

## Heart of Darkness: the Tragedy of the Congo, 1960-67

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When Laurent Kabila and his vengeful rebel army drove Zaire's dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, into exile, the new head of the economically moribund, disease-ravaged state took the reintroduction of the country's pre-1971 name as his first priority. Henceforth, "Zaire" would be the "Democratic Republic of Congo." The Western press either ignored this event or pronounced itself puzzled by it. But Mr. Kabila's seemingly quixotic concern for nomenclature gives us a clue to the direction this new strongman sees for his long-suffering people. By wiping away Mobutuist nationalism's centerpiece—the "authentic" Africanized name of the nation—Mr. Kabila declared the intervening 37 years null and void, together with the official corruption and foreign interference that characterized them. Henceforth, the Congolese would start once more along the independent path that opened so suddenly in the heady summer of 1960, when, after almost a century of brutal misrule by an alien power, they rose up and, led by their charismatic leader, Patrice Lumumba, won their freedom.

To understand Mr. Kabila's curiously unmodern nostalgia for the politicians of an earlier time, we have to recognize a pattern in the chaotic years that he and his fellow revolutionaries now so resolutely ignore. The madness that was the Democratic Republic of Congo during the period 1960-1997 sprang in large part from massive, clandestine intervention by the western powers. France, Britain, Belgium, and the United States would not let the Congolese decide their future for themselves, because these nations feared that a rival—another Western power or the USSR—would gain an undue say in the outcome and that foreign investors would lose money. But none of these countries thought that its motives and actions could stand much public scrutiny, either at home or abroad. They couldn't just send in the marines, as earlier governments had. From this sprang the twin tools of secret, "low-intensity" wars throughout the remainder of the 20th century: the mercenary "commando" and the small, COIN (counterinsurgency) air force.

In the 1870s, Belgium began to colonize the Congo under an arrangement that was all but unique in the annals of modern European colonialism. The Belgian Congo was supposedly deeded by a hazily defined group of local rulers to a private organization, something called the International Association of the Congo, a supposedly philanthropic, international development agency. In 1878, this group

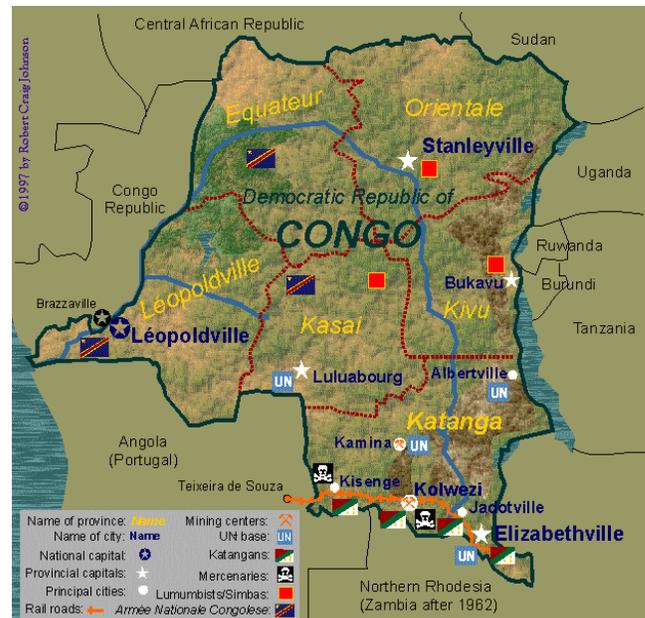


announced the creation of a new nation, the Congo Free State, with Leopold King of the Belgians as its titular head of government. In fact, both the Association and the State were threadbare disguises for Leopold himself, and the peaceful development of the Congo was an utter sham. Leopold was far more interested in exploiting Congolese ivory and rubber than he was in rural development. He and his concessionaires pursued this aim with a ruthlessness that appalled and outraged even the staunchest European imperialists. Local people were systematically robbed, enslaved, and forced to work as bearers or in the mines. Those who failed to work hard enough were routinely punished

with amputation of a hand and/or foot. Hundreds of thousands of Leopold's hapless slaves died of shock, exhaustion, disease, and starvation. Many more were simply massacred to expedite extraction of the country's resources. As a private proprietorship, Leopold's Association operated without parliamentary oversight in Belgium or elsewhere. As a supposedly sovereign nation, the Free State could likewise forestall private or foreign investigations or competing firms. Journalists and rival entrepreneurs were legally excluded from the Congo and ruthlessly hunted down if they entered without official sanction.

By 1900, chinks were starting to appear in the Congo's thick, bureaucratic armor. Reports of conditions in the Congo began to circulate abroad. In 1899, the great English novelist Joseph Conrad made his horrifying experiences as a Congo riverboat pilot the basis of his most famous work, the novella *Heart of Darkness*. In 1904, the liberal English reformer and journalist Robert Casement published the shocking results of his lengthy, clandestine investigation of Leopold's private preserve. These revelations did enormous harm to Belgium's international reputation and caused growing unrest at home. Belgians began to demand that their government nullify Leopold's claims and annex the Congo to the state. That way, it was argued, law and order could be established and the rights of local people protected. By 1908, this pressure was irresistible. Belgium annexed the Congo.

Annexation eliminated the atrocities and reduced the most outrageous excesses of Leopold's regime, but it did not address the fundamental inequities of the system or reduce the fatal influence of the great concessionaires. Wages and overall economic well-being soon improved to the point where, in the post-WW2 years, the Congolese had one of the highest standards of living in black Africa. The Belgian Congo provided more clinics, primary schools, and social welfare organizations than any government on the continent. But, in so doing, Belgium did no more than put some of the Association's paternalistic rhetoric into practice. The wages that gave the Congolese laborer his relative prosperity paled in comparison with the vast wealth that his labors earned for various secretive, government-sanctioned foreign monopolies. Africans were children, the argument went. They expected no more, and they needed only a firm, guiding hand and simple, physical work that would not overtask their limited intellects or stir up unrealistically egalitarian hopes. Africans labored on the roads, in the rubber plantations, and in the ever more important diamond, cobalt, and copper mines. But they were not allowed to manage their own affairs. French, British, and Portuguese colonial authorities encouraged African lawyers, businessmen, clerks, scholars, and novelists. A native intelligentsia was a useful safety valve for native aspirations and the cornerstone of friendly future governments. The British expressly trained African parliamentarians and jurists, while the French let Africans elect deputies to the French parliament. Angolans enjoyed at least nominal, full Portuguese citizenship even under the Salazar dictatorship. But Belgium expressly excluded Africans from positions in government and corporate management, from learned professions, and from higher education. It banned the publication of African newspapers and the organization of native political parties. The police watched self-educated Africans and subjected them to endless petty harassments and arbitrary, indefinite imprisonment.



