

**Yale-UN Oral History**

General Gerry McMahon

Jim Sutterlin, Interviewer

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in Dublin, Ireland

*[A second interviewee, Major General William Dwyer arrives around p.9 ]*

*[Third interviewee, Lt. Colonel Dermot Earley, arrives around p.26 ]*

**Jim Sutterlin:** If we could, I'd like to start by discussing your experiences as a young officer, from Ireland, in Congo, and could you give a little bit of background on your assignment to the Congo? What kind of preparation did you have? What did you think you were getting into? And what did you find when you got there?

**General McMahon:** Certainly. I would say, first of all, to put it in context, I was a young officer commanding my first platoon overseas. My perspective, therefore, of the Congo operation, was quite focused, quite narrow, on my particular problems, although obviously I was aware of my company commander's and my battalion commander's level of concerns. But at the top military/political level, I wouldn't have very much to offer. Now, I think the other significant thing is *when* I was there. I went in May 1962; the operation had been ongoing since 1960. To put it in the context of Ireland: our first

battalion was the 32nd battalion and I was the 37th battalion. So, we had been there a while. I went as a volunteer because here in Ireland, since 1960--in fact, the Defense Act was amended in 1960 specifically to cater for our going in to peacekeeping in a big way--we had been in Lebanon with observers before that, but this was our first mission with troops. The Defense Act was amended to allow the military authorities to detail people to take part in operations outside the country, because up to then, inside the country was our complete focus. However, there was such a wave of volunteers; people were very anxious to serve in this new area, if you like--and remember we had not joined NATO, we were almost isolationist as regards Europe, so for a soldier it was a great opening. So, we started with volunteers, and we have gone on, by and large, with volunteers ever since. I think that as Chief of Staff I only had to detail a handful of specialists, because obviously you have a small pool there and you run out of volunteers fairly quickly. So, I went as a volunteer. Now, you asked about...?

JS: Let me just interrupt one minute there, to change to your present capacity because of something you just said. In terms of volunteering and interest in participating in this type of operation, have you noticed a change within the Irish army since the United Nations has been involved in more obviously enforcement actions?

GM: No. Our first enforcement action was UNISOM II, and again prior to UNISOM II we took on a Defense Act amendment to allow us to go on peace-enforcement. I was on

the General Staff at the time and I thought it was a bit peculiar because, here, thirty years earlier in the Congo we had gone on peacekeeping, and while we were there we had moved to peace-enforcement; and in fact, because there were no nice academic categorizations in those days, this evoked not one iota of discussion. However, there was discussion in our parliament prior to that latest act to allow us to go on peace-enforcement, but it wasn't very hot, there was no major debate on it. Subsequently, when we went to SFOR, again the debate wasn't very hot because it meant this was another step, although UN mandated--we were going under NATO command. So again, there have been changes, but I would have to say that we have gone along, stayed with the volunteer overseas soldier, and it has worked very well for us.

JS: I see. And just to pursue that one more moment. UNISOM II was viewed in many places as a disastrous operation. That did not change attitudes here in Ireland for participating in...

GM: It did not. You see, really, in my recollection, UNISOM went wrong before we got there. We arrived as part of UNISOM II; we went with a transport company. We were involved in Baidoa, that was our base, and essentially our work was bringing stores from Mogadishu down to the Indian brigade--initially the French brigade, and then the Indian brigade--in the Baidoa area, operating in the Baidoa area. We had involvement very much in humanitarian issues there, and indeed our President visited the orphanage,

which we were very much involved in the day-to-day running of. So, what was happening in Ireland was that troops were doing their normal job, which they do all over the world in peacekeeping, and the humanitarian side of it was getting played up, and everybody was very comfortable with that image. Now, the earlier image of the US becoming involved in shoot-outs and what-have-you, these gave pause to our politicians in sending us there but they did not, once we got there, they did not impact very much on public opinion here.

I suppose I will tell you a story that will indicate some of the ways we were thinking. We planned to go there with combat uniforms, which were the same pattern as the American uniform. After things got really difficult there, we changed our uniform. We went in the drab green that we had served in Lebanon in, and we did that specifically because we didn't want to be taken for Americans--not because of lack of support for the United States, but for self-protection for our own troops.

JS: Right. Let me pursue this a moment. It is of great interest because, actually, at Yale we are doing another project and this project has to do with defining potential missions for UN forces in this gray area involving peace-enforcement. A number of the things that we have postulated is the possibility for example of the United Nations utilizing force to capture a war criminal who has been indicted by an international criminal court. Another is to go into refugee camps in order to find persons there who may have been responsible in some way or another for genocide and again to take them out by force. So, my question, really, to you, is what do you think, as Chief of Staff of the

Irish army right now, of this type of operation? Do you think it is feasible for the United Nations? Do you think that Ireland would want to participate in something like that?

GM: I would have to say on both of those that they are political decisions rather than military decisions. The military would carry out such political decisions if such political decisions were coming. However, the military would have to be equipped to do such a mission and it would be very complicated and would demand a hell of a lot of muscle to do it. That, in turn, could impact on the political side, and although we are military and we are given a job, normally we would carry on and do that job, we have to be aware if in doing this job we make things worse. And your question actually reminds me of the current situation in the former Yugoslavia, where you have the biggest, mightiest peace-enforcement mission there ever has been, and they are tiptoeing around this exact problem. To a lesser extent we had it in Rwanda and again it was tiptoed around. Military action is military action, but in a situation where it has a huge political impact--while it might be the way on a blank sheet of paper to do the job--the impacts could be huge and could be self-defeating.

JS: Well, that's exactly it. And that is why an academic exercise like we are engaged in needs to have the input of people like you, as well as the politicians, of course, because as you say these are political decisions. And yet, it increasingly seems to be the areas in

which UN force will be needed. Peacekeeping is a declining profession, at the moment, in the classical form.

GM: I would agree peacekeeping is a declining profession at the moment. I would disagree that it is going to disappear off the map entirely. And it does concern me, because we have had a very good history in peacekeeping, but our politics is very conservative and our non-membership of NATO also has a bearing on it. I am very aware that peacekeeping is changing even as we speak, and I am also aware that we must keep up the political initiatives here at home to keep us in the game, and I think during the week, had you been here this week, you would have heard me speak publicly about our timidity in government and how it could in the long term impact on our peacekeeping ability, because I agree with what you are saying.

