if he had tried it wouldn't have done him any good.

JK: Was the US policy generally supportive of the operation?

Sherry: Yes, at that time it was supportive. US policy became highly supportive as soon as Kennedy became President which was January, 1961. Right, he was elected in 1960. On the 20th of January, 1961, Kennedy became President and thereafter there was a great deal of United States support and indeed an American military mission was sent to Katanga to see what kind of assistance could be given to the United Nations troops including bridging equipment and that sort of thing because it was envisaged the United Nations might get into difficulties in Katanga as indeed it did.

JK: Was there a change between the Eisenhower Administration and the Kennedy Administration in terms of support?

Sherry: Oh, yes, very much so. Under Kennedy and Governor Williams who was Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, United States support became very significant. And Adlai Stevenson was in New York. So, there we were in a situation where the shooting started and the UN troops for four days did not return fire in
Elisabethville.

JK: So, they were being fired upon.

Sherry: They were being fired upon and Mathu went off to negotiate with Tshombe. Mathu at that time was becoming ill. I still don't know exactly what it was. I think it was a case of acute arthritis, extremely painful, which put him out of commission. He was hospitalized in the UN Italian run hospital. Italy had provided a hospital to ONUC.

JK: Was the job there particularly stressful? There were so many changes in personnel.

Sherry: It was stressful. There was fighting going on. There was constant physical insecurity. There was some shooting right next to the UN headquarters.

So, Mathu became ill and was out of commission. So, I had to assume a lot of the functions and I was de facto acting UN Representative in Katanga at that time. I remained in that function until about mid or toward the end of January when Mathu finally came back from the Italian run ONUC hospital. However, I made it a point to go just about every day to keep Mathu fully informed about developments. I thought that was important. I kept sending all my cables to Leopoldville still under Mathu's name because I felt I was acting on Mathu's authority. Mathu being an African, I thought this was useful politically. I always told everybody who would
listen that Mathu who was temporarily indisposed would nevertheless be coming back.

Then, I think it was on the 24th, we finally got authorization from New York to take some action in self-defense. Now, at this point I have to introduce another very important character in the story and that is General Devan Prem Chand, who was and is a dear and close friend of mine. He was then UN Commander in Katanga, GOC, General Officer Commanding the Katanga area for the UN operation in the Congo. Then he went back to India and was Chief of Staff of the Eastern Command. Then he came back in UN service as the UN Commander in Cyprus, which was another major area of my involvement. His last UN job, just completed a few months ago, was as Force Commander in Namibia. We had him here in New York a few weeks ago to say goodbye to him because he has retired. He is well over 70 by now. He did a superb job in Namibia. He went back to India by way of London where he has family, some of his children. He was received by the Queen because some of the British officers who had served under him in Cyprus had said this man has had more British battalions under his command than just about any British general in the business. They honored him and he was received by the Queen. That was just a few weeks ago. Now he is back in India but I’m sure I’ll see him again. So, there we were. I was in effect the UN
Representative because Mathu was sick. I was the acting Representative. Prem Chand was the Commander. The fighting started. We got authorization to remove the road blocks and other fortified positions from which the gendarmerie under the command of the mercenaries -- and the mercenaries were all there, in fact, I personally arrested one of them and then we deported him, a man by the name of Swanepoll. So, we were working together. There we were working 20 hours a day. I was taking care of the political side, liaison with the foreign consuls in Elisabethville, etc. and I was doing the main interpretive reporting to New York and writing some of the press releases, the press communiques about the fighting. So, I was working on the operations side with the operations people and with General Prem Chand himself. The main issue was that within three days we had secured the whole perimeter of Elisabethville, but Tshombe had fled from Elisabethville at that point. The question then was whether we would continue and assert the freedom of movement of the UN force throughout the Province of Katanga. We had the freedom of movement legally from the government of the Congo. Let’s call a spade a bloody shovel. Asserting freedom of movement in the circumstances meant taking over Katanga because the Katanga Gendarmerie and their mercenary officers were not about to let this happen without resistance. Otherwise
they would be out of the picture. Which, incidentally, was a mistake, at least as far as the Katanga people were concerned. A year or two later Tshombe was Prime Minister of the entire Congo, and holding forth very well, holding forth about maintaining the unity of the Congo and preventing too much local autonomy. He was very clever, very very clever. He admitted to me just before he was Prime Minister in Leopoldville that he had been misled and ill advised and expressed regret that he had let himself be persuaded and guided by the Union Minière people and by the sort of more questionable riffraff with whom he had been involved in Katanga and the whole enterprise of the secession of Katanga. He remembered that we had told him, "why don’t you take part in the political life of the Congo? You are a gifted man. You would rise quickly. There aren’t that many fully qualified people to do that." Tsombe remembered that in 1964. He said, "I wish I had heeded your advice then."