This state of affairs could not last long. The new great powers, the USA and the USSR, opposed colonialism in principle, if not always in practice, and the postwar world economy made colonies ever less profitable and ever more expensive. In 1957, Britain granted Gold Coast colony its independence as the new nation of Ghana, under the charismatic leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. Urged on by Ghana's example and its leader's generous Pan-Africanist policies, Nigeria, Mali, Tanzania, the Central African Republic, Northern Rhodesia (later Zambia), and the French Congo (across the river from

Léopoldville) would all gain their independence in the next five years. Not even the tightest censorship and police surveillance could isolate the Congo from such stirrings.

Yet, as late as 1959, Belgian officials dismissed any talk of independence for the Congo as wildly unrealistic fantasies. An advisory commission (made up entirely of learned, government-appointed Belgians) felt that a strictly limited form of Congolese self-government would be possible in *thirty years* at the earliest. The commission conceded that local and municipal elections might be appropriate somewhat sooner, but it carefully refrained from setting dates. Unfortunately, what were major concessions in Brussels were already too little, too late in Léopoldville, Luluabourg, and Stanleyville. The Congolese had had enough.

Ten days after the Congo commission delivered its conclusions to the Belgian government, but before the report could be published, Léopoldville exploded. When police banned a gathering of the *Alliance de Ba-Kongo (ABAKO)*, a tribal cultural society cum political party with widespread support in the capital, three days of rioting ensued. Fifty Africans died, 250 were wounded, and, most ominous of all in Belgian eyes, fifty Europeans were injured. A deeply divided Belgian cabinet hastily announced that it would adopt the advisory commission's recommendations. It vaguely hinted that independence was Belgium's long-term goal for the Congo. But it did nothing to alter the behavior of the colonial administration, set no time tables, and made no start at organizing an orderly transition of power.

As a result, the "concessions" only inflamed passions in the Congo. While politicians in Brussels debated over the wisdom of the over-cautious steps they had just taken and wondered how they might get out of their commitments, Joseph Kasavubu, the conservative, nationalist leader of ABAKO, angrily rejected the entire government proposal. He demanded nothing less than immediate, unconditional independence. A broad spectrum of the country's hitherto tentative and splintered political parties coalesced around Kasavubu's position. Belgium was stunned, completely at a loss. That the *Congolese* might reject Belgian largesse had never occurred to the ministers and deputies gathered in Brussels. As rioting spread to other cities, the colonial administration began to disintegrate. The Belgian police found themselves unable to control events. The territorial army or *Force Publique* proved unreliable. In Belgium itself, popular opinion barred any intervention from the home land. The unions and the socialist parties rallied round the slogan, "not one soldier for the Congo," while cautious government ministers agreed that no one wanted a huge and costly war of attrition like that being fought in French Algeria.

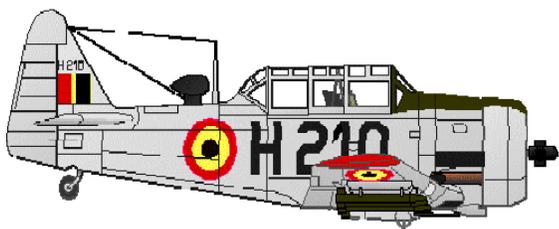
Faced with this crisis, the government in Brussels reacted with typical decisiveness: it convened another conference to study the matter further. This time, though, it invited various Congolese leaders and foreign representatives to a meeting at Brussels, in January 1960. Belgium probably hoped that lengthy negotiations would let it exploit the ethnic divisions and individual rivalries that had always splintered the African opposition in the past. But the strategy backfired badly. Aply led by Patrice Lumumba, a charismatic leftwing politician from eastern Congo, the Congolese delegation maintained a militantly united front from the first. It never strayed from the fundamental demand expressed in Kasavubu's manifesto: immediate severance of all ties with Belgium. Faced with such unanimity and with little effective opposition from the ill-prepared Belgian delegation, the international conference recommended unconditional independence for the Congo, effective in six months.

Belgium's oppressive colonial policy now came back to haunt it. No elections had ever been held in the Congo. There were no experienced Congolese administrators or civil servants. The entire nation of 14 million people had only 16 university graduates and 136 high-school graduates. There were no native

doctors, teachers, or army officers. This would have been bad enough had there been a well-organized, unified political front to take over from the colonial authorities. But political parties had been banned until 1959, and no broad, ideologically based political organizations existed. Tribal hatreds fostered by years of Belgian policy and by the corruption endemic in the administration created a fractured, suspicious polity. Congolese political parties were thus almost entirely based on ethnic and regional loyalties. There were hundreds of tribal and cultural associations led by naive and ambitious local strongmen. Kasavubu's ABAKO drew its support all but entirely from the Ba-Kongo ethnic group. It worked not for a united modern republic, but for a revival of the sixteenth-century Kingdom of Kongo that had once stretched across lower Congo and northern Angola, where many Ba-Kongos still lived. CONAKAT, founded by Moïse Tshombe, was the party of the "true Katangans," southerners who opposed incursions by other ethnic groups into northern Katanga province. BALUBAKAT represented the interests of the rival Baluba ethnic group in south Kasai and north Katanga. Only Patrice Lumumba's large *Movement Nationale Congolaise (MNC)* made any serious effort at recruiting members without regard to tribal affiliation. Even so, it drew most of its support from the tribal groups of eastern Orientale and Kivu provinces. Lacking any experience of government and any real sense of nationhood, the leaders of these associations saw political power as a way of advancing tribal interests and personal prestige.