JS: Let us go back to you as a young officer in the Congo, when you got there, and you were in Elizabethville, as I understand it.

GM: We left Ireland to fly into Elizabethville; however while we were getting ready to fly out from Dublin, we were switched to Leopoldville because at that stage Tshombe was coming up for talks and we heard as young officers, but I mean I can't verify this at all, that part of the agreement was that he would come up for talks provided there were some European troops in the area. That was the explanation given to me, but I have never

been able to pick it up in any reading I have done in subsequent years. So, we found ourselves diverted into Leopoldville. We spent about two months there. My platoon were put guarding the control tower at the airport. My mission was to defend that facility, and the background information given to me was that this was because if the talks broke down, that we had to guarantee safe passage--the UN I mean--from the venue of the talks in the city out to the airport and that my company was to ensure that the airport was held to allow Mr. Tshombe to go back to Katanga. We subsequently spent our four remaining months in our tour back in Katanga as he was back in Katanga, because he did eventually leave, although I can't recall him leaving.

JS: Again, as a young observer, how did you perceive the atmosphere in Elizabethville at that point? Did it seem to be dominated by the UN presence or by the gendarmerie, which were still there, I think, at that point?

GM: When I was there, areas in the center of the city were still held by gendarmes, but not very many. The fighting that had taken place in the previous six months had dislodged them from that. My memory of it was that we were in the suburbs, if you like, and I know that my own platoon were in three very up-market bungalows on a main route going out of the city. Our job was to control traffic in and out. I was unaware of any of the high-level political movements that might have been taken place, but I was very much aware of the huge number of Baluba refugees who were very near our area. I was very

much aware of the fact that the countryside outside the city, outside the suburbs, which we held, was not controlled by the UN but indeed was controlled by the gendarmerie. And, Bill Dwyer, who will join us later, will probably give you an indication of breaking out into that country. On several occasions we were prepared, orders had been passed, and UN-New York called it off. I can remember one occasion in particular where we were really ready to go at dawn the next morning and it was called off the night before. I am unaware of anything other than that.

JS: We were talking about your function in Elizabethville. I realize that you were in the suburbs there outside of the gendarmerie area, but I was wondering: did you see it at all as, or were you told that, it was part of your function to give any protection to the local population?

GM: Obviously, yes. But our area of operations, my platoon's area of operations, just covered several local living areas, and of course we did--although again humanitarian aid wasn't an in term at that stage in the peacekeeping context; we did feed people, we did employ people privately. I can remember a man who came to work for myself and the three other platoon commanders, kept our uniforms going, and we gave him some money, and his kids came up and we fed them. So, yes, very definitely. But as to the high-level, big-picture, defense of the local population against gendarmerie or whatever, I was not aware of it.

JS: And were you aware of any sense of hostility toward the UN presence there?

GM: Absolutely not. Certainly the mercenary prisoners that we held from the previous fighting were very anxious to indicate to us their side of the story. But hostility--I am aware of no hostility that I can say. But again, Bill, who was involved in the fighting and will join us shortly, he was and may be able to expand on that answer.

JS: This in a way is a kind of academic question, but as commander of a platoon in a rather unusual situation, how did you think of self-defense, which was the basis of the UN presence?

GM: We had been told about self-defense before we left Ireland. It wasn't anything very new to us, as Irish soldiers, because one of our tasks at home is aid to the civil power, where essentially you have a police force that is responsible for internal security, but they are largely unarmed. So, there is a legal right for them to call the military in aid to the civil power. And in such a situation, you have very clear--these days they call them rules of engagement--in that you can only open fire when the police you are protecting or your own people come under attack. So, this was absolutely nothing new to us at all. However, when we got to the Congo, the whole area of firing in self-defense became a bit

ambiguous because you would have to remember we were the 37th Irish battalion. The 36th and 35th before us had been involved in operations, instigated by the UN, against local gendarmerie led by mercenaries. So, I mean, this was very definitely not self-defense.

JS: And the Irish had suffered a number of casualties by that time, right?

GM: Yes. So, I understood the concept; all our soldiers would understand the concept, but when we got there it was not--as far as I would be concerned--it was not a self-defense mission.

*Major General William Dwyer arrives and enters the conversation.*

JS: General Dwyer, what were you doing when you arrived in Elizabethville?

General Dwyer: First of all, we were part of, I was part of a heavy mortar troop, 120 mm mortar, it's quite big; we called it a heavy mortar, and it was the first time that they had sent such a mortar troop with a UN battalion. So, we arrived, and immediately,

almost immediately, we were put in training with an Indian artillery battery of heavy mortars.

JS: Would they be considered heavy weapons?

WD: Yes. The field weapons are medium for us, but they are called 'heavy weapons'. Certainly in the context of what was available in the UN out there, they were heavy weapons. The Indians had 4.2 inch mortar; it was more old-fashioned. It wasn't as modern as our Brandt 120mm mortar. We were put in training with the Indians and teaching... We had more advanced fire-control systems, as well, than they had, even though they were all pen-and-pencil type fire control; they had older systems. And we trained with them on Air Ops, air observation work with the helicopter, obviously suspecting that something was coming. But we were told nothing before leaving for the Congo but we were there only a few weeks and we were training seriously. We didn't arrive until early November, so that training went on--we got on very well with the Indians. But then, just before Christmas, there was an Indian officer killed--shot down in a helicopter, shot down--and it sparked, it was the excuse for the Indian brigade taking action in general. We didn't--we were very junior; we didn't really know what had happened except that we were told to get our mortars ready to move; and the firing started all over the place, booms of heavy mortar coming from everywhere around, echoing into the night. But we were told to move to a certain position to fire heavy mortars, which we

did. We weren't really under fire at the time; there were a lot of stray bullets going around, small arms bullets, but there was no heavy fire down where we were, and we had no proper maps, which artillery people--they have to operate with proper maps--but we had no proper maps. We did some surveying; we had our survey equipment with us, and we did some survey work. Our first target--the Ethiopian battalion was attacking some place, moving south from Elizabethville...

JS: Did you know whom they were attacking?

