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YUN INTERVIEW

IAN BERENDSEN

MAY 4, 1990

SALISBURY, CONNECTICUT
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CONGO OPERATION

Hammarskjold and UN Troops Arrive in Elizabethville	1-3
Goals of UN in Congo	2
Secesseion of Katanga	2,3,20
UN Mission in Katanga	4
Communications	5,6
Removal of Belgians from Kamina Base	6,7
Katangese Leaders.	7,8
Consular Corps in Elizabethville	9
Lumumba's Arrest and Death	10-15
CIA Involvement	10,11,14
Soviet Involvement	15
UN Troops in Katanga	16,17,21,22
Katangese Gendarmerie	17,18,20
Personal Safety	19
Working with Dayal	21

JK: Mr. Berendsen, what was your position in the Congo at the time of the UN operation there and about what time did you arrive?

Berendsen: My position was representative of the UN operation in the Congo at Elizabethville and I arrived there about the middle of August, 1960, with the Secretary-General when he flew in with the first batch of UN troops to be stationed there.

JK: So, you arrived in August at the time that Hammarskjold flew into Katanga. Could you tell us what happened at the airport when you arrived?

Berendsen: I can remember one or two circles of the airport while clearance to land was being sought. I think the Katangese were not too pleased with the military planes in the armada that were coming. After a brief circling which I didn't realize at the time was more than routine, we landed, the Secretary-General got out, descended, was confronted with a Katangese flag, gave it a brief formal nod, and met the Katangese people there.

JK: Were you on the same plane with Hammarskjold?

Berendsen: Yes, right, the same plane.

JK: Were you aware of any conversations between Hammarskjold and Tshombe at the airport before landing?

Berendsen: No, I had heard there were some queries back and forth. But, it was not a longlasting affair whatever it was.

JK: Then the planes were allowed to land.

Berendsen: Yes.

JK: Did you meet Tshombe at that time?

Berendsen: I met him then and I was subsequently taken along by the Secretary-General to the meetings at which the ground rules of the UN occupation were being discussed.

JK: At that time what was the purpose for having the UN troops in Elizabethville?

Berendsen: Essentially, to maintain the unity of the Congo and to prevent intertribal or civil warfare in the Congo, and, of course, the protection of human lives, not that they were in great threat in Elizabethville at the time, although they had been briefly during the post-independence disturbances. Also, to take over from the Belgian forces still in Elizabethville for the protection of law and order.

JK: Was there any discussion between Tshombe and Hammarskjold at that time about ending the secession of Katanga?

Berendsen: I don't think it was expressly discussed. The idea was to establish an all Congo stationing of UN troops and

this was in itself an assertion of the UN view that the Congo should be one country. But, the general idea was that Tshombe was a politician in the Congo with legitimate aspirations and the hope was doubtless felt that he would in due course find it convenient and sensible to make his peace with the rest and form a government in which his interests would be reasonably taken care of. So, I don't think there was any arm twisting, certainly not at the meetings at which I was present, in which he was urged to end the secession forthwith or in the near future.

JK: So, the troops had arrived primarily to establish a UN presence and to help with maintaining law and order at that point. Let's back up for a few moments and could you explain your position at the UN before that point and how you were selected to fill that position?

Berendsen: I had worked in the Trusteeship division for 12 nearly 13 years before and had been on various missions to trust territories, some of them in rather delicate positions. I think especially of Togoland on both sides of the international frontier at the time of the independence claims for the French Togo, which was a tense situation. Also, a tense situation between the people in British Togoland who didn't want to be associated with Nkrumah but with people on the other side of the French line. They were politically

interesting missions, most of them. I had also been part of the secretariat of the UN operation in Lebanon.

JK: So, you were familiar with UN policy and the kinds of situations that could arise in the Congo.

Berendsen: Right, except that the Congo was a great big Humpty Dumpty that was all broken.

JK: It was a complex situation. You were the first UN representative in Katanga.

Berendsen: Yes.