JK: I want to ask you some questions about 1962. How were the communications between the UN operation in the Congo and in Elisabethville back to New York headquarters?

Sherry: Elisabethville did not communicate with New York at all. All my cables went to Gardiner in Leopoldville.

JK: How were the communications then between New York and Leopoldville?
Sherry: They were open. There were excellent communications. There was one problem and the one problem was this. We got copies of all cables coming in from New York. Code cables and clear cables were automatically transmitted to us in Elisabethville. Obviously, we had to be informed. We would get streams of cables from Gardiner "the following received from Bunche or the Secretary-General in New York." We got copies of the whole file. Except that apparently the Western diplomats had descended upon the Secretary-General after the successful completion of our Elisabethville operation, which must have been the 26th or 27th of December. They did not want the UN force to continue further because that would have meant taking a military initiative that would have been contrary, they said, to the basic charter of peace-keeping operations. You don't take military initiatives. You defend yourself. You never attack. A statement to that effect was issued in New York, that the UN troops would not go beyond the point that they had reached which was the Lufira River. The cable containing that statement, which was a clear cable, went to Leopoldville. We never got it in Elisabethville. We never got it. It was a crucial thing. There was a public statement by the Secretary-General that we were not going to go beyond the Lufira River. We got instructions to that effect also, but then we sent cables back saying we've got the momentum. This
is the time to assert our freedom of movement. There was not going to be much resistance. I remember sitting drafting the cable appealing to our direct superiors in Leopoldville namely Gardiner and the Force Commander, General Kebbede Guebre of Ethiopia, telling them this is the time to end the secession of Katanga. I drafted that cable indicating that this was the time to go on to Jadotville, Jadotville being a town about 30 miles north of Elisabethville where there was the best steak house in the Congo. The big mess started in Elisabethville the moment I arrived and I had never gotten to Jadotville. Everybody kept making fun of me because I was the only one who had never had one of those magnificent Jadotville steaks and I resented that deeply. And so, this was just one of my motives to go to Jadotville. There were others, believe me. Anyway, I drafted with Prem Chand standing there the cable appealing to Leopoldville to let us continue. Saying also, as Prem Chand pointed out from a military point of view, stopping on the Lufira River made no sense and was not safe for the UN troops. They were exposed there and the thing to do was to continue at least until Jadotville. We were also thinking of Kolwezi. That was by now the 29th or 30th of December, 1962. Tsombe had fled Elisabethville and had gone off to Kolwezi. What then happened was that we got the authorization to continue. We got the authorization from
Leopoldville "subject to the stated policy." Now the stated policy presumably included the statement by the Secretary General that we were not going to go to Jadotville, which we never received.

JK: Do you think that it was just an oversight?

Sherry: I don't know if it was an oversight or whether Gardiner deliberately withheld that one. It was a ten line cable, clear cable not even a code cable because it simply reproduced a statement made by the Secretary General in New York. So, we went on and that caused a tremendous row. We crossed the Lufira River. The bridges over the river had been blown, so the Indians built an embankment across the river and crossed. They went on to Jadotville. I did get my steak there, later on. There was a tremendous row in New York about this, protests from the Western embassies. It was not at all clear to us what the big row was about. We certainly had the authorization. Then Bunche came to first Leopoldville then Elisabethville to investigate the foul up.

JK: But by that time the troops had already gone to Jadotville.

Sherry: Right, and they were victorious. I was very happy then and I'm happy to this day that here I was involved in a key position in a UN operation in Katanga. I felt that we had vindicated Hammarskjold.