WD: No, we wouldn't have known it; I wouldn't have known it. I mean, we knew they were mercenaries, and we knew they were Tshombe's soldiers, if you like, but we wouldn't have been a part of that--we were interested in the job we were doing. And we weren't told everything that was going on at the top. So, we were told to fire on a certain camp, which was a gendarmerie camp; it was one of Tshombe's bases, and apparently our fire was extremely effective. The first round went into the area of the camp as it was supposed to, and that ended very quickly and everybody ran away. It was a peculiar type of a war that was going on. When our bombs started to fall, the people just ran away into the bush, frightened by the boom from the 120 or any other weapon that was being fired. So the next thing that happened the following day, Friday, the 28th of December, the Irish battalion was ordered to move south toward a place called Kipushi which is on the Northern Rhodesian border, and we were told to support them--so we did support them.

But we could see their movement. We had our ground position and our observation group who could observe everything that was going on and we gave them fire support, which was very effective also. We fired and moved forward and fired again, and the Irish moved into Kipushi without, I think, much small arm fire, although I think some of the cavalry who were out in front must have been in action because I know some of them got distinguished service medals for it, so obviously they were in action, but I can't remember how much action they were in and we didn't suffer any casualties. We weren't really under serious fire attack at all. It was more stray fire; there was no major response from the gendarmerie for that. They were running away in front of us. We thought that they would put up a strong resistance, defense around Kipushi but apparently they didn't; they withdrew into Northern Rhodesia.

So we thought the war was over. This was on New Years Eve--we were sure it was over, so we bivouacked over night and then we were ordered to join the Indian brigade and move north, which we did and spent the next week, I suppose, firing, supporting the Indian brigade moving north towards Jadotville and across the Lufira river.

JS: So, you were in that group that moved across the river?

WD: I was gun-position officer, actually, what we call gun-position officer. I was in charge of the guns and I was the one to order 'fire', and we'd get reports back from the

OP: I was the one who controlled the fire of the guns. We crossed the Lufira at an encampment, the 2nd or 3rd of January, I think...

JS: Actually, I think it was the 27th of December...

WD: Was it? Yes? [No. The first Section crossed 2 January and I crossed with it.]

JS: ... According to the notes I have. This is a particularly interesting historical event because there is some question as to who authorized this action.

WD: Well, there are some stories told about it, and any number of hear-says, probably embellished with the telling, you know! General Naron was a very strong individual-- that was the impression we got. There are all types of stories told that he turned off the radio sets when New York was telling him not to move forward. But we don't know whether that's true or not.

JS: In other words, your orders came through normal channels, so to speak?

WD: Oh absolutely. We wouldn't have known what was going on. I wasn't a second Lieutenant but barely a full Lieutenant! And I was interested only in the job I was doing, because we were too busy to think of anything else. We were told we were advancing towards Jadotville and that's what we did. We were informed that there were obstacles; the roads were blown up; the bridges were blown up; there was half a railway bridge across the Lufira River so that you could cross it with difficulty, but that was blown up the first night or the second night. It sounds very exciting and interesting but we were quite scared as well, you know, with the firing. We didn't know what was happening further up--I couldn't answer the question.

GM: There is a report that the General had said, "Tell them I didn't hear it." He supposedly said over the radio, "Can't hear you--can't hear you, sorry, say it again?"

JS: Well, I think it's clear that Ralph Bunche felt it would be too dangerous to go across at that point and you did go across. Who authorized it, is the question.

WD: I would have thought that was early January, now that I think of it.

JS: Well, it might have been. My date may be wrong here. Certainly, on January 14th was when the Secretary-General received word that Tshombe was ready to end his secession. So when you got into Jadotville, what did you find?

WD: There were very few people around, I remember. We were kind of disorganized and a bit lost, and we had to go searching for where we would camp. I think, maybe, the Indians just looked after themselves at that stage and we were... After it was over, I think it is fair. We consolidated our position... We went into a military camp where obviously the gendarmerie had been with white civilians, white officers--the mercenaries had gone away but left their transport, a lot of weapons. We got weapons there, a lot of transport left behind, very few people around the place. We just looked after ourselves, set up our camp, and the following day the war seemed to be over. We heard then, we started getting reports that Tshombe was going to talk, but it was above our head.

JS: Now, I have asked this question to General McMahon: being out in the field, what did you perceive as the attitude of the people, various tribes for that matter, toward the UN? The gendarmerie, you were fighting against them--did the people seem to look to them for protection, or to you?

WD: When we arrived, the war--as we called it a war--was about to start. We didn't ever get close to local people. When we arrived first, because the war was about [to

start], there was tenseness there. Once the fighting started, the civilians weren't anywhere, in any of the villages that we fired from; there were no civilians; they had disappeared into the bush; they had gone away. When we arrived in Jadotville, they were very, very friendly, but maybe because in Kolwezi subsequently there was a huge Belgian population, they may not have been the real natives that we were talking to, who were very pro-UN at that stage--whatever had taken place, very, very pro-. But before that we never got to know the natives except for the people who worked for the UN--they were all very friendly. They knew their shilling was coming from it, but whether that was the real situation...

I never got... When you are in a situation like that, doing an operational job, you don't get involved in the political side of it. Other people would have, but we didn't, we were interested in the job we were given to do and that was artillery or heavy mortars, firing them properly and hitting the target, and consolidating afterwards. Then later, after that operation we were charged with weapons controls.

JS: The firing of these weapons was far more than self-defense. Did this cause any confusion as to the extent to which you were able to use weapons in a situation in the Congo, or was it quite clear by that time that you were in an enforcement action?

WD: Oh yes, it was. We were told that we would fire. We were ordered by Brigade Command to be firing weapons and it caused us no personal trauma at all to order fire

when we were told to order fire. It was different when the UN was there earlier, and it was certainly a different UN in Lebanon. But at that stage, we were told, briefed, heading up with our heavy mortars, 'You would have to fire, you will be firing.' So the battalion commander was up there, in place, the former Chief of Staff, Paddy Delaney, and Comdt. Tommy Wickham, the Chief Operations officer, who got killed subsequently in Syria, was coming and he briefed us.

JS: He did brief you?

WD: He briefed us, yes, before we pulled out. He was a gunner himself, you see, artillery, and I suppose he was very proud of a little artillery unit getting involved. And he said 'You know, this isn't playing games now; you will be going out and you will be firing at the enemy and they'll be firing back at you.'

GM: The mere deployment, with cavalry out in front, main body, artillery giving support, this isn't self-defense. This is the classic offensive operations force.