Faced with insurmountable obstacles of its own making and with independence only months away, Belgium simply gave up. The colonial administration did nothing to smooth the transition. It let the Congo slide rapidly into anarchy and barbarism. When its rightwing white commander, Gen. Emile Janssens, announced that independence would have no immediate effect in the *Force Publique* and that no African officers would be commissioned in the near future, troops mutinied. Units brought in to restore order joined the mutineers, attacked their officers, and turned on the officers' families. Ill-trained and inexperienced Congolese sergeants could not maintain discipline in such circumstances, even when they wished to. Gangs of armed, uniformed troops looted shops, raped women in their homes, and indiscriminately beat and terrorized Europeans in the street. Léopoldville's European population fled en masse across the river to relative safety in Brazzaville. Non-African inhabitants of the interior found themselves under siege. Some were murdered or raped, and many more were robbed and beaten. Nor did the hated "whites" have a monopoly on suffering. In the mounting chaos, many old scores and newborn resentments were settled with machetes, spears, and the rifles and machine guns of mutinous soldiers. In Kasai province, genocidal warfare raged between Baluba and Lulua tribesmen, while well-armed "true"-Katangan paramilitary units systematically massacred Balubas in north Katanga.

North American Harvard IV Fire Assistance Flight, Force Aérienne Belge, Kamina, shot down over Inkozi while covering an Alouette used to rescue civilians.



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Belgium now faced the daunting task of evacuating its nationals under fire. Elite para commandos flew in from Europe and secured major air fields while additional reinforcements came in by sea. Public and ministerial resistance notwithstanding, Belgian forces in the Congo quickly swelled from an initial 3800 to well over 10,000. To Lumumba and the Congolese army, this naturally looked more like a colonialist coup than a

rescue mission. Firefights broke out between Belgian units and Congolese soldiers. Lumumba urged his people to resist any and all moves by Belgian troops. Soon the roads were insecure outside the major cities. To reach the besieged, outlying settlements and missions, Belgium had to rely on heavily armed road convoys or aircraft. Alouette helicopters were often the only way out for European planters,

mining engineers, missionaries, and their families. As more and more Congolese soldiers joined the rioters, the rescue helicopters found themselves contending with machine-gun fire rather than machetes. Losses mounted rapidly. To escort the Alouettes, the Belgian forces hastily armed the North American T6Gs and Fouga Magisters that had hitherto trained NATO pilots at the sprawling air base at Kamina. At least one T6 was shot down during an escort mission over Inkisi.

In the midst of the chaos, on 30 June 1960, the Democratic Republic of the Congo came into being under its first, hastily elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, and its first head of state, President Joseph Kasavubu. Belgium's King Baudouin came to Léopoldville for the event and delivered a stupid, self-congratulatory speech that provoked an angry reply from the new prime minister. "*Nous ne sommes plus vos singes*," Lumumba thundered, "We are not your monkeys any more!" The royal entourage departed in a huff. Lumumba, elated by the electrifying effect of his words on the restive population, played to the crowds and at times even seemed to encourage attacks on Europeans and their property.

Lumumba enjoyed a wide following among the divided peoples of the Congo. He thus seemed well prepared for leadership and well qualified to unify the country. Unfortunately, he inherited an impossible situation. Lumumba's increasingly strident, antiwestern, anticapitalist tone alarmed his fellow politicians, especially the conservative Kasavubu and Lumumba's former deputy turned army officer, Col. Joseph Mobutu. Anti-white, anti-European, and anti-Western feeling ran so high that almost all the experienced Belgian administrators and technicians were fleeing the country. This crippled the Congolese government and the economy. With the Belgian police and army officers gone, even minimum public order could not be maintained. To make matters worse, revanchist elements in the Belgian secret services were doing their best to stir up trouble among the Congo's rival ethnic groups. The French, Belgium's rivals for post-colonial dominance in francophone Africa, in turn made trouble for the Belgians and their native allies. All the while, the shadowy mining cartel that controlled Congo's copper and cobalt resources, the Anglo-Belgian *Union Minière du Haut Katanga*, was working behind the scenes to insure the continuance of its monopoly by any and all means possible.

Katanga stood forth as an island of relative calm in the eventful spring and summer of 1960. As Belgian troops withdrew from northern and eastern Congo, they quietly reconcentrated in the south, around the *Union Minière* mines at Kolwezi, at the Kamina air base, and along the rail lines that linked the mines with transshipment points in Portuguese Angola and Northern Rhodesia. *Union Minière* supplied much of the world's copper, almost all of its cobalt, and large quantities of uranium (Katanga was the source of the uranium for the atomic bombs that ended the Second World War). It considered itself vital to Western interests, and it enjoyed an incestuously close relationship with the Belgian government and military. Using company money, Belgian officers recruited, trained, and equipped a large private army for the *Union*, the Katangan *gendarmérie*, and used it to enforce order (and uninterrupted production) in south Katanga.

As the weakness of the legal government and the vociferously anti-foreign policies of the premier became clear, *Union Minière* decided that it could not rely on Léopoldville to protect its interests. Accordingly, the company set out to detach the mineral-rich parts of the Congo—Katanga and diamond-rich Kasai—from the rest of the nation. With the help of the Belgian army and intelligence services, it organized superficially independent separatist movements from an assortment of ambitious tribal leaders, local politicians, and die-hard European settlers. Moïse Tshombe, leader of the CONAKAT party, declared Katanga an independent nation on 11 July 1960 and made himself head of government. Albert Kalonji, the Baluba leader, followed suit by declaring south Kasai's independence

in August. Since these two provinces supplied almost all the revenue collected by the central government, they doubtless expected little effective opposition.