JK: And did you have to set up the UN headquarters there?

Berendsen: Yes, of course. It was predominantly a military mission, but the civil side of it was quite something because the various contingents for the most part were new to international operations and were not at all used to the rather unclearly defined role that they had to perform. Then, from the purely administrative point of view setting up an operation in a part that had de facto seceded from the rest of the country was rather difficult. For instance, to find the money to pay for the things. The UN didn't wish to put hard currency, if possible, at the disposal of the Katangese authorities. But they had to produce some methods of payment that would produce the supplies for these thousands of troops that were coming in very rapidly. And so, they had to in a discreet manner admit money into Katanga. And as for the general role I can best

characterize it when I was describing it to the person who was supposed to, but did not, become my permanent successor -- he was a Spanish Republican by past history -- he said "Oh, political commissar."

JK: When you began your work in Elizabethville, who were the other UN people that you were in contact with in Leopoldville?

Berendsen: Contact was by radio. Other forms of contact were not particularly good. It was more or less a separate operation in the first days. Bunche, of course, was at that time the head of the operation, but he was to leave shortly and F. T. Liu was his assistant as was Brian Urquhart. But, I did not see much of these people. I saw General Von Horn who came down with the initial group and paid visits. I can also remember particularly seeing General Rikhye, who was the military adviser to the Secretary-General and came down from time to time, particularly on the problem of the Kamina base.

JK: So, actually you did not have telephone communications.

Berendsen: No.

JK: You did not have immediate ways of discussing the issues that came up. It was by cable.

Berendsen: It would have to go by code, using radios for the most part.

JK: How long would it take to send a message and get a

reply?

Berendsen: If it was of sufficient priority and despite the fact that it didn't go into a tape but was tapped out by key, you could get a response to an urgent enough cable in a matter of two or three hours. But, some of our things went unanswered for a long time. Everyone had plenty of problems on the platter and unless you shrieked for attention it could wait quite some time. You could get it sent all right, but it would take its turn in the queue according to priority but its decoding would be according to priority and action on it would wait for more urgent things.

JK: You mentioned that you had discussions with General Rikhye about the Kamina base. What was the issue there?

Berendsen: The issue was part of the general issue that the Belgians were supposed to get out of Katanga by a general deadline which they pressed very hard to do. I think they over stayed their leave by a day or two, but in any case it was a great fuss. They conveniently took the view that Kamina base was a separate area and didn't count in it. There were a certain amount of troops and supplies stationed there which were discovered by Rikhye on a trip. This made a little scene, which passed by fairly quickly.

JK: Originally, it had been agreed between the Congolese

Government and Belgium that they would be able to keep the base at Kamina but at some point that policy was changed.

Berendsen: Yes, it must have been changed by early September.

JK: Because eventually UN troops were stationed there.

Berendsen: Right.

JK: When you did get established, were you often in touch with Tshombe and were you in touch with Munongo?

Berendsen: Yes, quite frequently. There were often meetings, as I noted in my letters, with the greater part of the Katangese cabinet and myself alone or with Colonel Byrne, the Irish head of the military establishment in Katanga, not a French-speaking man, so I was more or less on my own facing a whole bunch of people who tended to get really emotional and violent in language. Not so much Tshombe as Munongo, whom I can recall fairly early in the day saying, "I shall make your life impossible, remember the fate of Count Bernadotte!" I think he was a short tempered man but he had a laugh sometimes when it was all over.

JK: Could you elaborate a little on the character of the two men, Tshombe and Munongo?

Berendsen: Tshombe was personable and on the whole a very pleasant person to deal with, not a remarkably truthful man, I would say, but politicians the world over are quite similar. When he was feeling well he smiled. When he

was upset with something he looked unhappy, but he didn't make a great fuss. Munongo blew hot and cold. He was so short triggered that I don't think he was a very thoughtful man but I had pleasant times with him, too.

JK: Who else in the Katangese government did you work with?