WD: Absolutely, and we never thought any differently. It was a normal operation. We had been trained; we were very junior at the time, but our boss, who was a captain who had done his commanding staff courses at that stage and everything else, he would see it

as the classical type of military fire-and-movement operation. He would have seen it; we wouldn't have been looking at it quite like that; we would have been thinking of the guns and the rounds landing in the right place. That's really what we'd be interested in, what I was interested in anyway.

JS: And nobody said anything about minimal use of force?

WD: I can't remember that, with the passage of time. We had to control our firing only because we had limited ammunition. Heavy mortar ammunition is very bulky and heavy and hard to bring from place to place, and the roads were good and bad, and that's the only thing that limited our firing. If we'd had an unlimited supply of ammunition, we could have fired much more and nobody would have told us to stop. That's for certain.

JS: This is a rather delicate question, I guess: the military advisor to the Secretary-General at that point was General Rikhye and there are indications, there are some stories at least, that there was a general Irish antipathy towards General Rikhye. Did that get down as far as your commands at any time?

WD: Certainly not, not at all. The only Indian general I knew was General Narona who was a great man. He would visit us. He was a great man to get around subunits and

subunits and he visited us early on, and spoke to us and complimented us on our work--he was flying like a busy bee all over the place. He led the attack the whole way himself and came back and spoke. That was the way that was. I never heard of Rikhye until years and years later when he was in the peacekeeping academy in Austria. I had never heard, and in fact I didn't know he was involved--he certainly wouldn't have been a general in the Congo.

GM: I think that he was at New York. I know that General Naron, and I've met General Prem Chan, who was Force Commander in Cyprus when I served there, and I've met him several times since--he also was involved with our people in Namibia. But he and the Irish were always extremely close, and I have met General Rikhye also, and never got an indication... I mean the first time I've ever heard of this is what you've said now. Perhaps it was at the political level in New York, but I hadn't been aware of it at all.

WD: Did something arise later on in UNEF? Was Rikhye in UNEF?

GM: No, he had been in UNEF before that, in the 1950s.

JS: That's right.

WD: ... Something may have arisen when we weren't involved.

GM: No, we weren't in UN peacekeeping at that point. Well, I've never heard it until today.

JS: Well, fine, because he's a fine man. But there was another Indian, but again at a high level, Dayal, who was for a while the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, or the head civilian. His was a controversial assignment and he and Rikhye were fairly close. Now, the Irish had difficult assignments in the Congo, certainly. In Jadotville earlier, a number were killed, I believe, and there was an Irish infantry group in south Kasai where there was a lot of tribal fighting. How was the morale in the Irish troops, since they seemed to have to take the brunt of some of the fighting?

GM: I think it was fantastic. I think that even all these years afterwards, we had a television program about a month ago here in Ireland on the Irish forty years in peacekeeping, and the two survivors of the Niamba ambush, which was probably the most traumatic thing that has ever happened to us overseas, they were both on the show. One of them was interviewed at length, and again last Monday, there was a UN exhibition going on down at the National Museum, just opened, again to celebrate our forty years' involvement. Both of the survivors of that ambush were there, and even all these years on you can get the feeling--the high morale is still there, although the tragedy is still there

also obviously, because one of these soldiers is still very disturbed about his experiences in that particular operation. But that would have been my... I mean, I know my platoon loved every minute of their six months in the Congo. I still have contact with them after all these years; my platoon sergeant, I was in contact with him two months ago-- unfortunately he was in the hospital and has since died. The other members of my platoon, one of them is still serving and we quite often will talk about it.

WD: I would say the very same thing. The morale of the--how you call it--the heavy mortar troop, which was my subunit--and the infantry companies also, working with them later on--the morale was very, very high. We were really excited over the activities. Soldiers are always a bit excited, and their morale is very heightened when they are busy and active in doing the job they were trained to do. Certainly soldiers wouldn't be thinking of the big picture...

JS: That's what I was going to ask. You were down the line, both of you at that point, but did you have an idea of what the United Nations was trying to do in the Congo? Did you understand what the mission was?

WD: I would say, possibly, that we had been briefed. Intelligence, our intelligence officers, had briefed us before we went out. I think the man's name was Gary Foley, and he gave us, ran all the political makeup of the Congo and whatnot. That would be... how

interested I would have been in it--I'm sure I would have been very interested. I remember a lot of it. I must say I probably was very interested in what he was telling us. So, we knew from that. I would say that all officers would have known pretty well what was happening. We would have known who Tshombe was; we would have known the different names that subsequently came up; and we would have known where they were and what they were. We would have known how involved Belgium was in the whole thing up to the years before that.

GM: We were briefed as officers, and we, in turn, briefed our platoon. However, it sounds all very well organized at this remove, but I would have to say that as I said the other night on that television programme that in my platoon I was the only one who had ever been on an aircraft, and I was the only one who had been outside Ireland.

[end of side 1]

[side 2]

*Lieutenant Colonel Dermot Earley arrives and enters the conversation.*

JS: As you said earlier, this was fairly late in the game; in fact the game was over when you got to Jadotville, as far as Katanga, but--and by that time at the higher level

back in New York, the whole operation had become extremely controversial. One Secretary-General had died in the process. So that the United Nations was more or less divided, and badly divided because of this operation. Was this at all reflected, in your own troops in their wondering what it was they were doing in an operation that was not supported...

GM: I would say, absolutely not. And then I would continue by saying, why not? These days of instant television, instant radio, faxes, everything; it's the day of instant information. We would have been totally unaware of the problems at a political level being encountered in New York--totally unaware of it.

WD: Absolutely. We wouldn't have known anything. I subsequently got a hint that there was something, some disagreement at a higher level because an officer came from Leopoldville to the headquarters of our forces to inspect something, to seek information, and he let it slip out that there was a terrible row going on in New York, and that some countries opposed the actions that had taken place and he was coming to find out whether we hadn't fired into civilian towns and things like that. Not us, but the whole operation--not just the Irish. So we began to suspect there was something to it. I think he wasn't received with open arms. But he did give the hint that all wasn't well. That's all. Our soldiers would be in no way interested in that at all, too busy doing the job they were doing.

JS: Again, you had at your side soldiers from other countries, platoons, battalions from other countries. The Africans, most of them had left by then, I think. Were you aware of any great disparity in attitudes or in their capacity to fight?