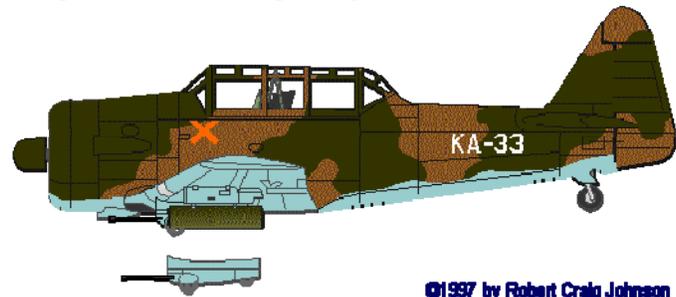
In Katanga, Belgian troops immediately disarmed Congolese government units under cover of "peacekeeping" and officially "withdrew" from the country. Unofficially, they were simply seconded to Tshombe's *gendarmérie*. Lavish supplies of Belgian arms, laundered and trans-shipped via the copper-ore terminus at Texeira di Sousa in Angola, were smuggled in over the mining company's railroad and flown into its airfield at Kolwezi. Belgium gave the Katangans a ready-made air force by simply "abandoning" its armed T6G trainers.

To give the self-styled *Force Aérienne Katangaise* a more intimidating, more modern character than these effective but elderly aircraft could provide, *Union Minière* also purchased three armed Fouga Magister jet trainers direct from the factory in France.

These were delivered by air from Toulouse aboard the Seven Seas line's YC-97 freighter (N9045C) in February 1961. The Magisters

received the serial numbers 91, 92, and 93 and joined two South African-supplied DH Vampire jet fighter-bombers, Alouette helicopters, Do 28a Skyservants, and C-47 transports at airstrips in Kisengi, Kabongo, Jadotville, and Kolwezi. To provide cover for the Belgian troops and additional technical specialists for the Katangans, *Union Minière* hired hundreds of highly visible French, German, and South African mercenaries. *Les affreux* (the "frightfuls"), as the unruly mercenaries were called, were for the most part combat veterans fresh from the French Foreign Legion's abortive *putsch* in Algeria. Many had earlier served in the *Wehrmach* and SS.

Ex-Belgian North American T-6G, Force Aérienne Katangaise, Kolwezi and Kisengi, Katanga, 1962



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Yet the Katangan leader was the real strength of the secessionist movement. Tshombe was a shrewd, devious, and daring politician, not merely a pliable tool in the hands of the company. He seems to have had genuine regionalist sympathies and the ability to get on well with the unruly, often overtly racist mercenary officers that commanded his *gendarmérie*. Under his rule, Katanga was a relatively tranquil place where European lives and property were safe, a circumstance he made frequent use of in his dealings with the West. According to Tshombe, Lumumba was a dangerous, clandestine Communist, a Castro with an animal lust for murder and rapine. This stance won him powerful allies in the US Senate and the Eisenhower White House.

Faced with this naked reassertion of the old, colonial order in his crucial, revenue-generating southern provinces, Lumumba appealed to the United Nations for assistance in reintegrating Katanga. That august body replied that it could not intervene in an ostensibly "internal" matter, however blatant external, foreign involvement might be. The secretary general, Dag Hammarskjöld, explained that the UN could at most supervise the withdrawal of Belgian forces and replace them with UN troops, who would serve purely in a peacekeeping and policing role. As Lumumba had feared, Belgium complied with UN directives by withdrawing its forces from all provinces except south Katanga. It abandoned Kamina, after the remaining T-6s had been transferred to the *Union Minière* field at Kolwezi.

In desperation, Lumumba appealed to the Soviet Union. He asked for advisers, weapons, trucks, and transport aircraft for a Congolese National Army (ANC). Lumumba hoped that a rapid invasion of Kasai would stifle the insurrection quickly and at minimal cost. From Kasai, the ANC could move

against Katanga by seizing the newly vacated airfield at Kamina. The USSR responded much more favorably than the UN had done. A force of 10-15 Ilyushin Il-14 transports, hastily painted in Congolese markings, was immediately despatched. These joined 5 requisitioned Air Congo (SABENA) DC-3s in ferrying 1000 ANC troops into Luluabourg, the capital of Kasai. Here they massacred hundreds of pro-Kalonji Balubas. Soviet trucks then arrived to take the Congolese troops and their new Czech officers south to Kalonji's capital, Bakwanga, which they soon captured. All seemed to be going well until, with Lumumba's forces only 20 miles from Katanga, Tshombe became alarmed. He rushed troops to the border and stopped the government offensive in its tracks. Baluba tribesmen harried their flanks. And suddenly, there was no target airfield for the planned airlift into Katanga itself. Belatedly the UN had decided to intervene and had occupied Kamina.

Lumumba's unilateral appeal to the Soviets further alienated the conservative elements in the Léopoldville government and all but panicked the Eisenhower administration. Eisenhower launched the CIA on another of its ill-conceived, anticommunist crusades. Blinded by its own preconceptions and the machinations of its NATO allies, the CIA joined the Belgian secret service in plotting against Lumumba. It initiated a series of singularly inept assassination plots, later revealed by the findings of the US Senate's Church Commission. None of its efforts were successful.

The West's objectives were soon achieved, however, by other means. Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba and appointed a moderate, Joseph Ileo, in his place. Lumumba dismissed Kasavubu and insisted that he Lumumba was still prime minister. Some parts of the Congo declared for one, some for the other. Both sides courted the army and arrested each other's supporters. When the army finally stepped in, it was to arrest Lumumba. With US and UN encouragement, the commander of the Léopoldville garrison, army chief of staff Col. Joseph Mobutu, suspended the constitution and expelled the Russians and Czechs. Mobutu named an interim civilian administration under Kasavubu. Lumumba remained safe in the prime minister's villa for a time, shielded by a ring of UN troops. But he was loath to leave the initiative to Mobutu and also, perhaps, to MNC rivals in Stanleyville. Despite enormous risks, he escaped and attempted to join his supporters in Stanleyville. He did not make it. The army captured him on 1 December in Kasai, beat him savagely, and confined him inside the army camp at Thysville. But Lumumba was still a threat. His arrest provoked full scale revolt in more than half of the Congo. Rumors of pro-Lumumba coups abounded. Then, on 13 January, troops at Thysville mutinied (over pay), apparently at Lumumba's instigation. Kasavubu tried to get the deposed prime minister to rejoin the government and thus, it was hoped, secure the loyalty of the soldiers. When he refused, Mobutu and Kasavubu decided that Lumumba was too dangerous to be kept alive. On 17 January, soldiers put Lumumba and two aides on a plane bound for Tshombe's capital, Elizabethville. Guards beat the three helpless prisoners nonstop throughout the five-hour flight. In Elizabethville, Katangan gendarmes dragged the by now severely injured men from the plane and drove them to an isolated house, where Belgian mercenaries methodically beat them to death, reportedly under Tshombe's personal supervision.