JK: Were there many casualties in that operation?
Sherry: No, there were casualties but not that many. Well, there wasn't much of a New Year's celebration because we were right in the middle of an operation. I was in Elisabethville. Then Bunche came and we spent several days with Bunche. He investigated very thoroughly the whole course of events. And, of course, we were completely vindicated. Whatever foul up in communications did occur, if there was a foul up, occurred in Leopoldville. Bunche wrote a very good report to the Secretary General which was published as a Security Council document. Then a few days later we also occupied Kipushi. We went south in the direction of Ndola and occupied that panhandle of the Congo toward the southeast down to the town of Kipushi. That was a very successful operation, so that we could not be attacked from behind. There was some fear of some foul play being initiated by certain elements in Northern Rhodesia who were under the influence of South Africa. At this point Tshombe was still in control of the whole western part of Katanga, especially the mining city of Kolwezi. Tremendous pressure was now being exerted on Tshombe, who had returned to Elisabethville, to give up Kolwezi so this would be the end of the secession of Katanga. During the night of the 17th, I think though I wouldn't swear on it, of January, 1963, at 4 o'clock in the morning -- those peculiar working hours had been going
on; I told my friends that I had never worked so hard in my whole life; we were lucky if we had three or four hours’ sleep; I had never worked so hard except the two weeks before my orals at Columbia when I slept even less -- anyway I got this cable at four o’clock in the morning. The messenger came and woke us up. I was staying in Jaime Valdez’s house. Valdez was one of the assistants to the UN Representative in Katanga. Mathu was still ill and in the hospital. The cable asked me to receive Tshombe at UN headquarters in Elisabethville together with Prem Chand and to negotiate the surrender of Kolwezi which would be the end of the military and the political secession of Katanga. This happened on the same afternoon. There came Tshombe to my office.

JK: It was yourself and Tshombe and who else?

Sherry: Prem Chand and the Chief of Police and the Chief Operations Officer, the Commander of the Ethiopian contingent, the Commander of the Tunisian contingent. Tsome came with Munongo and a very nice fellow who was the Chief of the Katanga Police but who, in fact, had maintained very close relations with us and had been helpful to the UN side. Luckily Tshombe did not know about that, otherwise, he would not have probably survived. That was the group. I have pictures of that. We negotiated for about three or four hours and reached something we thought we were going to call a joint
communique, but then I went out and got on the blower with Leopoldville with my friend F. T. Liu, who was now the principal political officer. I sent the text of what we had negotiated under which Tshombe would not be considered a prisoner. He could still have his guard and they would be able to wear their fancy uniforms. But the secession would be over and he would revert to being provincial president. All of this was published in a Security Council report. Except that Mr. F. T. Liu remembered a previous incident which had occurred when the United Nations issued a joint communique with the authorities in South Africa and this was strongly criticized. So, F. T. Liu said, "no, you cannot call it a joint communique. It's got to be a summary of decisions without stating whose decisions they were."

But, of course, it was an agreement we had reached with Tshombe. I felt then and I feel now that we always dealt with whoever was sitting in the chair without, for all that, recognizing him in any capacity. I will never forget the scene in my office in Elisabethville with all the maps and everything. It was a moving moment. After all that had gone on and the killing of Hammarskjold, and there was the man. I had him sitting in my office giving up. That was the end of the secession of Katanga. Three or four days later all the arrangements were made because apparently all the Kolwezi bridges and other important
structures had been mined by the mercenaries. Those things had to be removed and our engineers went in. Our troops met at a table and had tea outside of Kolwezi before the UN troops marched in and that was it.

What happened after that was that we started concentrating immediately on restoring life to normal in Elisabethville. By then, together with Mathu who was feeling much better and was almost ready to return to his job, we invited all the heads of municipal services in Elisabethville to come to UN headquarters. We asked them to see to it that everything was back to normal. We wanted the Katanga Elisabethville policemen in uniform, standing at intersections and directing traffic. We wanted to make sure that all the municipal services, water and whatever, should be working again, all the offices open and everybody back on their jobs. This was discussed at the meeting in our office. By then Mathu came back. It was done and done successfully and peacefully. We were rather proud of that. I was supposed to have stayed in the Congo for a month initially. By then I had been there for about three months. I made it clear that I wanted to go back to New York because the main job for which I had been sent had been completed. The fighting was over.

JK:

In terms of what we have discussed so far, what is your assessment of the Congo operation?
Sherry: We can discuss that next time because I came back to the Congo. We were talking about January, 1963, and I came back to New York in February. But, then I was sent again to the Congo at the beginning of 1964. I was mentioning F. T. Liu. F. T. Liu was the principal political advisor in Leopoldville. He went back to New York and I was sent as his replacement in Leopoldville. So, I was there until the closing of the operation. Those were some very difficult days also. That was the beginning of the Simba rebellion which the Congo government was quite unable to deal with and there was a lot of killing. By then we hardly had any troops left. I left the Congo about the 5th of July, 1964, after having written the whole political and military part of the Secretary-General’s last report on the Congo operation, which was published on the 29th of June and the operation came to an end on the 30th. I also drafted the cable which I think is still in the Special Political Affairs map room on the 38th floor, about the departure of the last United Nations troops. I wrote the cable. I got up at three o’clock in the morning in order to get to the airport because the UN Nigerians’ plane was due to leave at about four or five. Diplomats were there but not a single representative, civilian or military, of the government of the Congo. That was the last Congo cable I drafted. That was the end of the operation. I remember going to
the 4th of July party given by the American Embassy, by Ambassador MacMurtrie Godley, whose son was my student at Occidental College two years ago. Godley later on was US Ambassador to Lebanon, a very distinguished diplomat. Anyway, there was Tshombe and everybody knew that Tshombe was about to become the Prime Minister of the Congo.