WD: The only 'foreigners,' if you like, that I knew were the Indians who were in a heavy mortar outfit, and they seemed very well organized, uneducated as a lot of the soldiers that you come across with the Indians are, but they seemed to be a fine military force. Their officers seemed to be well trained and they certainly helped to do the job. The ordinary Indian wasn't interested in the political game that was going on higher up someplace. I didn't know... we supported the Ethiopians, as I said, but I never came in contact with them personally, at all. The Ethiopians, there were some other...

GM: The Ethiopians served beside us, and I must say one would have to be very impressed by them. You see, we had never had any intercourse with any other foreign armies, so for us it was really, really interesting to compare and contrast. The Ethiopians, I must say, impressed me very much. The Nigerians, because again African countries at that stage--there weren't that many of them, and the Nigerians, interestingly enough in 1962, were there, but down to company level. Their company commanders, battalion commanders, were actually British. So they were in transition. And again, from the outside, they looked very impressive. They were trained by the British and it was very

obvious. The Ethiopians were quite different, now. But again they were also very impressive.

JS: Now, a question that relates partly to the Congo, but to your subsequent experience as well. At the present time, when the operations do involve more frequently enforcement, it is sometimes said--and the Colonel will be familiar with this, I guess--that countries that have never really fought a war, are less able to provide troops that are competent to deal with enforcement action than countries that have been involved directly, if not in war, at least in conflict situations. Do you think this is valid or not, as an Irish officer?

WD: Of course, what you say depends on armaments and levels of training and equipment. If you are talking about enforcement, you are talking about hard, heavy military hardware, if you like, whereas the countries which maybe have not been involved--although maybe you shouldn't associate the two... because some countries have not been involved in conflict, have been neutral countries for years, but they still are very well armed and equipped. So the two aren't, if you like, synonymous. From our own position, for peace-enforcement at present, we wouldn't be sufficiently armed for most, practically all, enforcement operations. We are moving towards a situation where we would be better equipped and better armed, and so on. But it's in the future. But at this time I would have to say that you couldn't compare with the United States or Britain or

France or Germany, or the Scandinavian countries for that matter, who were not involved, if you like, in recent wars, and other countries--Eastern European countries...

JS: But the question has arisen with regard to the Swedes.

GM: I would have to say that, on that, Bill has made a valid point there, that we are professional. Our military is trained to a very high professional level. However through years of--and I won't call it neutrality, I will call it isolationism--we are poorly equipped. Very well equipped in small arms, and the less-expensive items. Not well equipped on APCs, etc., etc. And that was always the way. The great lessons we brought back from the Congo were that we were every bit as good and better than most of the armies we had come across, but that our equipment was pathetic. But I think that maybe what has tripped your question is a lot of simplification I hear about former Yugoslavia, and about UNPROFOR and about how good SFOR is. I have not served in either UNPROFOR or S-FOR but I have visited many, many times, and it strikes me that UNPROFOR went in with a mission, which was to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid. They were equipped for that...

JS: Peacekeeping.

GM: ... And then mission-creep dragged them further and further into the minefield, if you don't mind me using that expression, without equipping them for it. Now, IFOR and SFOR are the other side of the coin. They have gone in with such might that not a mouse can look sideways but they are on top of it. However, there will be over the coming years a dynamic to withdraw and if that takes place before there has been political advancement then at some stage, when that weight starts to move out, things will start again, unless the political problem that is at the basis of it has been sorted out. And I think an awful lot of nonsense has been written and spoken, and I feel very strongly about it, about the whole area of 'The UN are no good for doing peacekeeping, it has to be NATO, it has to be this...' I think that is absolutely ludicrous, because, actually, SFOR is a UN operation. So, you know, if that's what is tripping your question, I am answering in the negative very enthusiastically. Sorry Dermot, you haven't got in at all...

**Dermot Earley:** I would agree. I just think that in the question you have asked, here are two things. There is an ability of the particular country to carry out the function of enforcement or fighting the war. And I think that generally most professional armies that have been involved in peacekeeping activities, traditional peacekeeping, would have the ability... as General McMahon said 'We all know how to conduct the operation, but the main problem is are you equipped to do the job? And do you have the back-up and the protection?' And I think that in Ireland, here, from a political level, too, we wanted to ensure that the safety and protection of the troops involved in whatever peace-enforcement action we got involved in, whether it was Somalia or now with SFOR, that

we did have the ability to protect our troops doing the job. There was never a question of them being unable to do the job, if that protection was there.

GM: Actually, Dermot has tripped another thing in my mind, that in UNOSOM, you had NATO countries serving in UNOSOM; you had non-NATO countries like us serving there. When we send troops overseas, each battalion commander--and Dermot has been a battalion commander--gets sealed orders from the Minister, which I give him, and among the things in there is that he is now placed under command of the force commander in the UN.

JS: That is standard procedure here?

GM: That's standard procedure. Now, we are a non-NATO country that hasn't been involved in the great alliance for the last fifty years, but we recognize that if you don't have a chain of command that works, forget about it. And our troops are well aware--of course, when Dermott was battalion commander (and he had a very traumatic time in Lebanon), I knew what was happening but I never rang him and no Irish minister ever rang him. He played the game out there within the UN structure. However, I am well aware in UNOSOM, of NATO countries who, when the force commander ordered them to re-deploy, refused. So, it has nothing to do, I would hold, with whether you are a non-NATO involved in the UN operation, or whether you are in a NATO operation, or

whether you are NATO with UN, or whatever. It has to do with the chain of command, and with whom you answer to.

JS: Yes, amen! Even in Lebanon, I believe, there was a major country that did not follow the...

WD: At one time, that is correct.

GM: Correct.

JS: But what you have said, General, is extremely welcome to me--and this is not part of the interview, in a way--the recent proof of this, is the operation in Eastern Slavonia, which was a purely UN operation and did involve enforcement, and the chain of command was fairly clear. There happened to have been an American, who was the head of the operation--which perhaps added some force that might not have been there otherwise--and IFOR was right next door, or SFOR. But it did work. It did show that the UN is capable of carrying out an enforcement action.

GM: We had people with UNTAES--they were observers, officer observers. I visited UNTAES, and I was very impressed by it, but I was also very impressed by going in to small villages and finding maybe six Jordanian tanks totally controlling their area of operations. But that's what peacekeeping--peace-support operations as they are called now to bring them all in--that's what they are all about--having the equipment and the briefing and the political backup to do whatever task you are given.

JS: Right. Does either of you have any particular point you'd like to put on the record so to speak about your experiences, or the Irish experience, in the Congo? I want to go back to that now for a moment, for our history.