Lumumba's death was hushed up a few weeks and then blamed on a bungled escape attempt, but no one believed the Katangan account. In February, demonstrations took place in more than thirty western cities. Mobs demolished the Belgian embassy in Cairo. The Soviets demanded the removal of the Secretary General and withdrawal of UN forces. The non-aligned nations who had hitherto been the UN's strongest supporters, notably India and newly independent Ghana, felt betrayed. Kasavubu's association with Tshombe, apparent UN connivance, and obvious US involvement thus damaged the reputations of all involved and made a marked turn to the left all but inevitable throughout the third world.

For the Congo, the effects of Lumumba's death were disastrous. All traces of national unity vanished. The country split into four. Lumumba's one-time lieutenant, Col. Mobutu, was in nominal control of the legitimate central government and its army. But, in reality, his power did not extend beyond Léopoldville province in western Congo and the army units stationed there. A leftwing MNC leader, Antoine Gizenga, ruled the east as the martyred Lumumba's successor. He proclaimed Stanleyville the capital of a Free Republic of Congo centered on Orientale province. Gen. Lundula's troops supported him, and Nasser and the Soviet-bloc recognized his government. Tshombe continued to hold Katanga, with ill-disguised Belgian support. Albert Kalonji emerged from the bush to reassert the independence of his diamond state in southern Kasai province, with still more obvious Belgian assistance. Following the precedent set in Elizabethville, he celebrated his return to power by arresting and murdering six prominent Lumumbists who had had the misfortune to be in transit through Kasai. Stanleyville retaliated by sending fifteen of its own prisoners before the firing squads. Meanwhile Katangan gendarmes and white mercenaries poured into northern Katanga and set about liquidating the Baluba opposition. Thousands died under often horrific circumstances.

World opinion turned sharply against Tshombe and his the Belgian and British financial backers in the aftermath of the killings. Alarmed by the resurgence of colonialism and the threat of a major superpower confrontation in Africa, non-aligned states, such as India and Ghana, pressed the UN for a quick end to the fighting and a negotiated reintegration of Katanga into the Congo. Elections in the US had brought a new administration to power, one less sympathetic to European interests. Given the results of his predecessor's unquestioning support for colonial powers, President Kennedy was loathe to continue down the same path. He instead threw American support behind the non-aligned countries and made the principle of self-determination America's principle bulwark against widening Soviet influence. American diplomats and UN representatives set about organizing a series of meetings between Tshombe and the Léopoldville government, while the UN units scattered throughout the country were at last allowed to intervene in defence of law and order.

Tshombe played a double game throughout the negotiations. In private, he would agree to the terms of one painstakingly crafted agreement after another, only to denounce them when the agreements were made public. He seemed confident that delay worked always in his favor. English and Belgian business interests were solidly behind him, even if their governments had to be more circumspect given the new administration in America. Portugal, South Africa, and Welensky's white-dominated Rhodesian Federation were also now in the Katangan camp. Last but by no means least, a powerful group of US senators from the southern states seemed ready and able to block any administration action against what they saw as an anticommunist hero. Meanwhile, Tshombe's gendarmes assaulted and provoked UN troops at every opportunity. Tshombe denounced UN aggression each time, and appealed to his friends in the US Congress. At one point, he seemed on the verge of uniting Kasavubu and Kalonji against foreign, *United Nations* intervention in the Congo. But, when the three leaders met at Coquilhatville, Tshombe stormed out, and, this time, Mobutu arrested him. UN and US diplomats convinced Kasavubu to release Tshombe on the condition that he send delegates to a new session of parliament tasked with settling the nation's future peacefully. Tshombe agreed, returned to Elizabethville, and renounced the agreement by reasserting the independence of Katanga.

The United States and the UN nonetheless pressed ahead with the plan agreed at the Coquilhatville conference. Parliament met at the University of Louvanium, with delegations from Stanleyville, South Kasai, Léopoldville, and Stanleyville in attendance. Only Katanga was unrepresented. On 2 August, parliament asked moderate Cyrille Adoula to form a government. Adoula's coalition united all factions in the Congo, except Tshombe's. It also made the reintegration of Katanga its first priority. Anxious lest

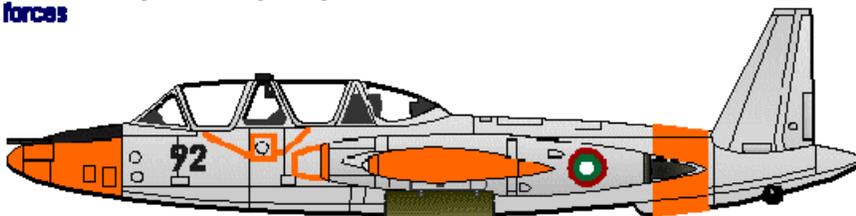
the pro-Soviet Stanleyville regime reestablish itself, Washington concurred and promised the UN whatever material support it might require in enforcing Security council demands.