JK: An interesting turn of events.

Sherry: A complete turn of events. That was when I had this conversation with him: "shouldn’t you have done this much earlier?"

Well, I have an appointment now and I’ve got to run.

JK: Thank you.


JK: Mr. Sherry, this is the second session of our interview on the Congo, the first one having covered your stay in Elisabethville in the earlier part of the UN operation there. I think we could discuss now the agreement that was drawn up at Kolwezi, if you would like to summarize what went on.

Sherry: It took place, actually, not at Kolwezi but in my office
in Elisabethville. What happened is that as a condition for giving up, Tshombe wanted an assurance of amnesty for himself and everbody else so as to make sure that once the central government of the Congo took over authority in Katanga, once the secession of Katanga was terminated, he and his supporters would not be subject to judicial action. Assurances to that effect were conveyed to the Secretary-General by President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Adoula on the 15th of January, 1963, even though circumstances had changed. On the next day, the 16th of January, the Secretary-General received a message from Tshombe which Tshombe sent through the Belgian government to the effect that he, Tshombe, was prepared to meet the United Nations Representative in Elisabethville -- I was the acting Representative -- in order to discuss, as it was called in the inimicable bureaucratic style, to discuss the modalities of the entry of ONUC into Kolwezi.

JK: Where was Tshombe at that particular time?

Sherry: Tshombe was at Kolwezi. I think that is where he had holed up. Those were very lively days. I was lucky when I got three or four hours sleep or less. At four thirty in the morning a messenger came from headquarters, from the cable office with a cable from Bunche instructing me to negotiate with Tshombe on the entry of ONUC into Kolwezi. This would complete the takeover of Katanga and mark the end of the secession of Katanga. We also gave
him assurances of free passage. We conveyed to him assurances that he would be safe. He was afraid of being arrested. We assured him that he would not be arrested. So, he showed up at ONUC headquarters at 5 o'clock in the afternoon on the 17th. We met there together with the Chief of Police in Elisabethville, a man by the name of Sapwe who had cooperated with us quite well all along. I think there was Mr. Kimba and one more assistant of Tsombe's. On the UN side, there was General Prem Chand and myself and the Commander of the Ethiopian contingent, Colonel Vorku, and one military assistant. We negotiated for four hours and finally signed a document. The signatures were my own and General Prem Chand's and Tshombe's. This document provided that the peaceful entry of the UN into Kolwezi would take place on the 21st. It provided that -- most of the facilities, the mining facilities and others, had been mined -- so, it provided that Tsombe promised to remove any explosives. He accepted the notion that the UN would enter Kolwezi in exercise of its freedom of movement, which applied to the whole republic of the Congo and this had been granted to it by the Central Government. So, this in itself recognized the authority of the Central Government.

The Secretary-General's plan for the reintegration of Tshombe's Gendarmerie would be carried out in due course. The members of Tsombe's Gendarmerie would not be treated
as prisoners of war. They would not be arrested. They would be allowed to continue wearing their uniforms. But, they would have to gather their arms into one central depot to be kept there by a detachment of around fifty Gendarmes. The fifty Gendarmes who would be watching over the arms and munitions of the Gendarmerie would be placed under ONUC command and control pending the plan for the reintegration of Katanga. Tshombe acknowledged that his people would be held responsible if there were any casualties among ONUC personnel. He was permitted to keep a small personal guard which was very important for him for prestige reasons. This took four hours to negotiate because every word had to be haggled over and agreed upon. Finally, we sent the draft agreement to Leopoldville. In Leopoldville was F. T. Liu. He was the principal political advisor there, which is the job I had a year later. We were planning to publish this agreement as a joint communique. But, F. T. felt that this was not a good idea because there had been some difficulties with a joint communique that had been signed on the occasion of a visit to South Africa by some UN officials a couple of years before. So, we made it into "a summary of decisions." The entry into Kolwezi did take place as planned on the 21st of January.