WD: I think that in some way ... The excitement of going to Africa, as a young man, out to Africa, the wondrous Africa, was enough to keep us in awe for a long, long time. And then the action we were in--we were soldiers, we were trained for it, and we proved, as the Chief of Staff has said, that we were as good as anybody else. In fact, the Indian officers in the artillery were in awe at how good we were, the few of us who were there. They were in awe of our standards of training and our control in fire discipline and all that. So, it did give us that confidence where we saw that we were as good even at that low level, as good as anybody else. That's, I think, the biggest memory I have of the whole thing. But I have no qualms of conscience at all in sending the Irish to any job if

they were properly equipped. The troops and their officers were all as good or better than anybody else.

JS: And that lasts until today?

DW: Right.

JS: General, do you have anything?

GM: I suppose we have had a good session. The main thing that has impacted me in the last hour and a half or whatever that we have been talking is to emphasize the dangers of looking at something that happened almost forty years ago and applying today in retrospect to that. It was a very different world. And certainly for us in Ireland it was a very different world. I would say US forces, had they been involved, would have had the sophistication, perhaps the world-view of things. But for us they were very simple times. We were trained in isolation here in Ireland. We went there and we acquitted ourselves extremely well, and we were very proud and very happy about that. But sometimes I think there is always this danger that you project yourself back and you say, 'Why didn't this happen; why didn't that happen?' I mean, communications with headquarters in Leopoldville to Katanga area must have been horrendous. They must have been worse

than trying to communicate with something circling around Saturn at this stage. It's very difficult to project backwards. I think that given all those drawbacks, and given the simplicity of the world at that time, I think we did extremely well.

DE: Could I make one point, even though I wasn't in the Congo at all? But in 1960, when Ireland decided to send troops to the Congo, and when the troops went there and the reports came back, General McMahon talked about doing a good job, and General Dwyer talked about the excitement, all of that was a major factor in my deciding to join the defense forces, because of the interest, the publicity, the feeling of well-done and well-being about this major operation undertaken by Ireland and so well done by the troops who went out there to represent Ireland, the tragedy that occurred, the whole excitement of all of that, was certainly the first seed in my thoughts for joining the defense forces.

JS: That's a great point to end the consideration of the Congo. I think. General, how much time do you have? Do you have time to go into Lebanon? Let's go then, if we could, very quickly to Lebanon, a very different situation from the Congo, and one that put the UN peacekeepers in a more difficult role. I believe, General, when you were there the first time, it was just after the Israelis had moved in?

GM: Yes. Operation Litani, of course, started in March 1978, and when we arrived the situation had just, if you like, reached where it's still at, if you like, in that Israel was

supposed to withdraw. It withdrew from the Litani in three phases, and really they were ridgelines. So, they withdrew on to one ridge line, then they withdrew on to the second ridge line and the UN forces were coming in behind them, and the final withdrawal was to be from that final ridge line to the ridge line beyond, which was in fact the Israeli border. That last phase movement never took place. So, when we arrived there in November 1978, this had just, if you like, started to come into effect, and of course it hasn't changed all that much in the intervening time.

JS: That's right. I asked about understanding of the mission in the Congo earlier -- well, the mission in UNIFIL was even less clearly defined in many ways, including the so-called area of operation. Did you find this to be a problem as you were assigned there? I mean, in knowing what it was you were there for and where you were supposed to do it?

GM: I think you touch on a very basic problem, because if you have an operation where the parties in conflict have a signed agreement on something and that agreement is quite detailed--I am thinking of the Golan where I also served--then it is relatively easy to police that. Lebanon didn't really have that, and you know I was well aware that the United States was anxious to extricate Israel from there because the Camp David talks were going off the rails because the Egyptians didn't like what was happening. And I think there was an attempt to rush in troops with either an unrealizable mandate or one that was fudged, just to, if you like, check-mate one political problem while the

discussion went on with solving the Israel-Egypt one. And I think as a result, yes, the mandate has always been a problem. However, military people take a mandate like that and they transcribe it into a mission--now, the mission still in UNIFIL used to say 'confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces.' Of course, you couldn't confirm that they had withdrawn, but you could confirm that they hadn't withdrawn--so you were doing a certain part of your job there. And the military who had been deployed there have over the years, in my opinion, applied a realizable mission to the situation they found themselves in where the over-all mandate doesn't make that much sense. Now, that would be my thoughts on it, but Dermot has been a battalion commander there and he obviously had to wrestle with such a problem. I was a mere staff officer there.

DE: I would agree completely that you have to adjust the mission or the statement of your mission to allow you to fulfill whatever tasks you can possibly fulfill in trying to do the job that you were required to do, as per the mandate that was issued from the Security Council, and the fact that certain things hadn't happened created difficulties for you in doing that. But at the same time, there were many actions that you were carrying out which were very fulfilling and rewarding, and going a long way to ensuring that to the best of your ability, peace prevailed within the area.

JS: What was fulfilling? Let me ask you that in three terms: one responsibility that I think UNIFIL assumed was to try to prevent infiltration. How successful did you find that to be, and how fulfilling was that?

DE: It was very difficult to prevent infiltration because the terrain was so difficult, the size of the area that you were assigned to was so large, and because of the numbers of peacekeeping forces, the number of troops and the organization, it was impossible to have a water-tight situation. And in the role that you were playing, you are negotiating with the parties involved in the conflict to comply to the best of their ability with the rules, and when they are not willing to do so, that creates serious difficulty. But you attempted to do the best you could with the resources you had, and it was fulfilling when the local population whom you would serve, let's say for want of a better word, in order that they would live peacefully and have a normal life, when they were complimentary to you for the security measures that were around their areas and allowed them to live as normal a life as possible--that was the fulfilling part.

JS: And you saw that, I am speaking now as an Irish commander, as part of your responsibility in UNIFIL?

DE: Yes. Absolutely.

GM: If I could add just one thing there--it's very difficult also, it's extremely difficult terrain. You can block the roads, you can block the tracks by having mobile patrols that can set up snap check points every now and again, but the terrain there is so difficult, the wadis, et cetera. Of course you could do it by dominating as the French did early on, by shelling every valley, shooting into the wadis at night, but even that wasn't successful. But you are in a country with a fudged mission; you are there at the invitation of that country, because if they said, 'Please leave,' you must leave, and elements from within that country are trying to push foreign forces, as they see it, out of the country. Now, to get involved in major military operations in a situation like that is impossible, and unacceptable, I would hold. But within those constraints, you endeavor to keep a certain amount of movement to a minimum, but once the war begins and the fighting begins, and we had a big hoo-haa there yesterday and the day before, you are in the old UN situation then, of observing and reporting, and that's your mission.