The UN's demands centered on the removal of foreign forces and foreign-supplied heavy armaments from the Congo. UN officials hoped that Tshombe would be more tractable once his white advisers and bully boys had been removed. With this in mind, the popular Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld, despatched his Irish deputy, Conor Cruise O'Brien, with orders to enforce the UN's orders as he saw fit. Interpreting his instructions as broadly as possible and under considerable pressure from harassed UN military commanders in the field, O'Brien's staff put together a plan for neutralizing the white leadership of the Katangan military, codenamed *Rum Punch*. The operation achieved near complete surprise. In the pre-dawn hours of 28 August, Ghurkas attached to the Indian UN contingent seized the radio station and telephone exchange in Elizabethville and the *gendarmerie* headquarters. Detachments of Indian, Swedish, and Irish soldiers captured military posts throughout the remainder of the province. UN forces began to disarm Katangan gendarmes and oversee the repatriation of foreign mercenaries and political advisers. There was little chance for resistance, and Tshombe had little choice but to agree to the expulsions.

Tshombe was, however, successful in negotiating a brief stay, effective until 9 September. A hardcore of Algeria veterans among the mercenaries now took advantage of the delay. They gradually took control of the Katangan *gendarmerie* and organized it for resistance to the UN. O'Brien and his deputies had, in the meantime, decided to put a stop to the nonsense with another *coup de main*, codenamed *Morthor*, Hindu for "smash". UN soldiers were to seize the same objectives as before, but would also surround Tshombe's house and capture his ministers and associates in a series of raids. This time, Tshombe was ready. Katangan paratroops resisted the attackers. Though they were soon overwhelmed, they created enough confusion for Tshombe and most of his officials to escape to

Kolwezi. O'Brien nonetheless declared Katanga once more part of the Congo.

**Air Fouge Magister, Force Aérienne Katangaise, Ksengi and Kolwezi, Katanga, 1962, the last survivor of three, flown by mercenary Joseph Deulin in strikes on UN forces**



**©1997 by Robert Craig Johnson**

From the security of his Kolwezi stronghold, Tshombe launched a series of furious counterattacks on UN units. Piloted by the Belgian mercenary Joseph Deulin, the Katangan's sole serviceable

Magister strafed and bombed their positions at will, unopposed by UN aircraft or any meaningful degree of ground fire. Deulin even destroyed a number of UN charter aircraft at Elizabethville. Casualties mounted rapidly. Irish units in Jadotville were overrun and taken prisoner.

Appalled by the loss of life and alarmed by O'Brien's seemingly cavalier attitude towards the UN's limited mandate, Secretary Hammarskjöld refused to authorize reinforcements for the embattled UN forces in the Congo. Determined to negotiate a ceasefire, he flew secretly to Ndola, in Northern Rhodesia, to meet with Tshombe. He did not make it. His DC-4 came down 10 miles short of the runway on the night of 17 September. All aboard were killed.

Stunned by the loss of its popular Secretary General, the UN negotiated a humiliating ceasefire and ceded control of public buildings and military posts that UN forces had seized during the opening

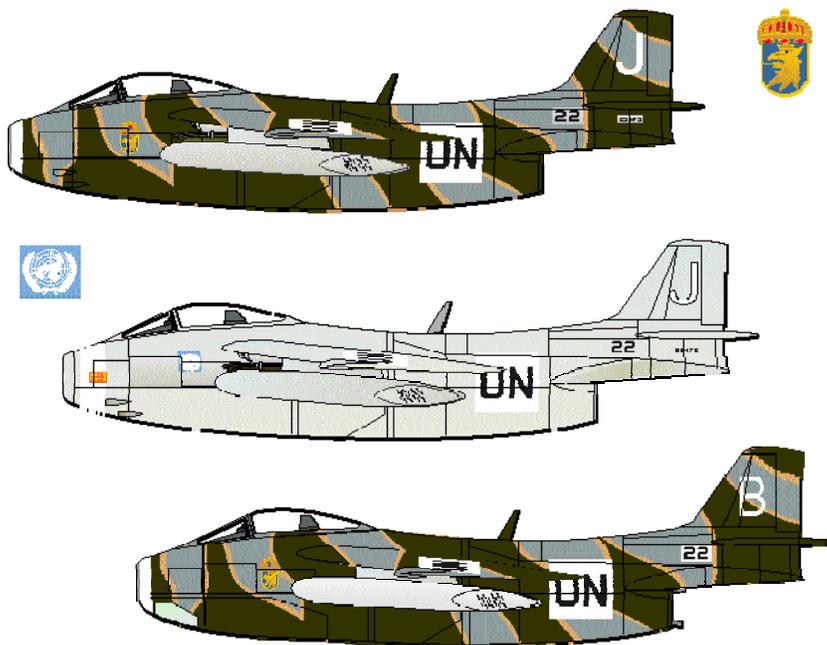
phases of *Morthor*. Katangan prestige soared. When Congolese troops tried to invade from Kasai, Tshombe's army hurled them back in disarray, and they promptly disintegrated. Additional mercenaries flocked into Katanga, and Tshombe's *gendarmerie* topped 13000 men.

But Tshombe had miscalculated. Defeat left UN commanders on the ground angry and anxious for a free hand in the fighting. Worse, the thoroughness of Tshombe's triumph and the collapse of ANC forces had badly shaken American officials. It seemed only a matter of time before defeatism and mutiny in the army and brought down the Adoula government. Accordingly, the US sought and received a strong new Security Council resolution that, for the first time, explicitly authorized the use of any and all force necessary for overcoming the mercenaries.

After their experiences with the Magister, UN commanders were understandably reluctant to hazard their men without air support. The US immediately offered to provide jet fighters, but the offer was refused in the interest of preserving the operation's loose veneer of neutrality. Impatient for results, the Kennedy administration hinted that it might act unilaterally to remove the Katangan air force. To forestall this, the UN requested and received combat aircraft and crews from Sweden. A detachment of five SAAB J29B fighter-bombers and two S29C tactical reconnaissance aircraft was drawn from the F22 fighter wing and sent to Kamina in the Congo. The S29s were armed with 20-mm cannon, 13.5-cm rockets, and napalm. The Swedes were soon joined by the bomb- and cannon-armed Canberra B(I) Mk 58 medium bombers of 5 Squadron, Indian Air Force, and the Canadair Sabre Mk 4s of the 4th

*Aerobrigata*, of the *Aeronautica Militare Italiana*, though these were soon withdrawn.