JK: What was Tshombe’s status after this point?
Sherry: He remained Provincial President. On the 23rd of January
the Minister Resident of the Central Government, Mr.
Ileo, arrived in Elisabethville to take over authority on
behalf of the Central Government. He represented the
Central Government and Tshombe remained as the Provincial
President.

JK: Was the Parliament allowed to stay as it had been?

Sherry: Well, the Parliament was in Leopoldville.

JK: I mean the Parliament that Tshombe often refered to in
Elisabethville.

Sherry: There was a local legislature. I don’t remember their
being very active at that time.

A week or so later, Mr. Mathu who had been ill
returned to his duties as the UN Representative in
Katanga and I was authorized to return to New York. Then
I was sent again to the Congo in February or March, 1964,
a year later.

JK: When you were in New York were you still working on Congo
matters?

Sherry: I was still working on Congo matters.

JK: Whom did you work with in New York?

Sherry: Ralph Bunche was my boss. It was a very busy period
because essentially what we were trying to do was to
provide for the retraining of the Congolese army, which,
to say the least, was not a very reliable military
instrument. We were trying also to wind up the UN
operation. A report was issued to the General Assembly. This report, written mostly by Bunche, made it clear that the Congolese could not expect the United Nations to remain perpetually there responsible for law and order in their country. There had to come a point where they would take over their own responsibilities. There was also the question of the financing. The General Assembly provided for the financing of the force until the end of 1963, and then until June of 1964. This was agreed upon by Prime Minister Adoula. There were occasional moments of tension. At one time Adoula had wanted the United Nations forces to stay on but, of course, we didn’t have the money.

JK: After the agreement at Kolwezi was the reunification of the Republic of the Congo complete and did that go smoothly?

Sherry: It went fairly smoothly except that toward the end of ’63 and the beginning of ’64 there occurred the Simba rebellion. It was quite a horrible event because those particular rebels were very much into massacres. They would get into a village or little town and simply kill anybody who was literate, who was not illiterate.

I was sent there in 1964 to be the political advisor for the period of the end of the force. The force was already being drawn down. It was being removed. Just during that period there came the Simba
rebellion.

JK: Was there any connection with the removal of the UN forces?

Sherry: There was no way of getting financing for the extension of the force. At the same time, this was definitely an internal matter. It could no longer be claimed that this was a matter that had any fundamental international aspects. It was felt very strongly that the Congo government should take care of this by itself. At that time the Congo government was negotiating for the training of its troops. There was one proposal that the troops should be retrained by the UN. The Congo government decided to have its troops trained by military advisors from a group of governments which included the Israelis. There were strong objections to that from various quarters in the General Assembly, as might have been expected. So, in the end no agreement was reached for any role by the UN in training the Congolese army.

JK: How was the training done?

Sherry: The training was never done very well and it never became a very good military instrument. An odd thing happened toward the end of my stay. I remained in Leopoldville until, I remember, going to the 4th of July party at the US Embassy. Then I left. At that time Adoula had already resigned. The rumor was that Tshombe was going to become the new Prime Minister of the Congo. I met
Tshombe at that reception and he was going on and on about how he now believed fully in the unity of the Congo and was opposed to any secession or separatism. He became Prime Minister of the Congo.

**JK:** When you went back to the Congo in Leopoldville, then, you were involved in the phasing out of the UN.

**Sherry:** The phasing out of the UN and responding to desperate appeals from various places to provide assistance in dealing with the Simba rebellion, in terms of sending troops. Occassionally we were able to send some patrols. But it was very difficult and it was a very frustrating period. That frustration was shown in the Secretary General’s report on the withdrawal of the United Nations force in the Congo, most of which I wrote. Parts of it were written here at headquarters. The account of the military and security developments and the phasing out of the troops was written by me in Leopoldville and cabled to New York. It was published on the 29th of June, 1964.

**JK:** What were some of the major frustrations there?

**Sherry:** The major frustration was that while we realized that we had indeed succeeded in preventing secession -- there had been attempted secessions in various places, in Kasai Province and Equateur Province as well as in Katanga -- while we had ensured that the Congo could become an independent country, we were far from confident of the ability of the Congolese, especially the military side,
to ensure the country’s security and political integrity. As Bunche never tired of pointing out, the United Nations simply could not send troops all over the place to prop up governments that were having difficulty performing their own functions. After all, this was an independent country. Besides we didn’t have any money. The main thing is that the government of the Congo had agreed to the withdrawal of the UN force and did not make any request for the extension of the force beyond the 30th of June.