JS: Right--another responsibility that theoretically you had there was to assist in restoring the authority of Lebanon, of the government, in the south. How did you go about that, and did that give you some satisfaction?

GM: If I could start on that one, I would say that when I went there in 1978, the town we went to, Tibnin had about a population of 1000 and sometimes it dropped to four or

five hundred, depending on what was happening, if there was shelling. None of the farms were being tended, the tobacco crop had been saved with great difficulty. There was, if I can remember, maybe two local policemen and there were no Lebanese military to be seen in the area. When I go back there now, and my last visit was there in March, huge difference--OK, the Israelis are still sitting in the Israeli controlled area, but Lebanese medical personnel are there and the Council for the South are doing work there, the roads, the infrastructure, the farming, the building of houses. The population of south Lebanon is at least ten times bigger than it was ten years ago, and all of these things--and the Lebanese are back--all of these things in my mind are contributing to the return of Lebanese sovereignty in the area, though not in the full area. And I think that marvelous work has been done in the ten years. Now, that would be my perspective looking at it over that period of time, but Dermot you would have more up to date...

DE: In exactly the same way, in dealing with the local leaders and the local communities; with the police, who are there more in force now than they had been at that time in 1978 of two policemen in Tibnin; the civil authority, the local chief administrator, for the greater area of the Irish battalion's deployment area, is taking his orders from the government in Beirut; he has money to spend; he has a plan for the development of the area, whether it be in education or infrastructure; and you facilitate him and help him, and you give him recognition, which is one of the most important things of all--that you give those people... you don't take any recognition for any success, but give all the recognition to the local leader, to the chief administrator, and to the Lebanese military people who are

coming more south of the Litani River as time goes on. One large area which was in the past occupied by the Ghanaian and Fijian battalions is now occupied by the Lebanese forces, and they are pushing south a little bit more all the time and they are becoming more confident to push south and to visit places like Tibnin and further south, which is coming very close to the Israeli controlled area. So, in helping the government to restore its authority, you do it in that way, and certainly I think that in a very slow process, over a long, long time, now, it is restoring its authority and getting a grip and control on lots of the area now. And by indirect means too, it has influence in areas, in villages, that are within the Israeli controlled area because through the United Nations and through the Council of the South, you have the humanitarian program for each of those villages, whether it be to provide medical aid or food or some work to improve the sewage system or the farming procedures, aided and organized and promoted by the Lebanese government, you are attempting to make this happen deep inside the Israeli controlled areas. So, I think that all of these things help to win the support of the people in those villages for the government and identify with the country.

GM: If I could just come in there on two points that Dermot has touched on--I am sure that you are aware that the only change made to the UN mandate since the beginning of this has been the adding of the humanitarian aspect, although we were working in our own small tin-pot way, as we always do, any place we go, the soldiers write home, people start something charitable, we send out several containers of clothes, school-books, what-have-you. That always goes on, but it is part of the mandate now. And the other point is

that the movement of the Lebanese army is happening slowly-slowly, but it is happening. Twice before it was attempted to move in the Lebanese army, and the second time when I was operations officer in the battalion, we were shelled for a week, and they stopped the Lebanese deployment. It was seen as very much a threat. I have the feeling now in Lebanon that there is much more room for accommodation for this kind of thing, with the people in the Israeli controlled area; they are cousins; there is commerce; they are over and back all the time. It is far less tense now. However, they are doing it very carefully. The Lebanese army itself, of course, has changed dramatically in the last couple of years.

JS: What about your relations with General Lahad's army and his group? How did you maintain--I mean, you had to have some contact with them--how did you do that?

DE: The policy at United Nations Headquarters and at force headquarters, and at battalion commander level, was that all communication involving the South Lebanese Army or the de facto forces of whatever term we want to use, was done through the Israelis, who are their commanders, their sponsors, their organizers, their promoters. However, to operate successfully on the ground, we do have contact at the lower levels, where you meet them as you go past their positions, as you occupy areas of ground right beside them, as you go through the same gates that they might have control of, and where necessary to be operationally effective to have a communication and a discussion. But the overall objective from the highest level was not to give them the recognition of

dealing with the force commander, the battalion commanders, but to have contact at a lower level, and that works. By having that contact through the operations officer of one of the companies, or perhaps a staff officer, the assistant operations officer at the battalion headquarters, you have contact and you know what is happening, and you can gain their-- I don't say support, but a recognition of what you are trying to do, and an understanding of why you are there, and a willingness to cooperate in many cases, but not in all. There are some difficult cases. Now, for example, there would be a huge problem with the commander in the area that we were operating in, and I can't think of his name at the moment...

GM: Akel Hashim?

DE: Akel Hashim--and he was so difficult that... I never met him and on the one occasion when he arrived with the commanding officer of Northern Command, the Israeli commanding officer, I would not speak to the Israeli general unless he was on his own. And so he understood that immediately and he banished Akel Hashim, which caused a huge problem afterwards because he felt he was insulted, and so on, and relations were not good for a few weeks. But at the lower level of operations, we keep command, and you have a working relationship, which helps very much.

GM: And this has been the way we have played it from the very beginning. At the very beginning I went with my battalion commander for a meeting--I was operations officer--I went to a meeting with Saad Haddad, who tried subsequently to turn this meeting around in a very clever way. So after that, and this was before really the UN got its liaison arrangements firmly on the ground, my battalion commander just said, "I will never meet with that man again." But the reality of the situation is that we had to talk to him. So he said, "You talk to him." So, I as the operations officer met Haddad quite often, but my battalion commander never met him subsequently.

JS: Never?

GM: Never.

JS: And was the contact, or is the contact, with the Israelis so clearly established that it is only authorized at some levels?