(Top & middle) SAAB J.29B fighter- bombers and (bottom) S.29C reconnaissance plane, UN Swedish squadron J22, Kamina, 1962



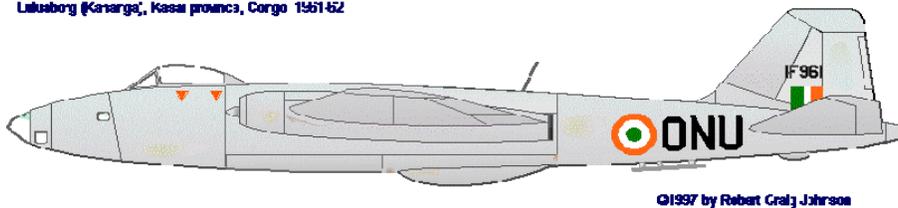
All that remained was a pretext for continued UN military operations. Tshombe provided it. In early December, his mercenaries initiated a series of deliberate provocations. Roads were blocked, UN positions were shot up, and UN personnel were kidnapped. A UN helicopter was shot down. Tshombe blamed "UN aggression." He clearly thought that constant harassment

would wear the UN down, while his friends in Europe and America and his threats to destroy the Kolwezi mines kept its troops at bay. This was a fatal mistake. UN commanders responded almost instantly. When diplomatic efforts failed to stop four days of continuous assaults on UN positions, Gen. Prem Chand of India asked the new Secretary General, U Thant of Burma, to sanction offensive action against the roadblocks and received the necessary permission. He did not launch the sort of ineffectual tit-for-tat reprisal that the diplomats expected.

In the immediate aftermath of the *Morthor* debacle, UN military commanders had prepared a contingency plan for a full-scale assault against Katanga's military and political infrastructure: operation *Grand Slam*. This time, they did the meticulous staff work that had been so conspicuously neglected in the earlier operations. They requested and received an open-ended commitment of USAF transport aircraft and put them to work moving huge quantities of munitions and materiel to forward staging grounds in the Congo. The big planes then stood by to move UN reinforcements up to the combat zone. With the help of American diplomats, the UN forced a reluctant British government to release a long embargoed shipment of 1000-lb bombs for India's Canberras. Gen. Chand was thus able to launch a meticulously planned, elaborately provisioned attack with only a few hours notice.

On 28 December 1962, UN troops in Elizabethville quickly took up positions near key points, well before Katangan gendarmes became aware of their movements or intentions. They quickly cleared the roadblocks, captured the telephone exchange and radio station, and seized *gendarmerie* headquarters, almost without loss. The Indian Canberras and the Swedish J29s raided Tshombe's airfields almost simultaneously. The Canberras' bombs cratered the runways while the fighters methodically strafed buildings and aircraft with their 20-mm cannon and heavy rockets. Tshombe's Harvards, the Magister, the two as yet unflown Vampires, and numerous transports were destroyed on the ground. UN ground forces rapidly fanned out across Katanga in hopes of ending the fighting before US cold feet, European pressure, and an over-cautious UN bureaucracy could interfere with a military solution. Light armored vehicles, lavish use of air strikes, and the daring and enterprise of its largely untested soldiers gave the UN an enormous advantage.

Canberra BQ 14158, Indian Air Force, detached to the Organisation Nations-Unies du Congo (UN Organisation in the Congo—ONUC), Lubumbashi (Katanga), Kasai province, Congo 1961-62



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Tshombe retreated to the *Union Minière* stronghold, the area around Kolwezi and Jadotville. His position, though not ideal, was far from hopeless. He still had almost 18000 gendarmes and about 500-1000 mercenaries,

plus plenty of money. Aggressive patrolling by the J29s had cut the air bridge to Portuguese East Africa and South Africa, precluding the supply of new aircraft, but the rail line to Angola was still open. The mercenaries had, moreover, managed to blow a bridge 15 miles from the outskirts of Jadotville, stalling the UN advance. As Tshombe no doubt anticipated, the Secretary General ordered his forces to cease operations immediately, pending further negotiations. The US, fearing damage to the mines, simultaneously insisted that US support could not be used for further offensive operations. Tshombe seemed to have evaded disaster and achieved stalemate yet again. At the very least, he seemed to have ample time to prepare for the ferocious resistance that the UN civilian leadership so feared.

Unfortunately for Tshombe and his patrons, UN troops in the field had taken care to remain out of contact with the UN's civilian chain of command. They professed themselves ignorant of any order to hold their positions. Instead, Indian troops unexpectedly managed to cross the damaged bridge without loss. They charged into Jadotville and caught the Katangans by surprise. Resistance collapsed with hardly a shot fired.

Tshombe held out in Kolwezi for another three weeks. But, given the performance of his army at Jadotville, Secretary General U Thant was now more inclined to listen to his generals and not to

Western diplomats. He would make no more concessions and would allow no more negotiations. Tshombe shuttled between Kolwezi and Ndola in Northern Rhodesia, making threats and trying to cut deals via his supporters in Britain and southern Africa. But it was to no avail. The UN rapidly installed Congolese government officials throughout Katanga, repaired bridges, and ferried in ANC troops. Finally, Tshombe had to capitulate. In return for renouncing secession and demobilizing his forces, he received an amnesty. UN troops entered Kolwezi, and Katanga was a thing of the past. The mercenaries were rounded up and deported (though usually just across the border to Angola, Salisbury, or Johannesburg). The Swedes blew up most of their now time-expired J29s on the runway at Kamina. The UN troops left for home. (At least two of the four J29s that returned to Sweden still exist, one camouflaged example in the Swedish Air Force Museum and another, bare metal airplane in storage at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum's Paul Garber restoration facility.)

The second, less public phase of the Congo's troubles now commenced. By the middle of 1964, Christopher Gbenye's Lumumbists had, in the interim, seized complete control of Kivu and Orientale provinces. Well-armed and equipped ANC units fled in panic before spear-waving bands of rebel *Simbas*, who were said to believe themselves immune to bullets. On 4 August, Stanleyville fell without a fight. The leftist rebels again declared their independence, this time as the "People's Republic of Congo." They also began a reign of terror against "counter-revolutionaries" and members of the intelligentsia and civil service. Thousands were massacred at the feet of Lumumba's many statues.