I do remember the departure of the last contingent. I believe those were Nigerians. The last contingent departed on the 30th of June. It was early in the morning. I went there to the airport to say goodbye.

JK: Was there any kind of ceremony?

Sherry: There should have been a ceremony, but actually not a single representative of the Congolese government either civilian or military showed up. None of them showed up. I sent a cable about that and about the ceremony that we held at the airport. That cable is framed and is in the map room in the Office of Political Affairs on the 38th floor. The point being that one need not expect any gratitude. By then the acting representative of the Secretary-General was B. F. Osorio-Tafall. He was made Officer in Charge of the UN operation in the Congo. He had been previously in charge of the civilian operations.
He was in Leopoldville. With the departure of the UN force the job of Special Representative lapsed and he became the UNDP resident Representative in charge of the United Nations Development Program operations in the Congo, which were extensive. It was one of the biggest, if not the biggest, civilian technical assistance operation anywhere. Just to give you an idea, the UN provided most of the judges. The UN provided technicians who did the airport control job. There were no local qualified airport controllers. The UN organized the tele-communications system in the Congo, extremely important. There were other technicians that saw to it that the water supply was hygienic, a very serious and difficult problem in a tropical area. It was a very large operation and it was only gradually phased down. It was never completely phased out. There is still a major UN operation there. It was phased down as newly trained Congolese personnel came back from universities or other training courses abroad to take over these kinds of technical functions.

JK: So, primarily the training had to take place outside the Congo.

Sherry: Some of the training took place inside at the university. There was a university in Leopoldville. A special school of administration was established there with UN assistance.
JK: Was there any apprenticeship kind of training where the Congolese would work along with a UN technician?

Sherry: Yes, this was done extensively.

I came back to New York in early July of 1964. In August and September of that year I gradually started working on a new UN operation which had been established in March, 1964, while I was in the Congo. That concerned the Island of Cyprus. That remained the center of my professional activities until I retired. I worked on Cyprus in New York. I wrote or edited a number of the Secretary General’s reports including the report that covered the fighting in the Tillyria region. Then Ralph Bunche informed me that he was talking to the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots and Greece and Turkey about sending me as Senior Political Officer to Nicosia. There was a new UN operation and so I was very much interested. I went to Nicosia at the beginning of October, 1964. The operation was extended for three month intervals. It would have expired in December, then it was extended and I was asked to stay until March, 1965. Then it was extended again until June and again until September. In the end I remained there for a year.

JK: Well, I need to ask you a few more questions about the Congo. During your stay in Leopoldville did you have any interaction with Mobutu?

Sherry: Yes, from time to time.
JK: What was his role in the government at that time?

Sherry: He was the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. However, he necessarily had extensive political authority. He was responsible for the army takeover in September, 1960, which eliminated Lumumba. He essentially sent Lumumba to his death which occurred in Elisabethville. Lumumba was beaten half dead on the flight to Elisabethville and then he was killed in Elisabethville, which is what led to the crisis here in New York.

JK: Was there a rivalry that had developed between Mobutu and Lumumba?

Sherry: Very much so. They were sworn enemies. First there was a hatred and antagonism between Lumumba and Kasavubu. President Kasavubu had dismissed Lumumba as Prime Minister and Lumumba did not accept it. He announced that he was firing Kasavubu. Then Mobutu eliminated Lumumba and established the Council of Commissioners as a governing body, which the United Nations did not recognize. All of our correspondence, and I drafted a lot of it at that time in 1960-61, was addressed to the President. Kasavubu remained the only person whose authority we could continue to recognize.

JK: He still maintained the title of President.

Sherry: Mobutu, as I understand it, the takeover by Mobutu was a CIA operation because the CIA had persuaded itself that Lumumba was a dangerous communist agent. I don’t think
that Lumumba was a dangerous communist agent. I think that he was a very high strung, near psychotic person who would have cooperated with almost anybody who would have cooperated with him. Yes, he was on the radical side, but then so were a lot of other people. I think that notion of the Soviet Union taking over that African country or any other African country is something that was very much in the minds of people in Washington in the early 1960s. That’s before Kennedy became President. In retrospect these days we tend to look at it with some scepticism. I must say that when I was in the United States and reading the American press I also assumed that Lumumba was a communist and was only waiting to invite the Red Army in. But even if he had, would they have come? It just isn’t quite so.

JK: Did he use the Soviets as leverage?