Berendsen: Virtually the only other minister I can remember was Kimba, who got executed for treason at a later date in Leopoldville. He was really an earnest, steady fellow not like one who would get involved in plots, but very determined about Katangese independence.

JK: Did you work with Mr. Kanza from the Congolese government?

Berendsen: I don't recollect his name. The only person who I can remember making several visits to Elizabethville from the central government was Mobutu, then acting chief of staff, who used to hold discussions with the Katangese. Just what he said or what they said, I don't know, but his comings and goings were very obvious. He was down two or three times in an obvious way. I can't say if he made any other visits.

JK: What was your relationship with the other foreigners there, the Belgian consul and the British consul, the US consul and so forth?

Berendsen: I had pleasant relations with the consular corps on the whole. The Belgians got mad at times, but were mad

officially rather than personally. The other consuls were pleasant and provided the usual exchange of information as does the diplomat corps anywhere in the world.

JK: Were they supportive of the UN operation in Elizabethville and the presence of the troops?

Berendsen: I think the British had their doubts and the Americans had their doubts with the whole operation as from the time Lumumba was living in UN protection. But, none of this was reflected in any particular effort by the local consuls to be discouraging. On the contrary, I think they supported the idea of whatever efforts the UN could do to keep the situation relatively calm and peaceful.

JK: At the time that you were in Elizabethville were the UN troops being used to try to get the Belgian advisers out of Elizabethville?

Berendsen: That was later on.

JK: There were various events going on in Leopoldville during the time that you were in Elizabethville. Kasavubu had dismissed Lumumba. Lumumba had dismissed Kasavubu and shortly after that Mobutu carried out a coup and took over the government. At that time then Lumumba came under the protection of the UN. Later on Lumumba left that UN protection and was later arrested. From your view in Elizabethville what were some of the

events and causes of his arrest?

Berendsen: Well, it was a particular political tribal and regional dispute that somehow or another left Katanga more or less on its own as it wished to be. I'm sure eventually that as we know they were prepared to accept Lumumba and acquiesce in his liquidation. But, there was no particular fuss caused in Katanga in the early stages that I could see. When Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba, what chiefly concerned the Katangese and caused very difficult times for a few days was that the UN abolished all troop movement and movement by plane throughout the Congo and the Katangese who in many ways benefitted from it saw that they could not support their more isolated military outposts in the north of Katanga and were fairly annoyed and we had a very difficult few days. And shortly thereafter there was a very feeble attempt at invasion of the very most northern part of Katanga by ANC people from Stanleyville. But, they got bought off, I think, by the CIA.

JK: And this was shortly after Lumumba's arrest?

Berendsen: Not after his arrest. It was after his dismissal as Prime Minister.

JK: There was some concern then that the CIA had been involved?

Berendsen: Nobody knew then exactly who had produced the funds

that caused the ANC to stop its attempted invasion of Katanga. And if one thinks of its future record one would doubt if it would have been pushed very hard or far. That was in mid-September. Lumumba's arrest was a month or two later and by that stage there was a sort of civil war going on in Katanga itself between tribal elements in the north who, I'm not sure if they were explicit supporters of Lumumba but they certainly supported elements in the central government that wanted to do in the Katangese secession. There had been many clashes of a guerilla nature between these tribal people and the Katangese gendarmerie. And I think probably by the time that Lumumba escaped from UN custody, if you can call the term escape because it was certainly protection rather than custody, the Katangese were thinking in terms of a rather low scale civil war in Katanga and probably thought that if Lumumba got free and in a position to exercise influence from Stanleyville, he might support these people and build them up.

JK: So, they were not anxious for Lumumba to be released.

Berendsen: No, I would think not.

JK: Was there any discussion about the decision to remove Lumumba from Thysville to Elizabethville later on in January when he was transferred?

Berendsen: I believe I have read in the records since that there

was quite a lot of discussion between whoever were his captors and Tshombe and company. Of course, it was all done without the UN being privy to it. When I, after the event, went to see Tshombe and told him in his own interest to have Lumumba visited by the Red Cross, Tshombe maintained that it was a complete surprise and that they had received him with the shortest of notice. But, I don't believe that was so at all.