DE: Yes, there is a liaison system in place, and in the force headquarters, the UNIFIL force headquarters in Naqoura, there is a liaison section, and the Israeli defense forces have at Rosh [Hanikra] a liaison office, and both of these offices speak on all the problems in relation to liaison throughout South Lebanon. And it works very well. If any

of the battalion commanders have a problem, it can be solved very quickly through this system. Now, Israel can use that system to its best advantage by making people not available, by not having the contact as quickly as the UN would like, but I would have to say during the time that I was there as battalion commander and previously as an administrative officer in the battalion, it worked very well. I met, on a couple of occasions, the Israeli brigadier who had responsibility for the Israeli troops and the South Lebanese army in my area, and we were able to talk about our difficulties and solve them to my satisfaction on most occasions.

GM: At my level over the last couple of years, and my predecessor, you come under a certain amount of pressure to make your own arrangements with Israel on the ground. They always pressurize us from the point of view of the Norwegians: that the Norwegians had met and the Norwegians had arrangements, and the Norwegians had this, that, and the other, and why can't the Irish do the same? The Norwegian situation is very, very different from the Irish situation, in that the Norwegians are completely locked within the Israeli controlled area--so obviously, they have to talk to the Israelis and they have to make living arrangements between them. We have an over-lap, and we do have difficulties in that over-lap, because we hold the line is *here*, the Israelis hold it's *here*, and there is a gray area in the middle, and that's the fault line through the Irish battalion area, if you like. But we have always resisted it, again because of our long association and our long support for the UN and its chain of command. We do not want to operate outside the UN chain of command, in a private arrangement. Although it might be

attractive from time to time, but we have other ways of getting around it, as Dermot has indicated.

DE: The difficulty, and from my experience at headquarters level in New York, would be that understandings are made and formalized, and this creates a difficulty later on when you want to make progress on a certain area and you find that something is in place and agreed upon but not known to the force commander or to the headquarters in New York and it causes a difficulty in advancing progress on the diplomatic level at a later stage.

JS: Now, I have a last question, and I know this does not apply to the Irish contingents, but I wanted to ask what your observations were concerning corruption in UNIFIL, and what should be done about it.

GM: I have been aware of corruption within the UN system for a long time. I would have to say that I haven't been that much aware of it within UNIFIL but I have certainly seen it elsewhere. It normally, unfortunately, happens on the administrative and civilian side of the UN.

[end of tape 1, side 2]

[tape 2, side 1]

GM: ... About corruption, and I was zeroing in on the corruption on the civil administration side, and I was pointing out that there is, and has been, a lack of professional acumen on that side. And now you have said, 'What about the troops?' I would have to say, 'Yes--we have had our problems.' I can remember, in my time with UNTSO, officers smuggling gold between Israel and Egypt; I can remember, in my time in UNIFIL, soldiers bringing hash from Lebanon into Israel. However, I would say that in my opinion, given the numbers of troops that are deployed there, that it is not a major issue, and in fact I wouldn't... to me corruption is something that actually attacks the whole system and that is detrimental to the whole system. Perhaps I am naïve, but my view is that troops involved in this kind of thing--certainly they have been involved--but I wouldn't put it at all at the corruption level. Now, I am sure both my confreres here at the table--they know me well enough to come in and say I am talking nonsense. But that is my personal view.

WD: ... Really I can only speak of the Irish troops, the Irish battalions... and I am not sure what systems operate elsewhere...

JS: Unfortunately they are not typical!

WD: ... And there is no scope for large-scale corruption at all. You know when there is military in an environment like that, there is always certain petty corruption going on-- smuggling bottles of whiskey, or of this or the other, trying to sell a couple of gallons of gasoline, or a tire for a truck, or that type of thing--but it is always happening. It is not a patch of what went on in Vietnam, where you had helicopters and trucks and everything! Small-scale corruption would go on, but I don't know about other militaries, whether for instance there is corruption in other battalions because of their pay or anything; we just don't know that. We would hear stories, but there is no evidence to me that these things happen.

DE: I think that the problem, of course, when you are in a mission for a long, long time, and people become familiar with the modus operandi of all the forces of authority, or the agents of authority, and peacekeepers are an agent of authority, and they have a certain status and freedom of movement, and I think it is natural to accept that opportunities are seized upon, and there is no doubt but that they have increased in recent times right across the spectrum of peacekeeping wherever it was in the world. In Cambodia, there were problems; in Somalia there were problems; and I understand that in Yugoslavia there are problems. In UNIFIL also, there were problems; and, as General McMahon has said, in UNTSO at times. But the problem that I see leading to all of this is the peacekeepers becoming more familiar with the local community, and the longer you are in an area the more familiar you get and you can have things happen for you that will

benefit you. But to counter the problems, I do know that in the UN overall and in UNIFIL in particular, which was the last mission I served in, systems are in place to try and ensure that it doesn't happen, and that that great ethos that was established about peacekeeping and righteousness and correctness and so on, is put in place, and that the operation isn't tarnished in any way by actions like this. But unfortunately it is present.

GM: Since the very beginning of time, not to mind the UN, there has always been a tendency for some people to use the system to their own advantage. And I have no doubt, on every mission that soldiers have ever been on, and I'm sure the Roman legions were at it a long time ago, there has been this. However, I was surprised at your use of the word corruption, because corruption, to me, is that it is widespread. This thing exists; it is, as best we can, stamped out, by military police, by... in fact, in UNTSO where it is an all officer observer mission, after the incident of the smuggling of the gold--and again that was two observers, not the whole UNTSO organization--they set up a military police element in Jerusalem, of two Americans, and an Irish observer who happened to be a military policeman at home, and I've forgotten who the fourth nationality was, and they policed this, specifically this, traveled to all the areas, etc. So, you can only try to stamp out this, but it is as old a history. But to me, corruption is getting involved in contracts, screwing the soldiers on the ground because you have done a little, you have done a big deal on the food contracts, etc. To me, this is corruption and that's why I reacted more to the corruption [word]; I would call this other thing 'crime' and 'petty crime' that soldiers are involved in.

JS: It is a very good distinction that you have made, and actually the reason that I raised it is because I think over-zealous people have equated it with infringement of human rights, and have sought to... insisted that there should be greater human-rights training given to peacekeeping soldiers. I don't know whether you have any program for that in Ireland or not.

GM: We do, in our UN school. In fact, we have military-civil seminars that we hold there on civil rights. We have them with the NGOs because we work with the NGOs. We are very much aware of it, and it is in the curriculum, and in fact you are more than welcome, if you are ever back in this neck of the woods, to go and talk to the commandant of the training school. You are more than welcome to talk to him about it.

JS: Thank you.

Tshombe, Moise