Sherry: He used the threat of the Soviets as leverage, not very skillfully because in the end he antagonized everybody. He had this tremendous self-confidence in his ability to sway the crowds. That is why he fled from the house in Leopoldville where he was protected by UN troops and where he was safe. He thought that he would just go off into the countryside and it would become a triumphant procession where all the Congolese would follow his leadership and his golden words. But, it didn’t happen that way. He was captured and brought to Leopoldville
and then off to Elisabethville and then death.

JK: Was his rivalry with Mobutu also tribal?

Sherry: Yes, there was a tribal difference. Although, it must be said that Lumumba and to a certain extent Mobutu were fairly detribalized. They were among the few people in the Congo who had a conception of the country as a whole. I'm not in a position now to comment on the kind of government that Mobutu has given the country since he took over the government for good.

JK: Did he appear to be an ambitious man at that time?

Sherry: Yes, he was ambitious. If you are going to interview F. T. Liu you can ask him about Mobutu because he had a great deal to do with Mobutu in 1960. I wasn't there at the time. I was in New York. I didn't start my involvement with the Congo until December of 1960. F. T. was in Leopoldville at the time and he can tell you fascinating stories about how Mobutu showed up at UN headquarters saying words to the effect, "You know, I'm supposed to be running a coup d'etat, what do I do next?"

And, of course, he was told that the United Nations would have nothing to do with his running a coup d'etat.

JK: My understanding is that in the beginning Mobutu was not particularly keen on being in a position of authority.

Sherry: He established that Council of Commissioners. When Kennedy became President in January, 1961, he decided that the US government should cooperate with the UN. So,
in August of 1961 there was the reconvening of the Congolese parliament and the election of Adoula as Prime Minister, which was entirely engineered by the UN. Adoula served until 1964, when Tshombe became Prime Minister. Then later Tshombe was kidnapped by the Algerians and died in captivity. But, then the UN was no longer involved politically, and I was very busy with Cyprus.

JK: In retrospect, was there anything learned from the Congo operation?

Sherry: It was an extremely difficult operation. What was learned was that there was no fundamental meeting of minds among the major powers about the nature and a modus operandi of a peace-keeping operation. The whole problem of finance, command, and control became critical at that time. In the end in 1964 this became very critical because it became impossible to run the 19th session of the General Assembly at all. The Russians had refused to contribute financially to the UN operation in the Congo. The International Court of Justice ruled that the expenses of the Congo operation were regular expenses of the United Nations under Article 17 of the Charter. The theory under Article 19 of the Charter was that the Russians didn't have any vote in the General Assembly because they were two years in arrears. What was done was that a gentlemen's agreement was reached under which
the General Assembly acted by consensus on all essential housekeeping matters on which there was no disagreement, including the continuation of the budget and the continuation of the regular activities of the UN itself. A number of resolutions were adopted by consensus. That was the only way in which things could be run. That crisis was only solved when the United States gave up its idea of threatening the Soviet Union with deprivation of its vote in the General Assembly. A lot of people felt the result would only have been the collapse of the UN. There was no point to having the UN without one of the two major superpowers. A compromise was reached under which a committee on peace-keeping operations was established which was supposed to examine the whole problem of command and control and the financing of UN peace-keeping operations. That committee is still meeting. Now, of course, it is flourishing. For quite a while it was completely deadlocked, but this did not prevent the Cyprus operation which was a major new operation. What was done at that time was that the practice was established of having any UN operation set up only for a limited period and subject to renewal by the Security Council. So, the Cyprus operation was set up for three months at a time. Later on that was extended to six months. The same goes for all the other operations now under United Nations authority.
JK: So, the Congo operation had some effects on further planning.

Sherry: Very much so, it also had political effects in the sense that everybody felt that this type of operation must be avoided. A lot of people thought it was a failure which it was not. It did achieve what it was supposed to achieve. Although, in fact, a lot of new problems which had not been anticipated at the time cropped up in the Congo which could not be dealt with. And additional problems cropped up after the United Nations left. The Simba rebellion was overcome with assistance from former colonial powers including the Belgians and the Americans and the French. This gave rise to a furious response from a lot of the non-aligned. Mobutu then took over as ruler of the country and has remained ruler of the country ever since. He has been severely criticized for the way in which he exercises that rule.

JK: What were the things about the operation that people wanted to avoid, the costs or the size of the operation?