JK: So, it was unclear whether Tshombe had agreed to have Lumumba brought to Elizabethville. Is it possible that he really didn't want to have him brought there?

Berendsen: I cannot speak with first hand knowledge other than his saying that it was totally unexpected, with the shortest possible notice.

JK: That is what Tshombe explained to you?

Berendsen: Yes.

JK: And then, you had tried to convince him to have the Red Cross visit Lumumba. Was Tshombe present at the airport when Lumumba arrived in Elizabethville?

Berendsen: I do not believe so. Obviously very well prepared arrangements had been made to deal with him on his arrival. They suddenly got hold of him, pushed him over between a row of troops who wielded rifle butts pushing him over into a jeep, I believe it was, and he was whisked off to some place on the perimeter of the airport where an exit had been cut through the

protective wire. Obviously, whoever was doing it had it well rehearsed and it was not a sudden decision.

JK: Were there UN troops stationed at the airport?

Berendsen: There were UN troops at the airport, perhaps two companies of Swedish troops. They noticed the event, but it was done so quickly that I cannot blame them for not reacting to it before it had all passed by.

JK: So, it wasn't possible for them to intervene at that point?

Berendsen: Well, they didn't. They reported it very quickly and they had their whole guard, their whole company, stand to. Before they could decide what to do, before presumably the company had stood to, the little cavalcade had driven off and Lumumba was no longer there.

JK: Do you know where he was taken at that point?

Berendsen: There was a story eventually put out of the vaguest character by Munongo when he announced his supposed death while trying to escape.

JK: He had two other people with him. Were the bodies ever found?

Berendsen: I don't believe so. Nothing was produced.

JK: In the days that followed his arrival in Elizabethville you had spoken to Tshombe.

Berendsen: I spoke, I believe, the day after the arrival and I reiterated what was said on the next day or two.

JK: In your opinion what do you think happened to Lumumba?

Berendsen: I think that he was probably killed very shortly after his arrival by deliberate intention. Who wished the corpse on who and under what circumstances I do not know. I know that one of the main planning agencies in trying to dispose of him was the CIA. But, when all the evidence about it came out, when the CIA was being forced to come clean, the implication was that other people took over before their plans could come to fruition. But, I have no doubt that he was deliberately killed whether by central government people or by the Katangese. Obviously, there must have been a fair degree of collusion of one sort or another.

JK: Upon his death when it was actually announced, in February, what were the repercussions politically from that event.

Berendsen: Well, there was no particular belief in the announcement if you speak of the consular corps or the journalistic community, but I think to some extent it had already been discounted because rumor had gone around. But, there was remarkable indignation against Lumumba in Katanga. I don't think he was very much loved in South Katanga, at least. Far from it.

JK: Well, the Soviets came out very strongly against it, condemning Hammarskjold and the United Nations.

Berendsen: Well, I'm sure there was a great deal of condemning in

the UN community in general and, of course, it was one weapon to beat the Secretary-General with in the Soviet campaign against him.

JK: Did you have any contact with the Soviets or was there any Soviet presence in Elizabethville?

Berendsen:None whatsoever. They were not welcome, not from our point of view, but from the Katangese. They were wanting to establish themselves as good anti-communists and reliable to the business community and Western Europe, amongst whom they had quite a measure of support or partial support, at least.

JK: The UN conciliation commission, which F.T. Liu was a part of, investigated the death of Lumumba.

Berendsen:Well, there was a separate formal commission to investigate the death of Lumumba before whom I gave evidence, but the conciliation commission was around at the time.

JK: So, there was a formal UN investigation?

Berendsen:Yes.

JK: And you gave evidence at this investigation?

Berendsen:Yes, I did.

JK: What was the nature of the evidence that you gave?

Berendsen:Very little more than I have already told you. The rest would have been speculation.

JK: During that time was there fighting going on at all in Elizabethville that UN troops were involved in?

Berendsen: No, at the end of the time, particularly in February when the Security Council adopted a new resolution which was supposed to tighten the mandate of the operation affairs were quite tense and one gave some thought to the possibility of hostilities breaking out. But, they did not. But, there was an increase in the civil war activity of the north at the tribal dividing line. And the situation was by no means pleasant but nothing boiled over at the time.

JK: Amongst the UN troops that were in Elizabethville, were the troops well disciplined.

Berendsen: Those in Elizabethville were Swedish troops. They were well disciplined. On the whole, I think, UN troops were quite well disciplined. We had charges against the Mali troops and also some against the Ethiopian troops. The Mali situation was difficult because it was a time of the federation of that state between Mali and Senegal which was breaking up and the troops came from both parts and were not too easy amongst themselves. But, most of the charges against troops were because there was a certain measure of sympathy for the non-southern Katangese tribespeople who had been treated quite roughly by the Katangese gendarmerie and a certain tendency for the UN people to do what they could to limit that and certainly not to condone it. You could go to southern Katanga in Elizabethville

where things were very quiet and peaceful and industrious where these people were trying to represent law and order and all the rest of it. You could go up north and these same people were trying to enforce their rule amongst people who didn't want it. And it wasn't easy for the UN troops to play the right role. Eventually in about late October or early November we managed to persuade the Katangese gendarmerie to maintain itself in particular garrisons and not to patrol between. And we did what we could to keep communications going in between and thus avoiding as many clashes as would have occurred otherwise. But, then we had trouble because in a town called Kabalo, which was on the Lualaba River at the upper reaches of the Congo, the local Katangese felt very insecure even though they had Ethiopians around. The local Baluba tribesmen would sneak into town and I don't think anyone was actually killed but they would taunt the gendarmerie members, who they would claim not to have received all the measure of support that they should have from the Ethiopians. Eventually by dribs and drabs the whole garrison asked the UN to withdraw them and we did so.

JK: Were there efforts to remove Belgian troops or were they leaving at that point?

Berendsen: The Belgian troops left in August or early September.

The Katangese gendarmerie was cadred by former Belgian officers of the Force Publique.

JK: So, officially the Belgian troops had left but there were still Belgian officers participating in the gendarmerie?

Berendsen: There were Belgian officers there in numbers and toward the end of my time it was becoming an issue to try to get them out of the country. It hadn't progressed to become a very urgent issue as it subsequently did. Of course, they got them out in time and they got a wild bunch of mercenaries instead. I don't know if it was a great improvement.

JK: Were the UN troops and the staff accepted by the people in Elizabethville, the civilians?

Berendsen: It varied from time to time. Sometimes we were accused of being too passive. I had a whole month in which I was effectively persona non grata to the Katangese government from Tshombe down and they said they wouldn't deal with me. It made for a rather more pleasant two or three weeks. But eventually they decided they would deal all the same. At various time when the UN was threatening policy actions which they didn't like, they would make lots of noises person to person. I remember in my letters noting that they threatened great demonstrations and a few school children showed up on one occasion. There was a lot

more talk and not much action.

JK: Was there any concern about your personal safety?

Later on I understand there were some kidnappings.

Berendsen: Brian Urquhart was kidnapped, and I won't say within an inch of his life but he had the good fortune to be rescued by Senator Thomas Dodd, otherwise known as the Senator from Katanga. But, when they broke off relations with me I was advised to get a bodyguard and I got three Moroccan troops. One of whom had been a part of the bodyguard of General Salon. I don't know if you remember this former French general in Indochina and in Algeria, but he was the leader of the former OAS, not the Organization of African States, but the anti-de Gaulle forces. So, I had three tough hombres following me around. But, I eventually decided it was a little overdone and sent them going.

JK: So. it wasn't quite as dangerous then?

Berendsen: Well, I told you there had been threats at meetings if I didn't mend my ways and I hadn't mended my ways entirely to their satisfaction but, it was much less tense than at the time when Brian Urquhart was kidnapped.