Sherry: Yes, and the fact that the operation dealt with an internal matter. It did not have sufficiently clear terms of reference. It was not at all clear what that operation was supposed to do. So, the Secretary-General had to improvise as he went along. It was clear that one of the purposes of the operation was to prevent the disintegration of the Congo and to prevent the secession.
This was prevented and the last secession was defeated and the Congo was reunified and it remains a unified country to this day. There was the question of heavy technical assistance and this was provided to make the country capable of governing itself and carrying out the routine functions and services that a government is supposed to provide for its citizens.

JK: Was the UN critical of Belgium for taking such little responsibility for independence?

Sherry: Yes, and our (the UN’s) relationship with the Belgians was extremely tense until Spaak took over as Minister of Foreign Affairs which was in 1961. Prior to that the situation was quite tense. One of my first jobs when I joined the staff of the Congo operation under Wieschhoff was to draft a lot of rather nasty diplomatic notes addressed to the Belgians. The Belgians, of course, sent a lot of nasty diplomatic notes to us.

JK: What kind of a man was Spaak that he was able to change that situation?

Sherry: Spaak was a very brilliant man who had a much broader view of Africa and realized that independence for an African country did not mean that it needed to lose its connections with or technical assistance from other governments. There are more British now in India than there ever were during the Raj. There are quite a few Belgians and French and others in what is now Zaire.
JK: I think we have covered our discussion of the Congo and I appreciate your cooperation and your analysis of the Congo operation.

Sherry: The problem of what peace-keeping operations are about at least in theory was not solved. No agreement was reached on what a peace-keeping operation should do except that it was solved in a negative way by providing for limited time authorizations so that the Soviets accepted the notion that peace-keeping operations would not be run by a committee of the Security Council but should be run by the Secretary-General subject to renewal which could be vetoed. The problem never arose. There was never again as big a controversy as had occurred over the Congo. The Soviets were quite supportive of what the UN did in Cyprus. The Russians accepted and were a party to the establishment of UNEF II in 1973. I had the privilege of being on the team which under the leadership of Brian Urquhart prepared the guidelines for UNEF II. Most of the work was done by F. T. Liu, James Jonah and myself. We prepared those guidelines overnight. Those guidelines were, thereafter, used again and again.

JK: In the Congo were the troops able to achieve their objectives with the least number of casualties possible?

Sherry: There were casualties. There was one Irish detachment which was ambushed and I think about 45 men were killed there, or more. There were a number of Italian flyers
who were in Kindu in 1961. They were killed and their bodies disposed of quite horribly. There were quite a few casualties.

JK: Were there things learned about how to manage troops?

Sherry: It was very difficult to manage because while the Congo government supported the UN operation, authority in various areas was not exercised by the central government but by a variety of local authorities including secessionist authorities. In the countryside there was an enormous variety of ethnic groups and tribes which were fighting each other and which didn’t know very much about the Congo. Brian Urquhart tells the famous story of the time when the first Moroccan troops arrived in the Congo in July, 1960. Arrangements were supposed to be made to send a detachment of Moroccan troops to the Port of Matadi. They got in touch with the Congolese military who had carried out the rebellion that gave rise to the problem in the first place. These were told that the ONUC was there. And their response was, "the ONUC is what tribe?" ("l’ONU, c’est quelle tribu?")

JK: Well, I think we can conclude here. Again thank you very much.

Sherry: You're very welcome.
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UNIVERSAL NATIONS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT

I, George Sherry (Interviewee) hereby agree to participate in the United Nations Oral History Project, sponsored by the Yale University Institution for Social and Policy Studies, and consent to the recording by magnetic audio tape of (an) interview(s) with Jean Krasno (Interviewer) on July 12, 1990 (Date) at New York City (City), N.Y. (State).

It is my understanding that a typed transcript will be made of such tape(s) and returned to me for any necessary corrections. I hereby agree that if for any reason I have not returned the transcript with my corrections to the Institution for Social and Policy Studies within three months of the time it was sent to me, the Project Staff may edit the transcript and make it available for research and other use as provided here below.

In the understanding that the tape(s) and transcript(s) will be preserved at the United Nations and made available for historical, scholarly and (as deemed appropriate by the United Nations) public information purposes, and that copies will be placed on deposit at Yale University for research and study, I hereby grant, assign, and transfer legal titles and all literary rights in the tape(s) and transcript(s) to the United Nations. However, it is agreed that neither the United Nations nor Yale University will publish or authorize publication of the transcript(s) or any part thereof during my lifetime without my written permission.

George Sherry
(Interviewee)

Jean Krasno
(Interviewer)

(For the Institution of Social and Policy Studies)

Oct. 15, 1990
(Date)

July 12, 1990
(Date)