JK: In O'Brien's book he mentioned that he had met with you in New York before going to the Congo.

Berendsen: You are speaking of Conor Cruise O'Brien. I had not known him but I just gave him a frank view of the

situation in Katanga which he has represented very accurately in the book he wrote. Things had become quite tense by the time I left and I could see them becoming tenser.

JK: What were the causes of that tension?

Berendsen: Well, there was a civil war going on and the UN was being urged by Dayal and others to intervene more actively to break up the hostilities. And if we did intervene we would be taking on the Katangese gendarmerie unless they gave way. And this was sort of implicit in the Security Council resolution that I spoke of which seemed to imply a more active role and if we did that, we might clash. And if we clashed, we would have had more or less the situation we had in September, 1961. We were doing, to call it contingency planning would be too much, but we were thinking aloud about what might happen. It didn't but it did later.

JK: Do you think that O'Brien was a good choice as your replacement in Elizabethville?

Berendsen: I think that he is a very interesting and intelligent man but I think that he was too personalized. One needs some body well accustomed to UN discipline and history of peace-keeping. He carried out various initiatives in Elizabethville which were obviously very embarrassing to the Secretary-General Hammarskjold. Not that they all were ill taken but, they created an

impression of greater activity and less muted policies than they might have done.

JK: Speaking of personalities, you were in Katanga at the time that Dayal was the representative in Leopoldville. Did you work closely with him or were you in touch with him frequently?

Berendsen: I came up once or twice for consultation and I had known him in Lebanon and I had known him to be a very intelligent and thoughtful man. He has a sort of high caste attitude, a Brahman type intellectual stance which I think stood him in very bad stead in the Congo. One really had to make all sympathies to these Congolese politicians to even begin to understand or begin to get some influence with them. They were a very difficult lot, but, maybe I speak too strongly. Dayal would sort of radiate contempt if a sort of attitude did not strike him as civilized or intelligent and there were plenty of those attitudes going around.

JK: Well, we are just about at the end and I wanted to thank you and ask if there was something that we hadn't covered that you wanted to comment on.

Berendsen: It was a very hectic time, indeed. I went to a town called Luena, one of many trips up country to inspect because otherwise we didn't have any idea. This was a coal mining town on the main railroad in Baluba territory. And the mining community was carrying on

that these Baluba Kats would come into a town and threaten and occasionally attack some of the people. There were Moroccan troops there so they didn't come armed. But, I went up one day by rail car and there were a group of people in town from the outside carrying clubs and looking as if they were up to trouble. They were dispersed and their arms were gathered. One of them was some sort of a nailed cudgel which had on it "sans pitie" (without pity) and we gave assurances to the local mining community we would keep the town safe. But, as we went out there were a lot of Baluba assembled, some of them actually armed with firearms. There were Moroccans around who disarmed them and told them not to come back armed or they would be in serious trouble. These were examples of incidents that were occurring all along, but I just happened to see it that day.

JK: It was a tough time. Well, thank you very much.

Index of Names

Bernadotte, Count Folke	7
Byrne, Colonel	7
Dayal, Rajeshwar	20, 21
Dodd, Senator Thomas	19
Kanza, Thomas	8
Kasavubu, Joseph	9, 10
Kimba, Evariste	8
Liu, F. T.	5, 15
Lumumba, Patrice	9-15
Mobutu, Joseph-Desire	8, 9
Munongo, Godefroid	7, 8, 13
Nkrumah, Kwame	3
O'Brien, Conor Cruise	19, 20
Rikhye, General Indar Jit	5, 6
Tshombe, Moise	2, 3, 7, 12, 13, 18
Urquhart, Brian	5, 19

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I, Ian Berendsen (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 May 4, 1990 (Date) at Salisbury (City), ct. (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.

Ian E. Berendsen
(Interviewee)

May 4, 1990
(Date)

Jean Krasno
(Interviewer)

May 4, 1990
(Date)

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