As the rebellion spread east, the now desperate Joseph Kasavubu asked none other than *Moise Tshombe* to accept the post of prime minister and form a new government! Tshombe returned from exile in Spain and rehired his mercenaries for service against the Simbas. Three major units came into being. A South African, Mike Hoare, organized an English-speaking company called 5 Commando, while Bob Denard, a shady former French para and intelligence agent, formed a Franco-Belgian 6 Commando. A renegade Belgian planter, Jean "Black Jack" Schramme, formed a third unit, 10 Commando.

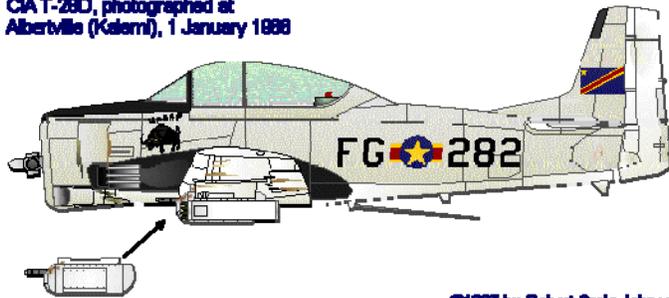
Seduced by its own Cold War-induced fears and by the skillful anticommunist posturing of the Léopoldville politicians, the US now let itself be drawn into the civil war. To support Tshombe's mercenaries, the CIA obtained a number of T6Gs from Italy, and recruited mercenaries to arm and fly them. Many of the pilots were Cuban emigrés and veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion. The Simbas had no anti-aircraft weapons and little conception of even the most rudimentary defensive measures, such as camouflage and dispersal. Even the modest air strikes that T6s could manage were devastating. Mercenary columns made up of a few jeeps and trucks festooned with machineguns would dash forward after each strike to massacre the demoralized and disorganized rebels. In western Orientale, Simba resistance seemed on the verge of collapse. Tshombe's forces were soon closing in on Stanleyville, the Simba capital.

Faced with this blatant neocolonialist aggression against a friendly, proto-socialist third-world country, the Soviet Union and its African allies mounted a large-scale arms airlift into the still sizable, Simba-held portion of eastern Congo. Soviet aircraft carried the weapons to military airfields in Algeria, Ghana, and the United Arab Republic. Then Algerian Antonov An-12 and Ghanaian Il-18 transports flew the arms into Orientale province, using Brazzaville (in the former French Congo) as a staging point. Egyptian An-12s mounted a similar effort to Orientale and Kivu from forward bases in the Sudan. Needless to say, Simbas with machineguns proved rather harder for mercenaries to deal with than Simbas with spears.

The success of initial air operations and the magnitude of the Eastern-bloc response caused the CIA to greatly expand its Congo air force. The CIA replaced Tshombe's T6s with new T-28Ds, and recruited additional pilots and ground crew to operate them. The new air campaign required a far larger investment in personnel and equipment than had hitherto been the case. More than twenty Cuban pilots were now flying in the Congo, supported by Cuban ground crews. But the rapidly expanding operation required more personnel than this "sanitized" and "deniable" recruitment source could provide. So the CIA formed a shell company with the unlikely sounding name of *Anstalt Wigmo*, incorporated in

Liechtenstein in 1964. This would pose as a private contractor doing maintenance work for the Congolese air force.

CIA T-28D, photographed at Albertville (Kalemi), 1 January 1966



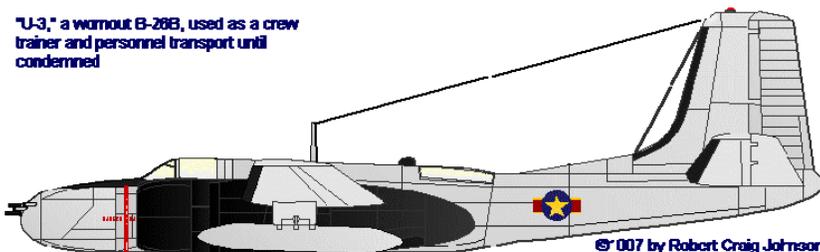
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The CIA's Cuban pilots were already pressing their Agency handlers for a more potent aircraft than the T-6 or T-28, however. They wanted their old mount, the Douglas B-26 Invader used for the Bay of Pigs invasion. It had the range and firepower to undertake missions that the T-28s could not. Washington

set about finding them some aircraft. Unfortunately, this was the period when an epidemic of wing-spar failures was forcing virtually all of the world's B-26 users to ground their fleets. The newly remanufactured OnMark B-26K Counter-Invader was not yet available and was, in any case, urgently needed in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, four wornout B-26Bs were taken from the CIA's bone yard at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines and sent for minimal refurbishing on Okinawa. These aircraft had seen long, hard service with the CIA, having flown for the French in Indochina and with contract personnel in Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Some may have been veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion itself. All had been condemned and junked after inspection by USAF mechanics. In fact, one airplane had to be scrapped on Okinawa. But the other three were patched up and ferried out to the Congo. Two arrived in August 1964, one having crashed in transit. Unfortunately, neither proved of any use as a combat airplane. Their dubious structural integrity and generally poor mechanical condition made pilots reluctant to fly them. One airplane was used for occasional reconnaissance flights with the tongue-in-cheek designation "U-3." Later, it was converted into a primitive personnel transport, so that

unit ground crews could escape in the event of a debacle. Neither airplane was flown much.

"U-3," a wornout B-26B, used as a crew trainer and personnel transport until condemned



As it happened, the B-26Bs were no longer needed, however. During the protracted delivery of the old airplanes, the situation in the Congo had taken on a much higher priority in Washington.

Given the unexpected magnitude of the Eastern-bloc response to US intervention, short-range, close-support airplanes like the T-28D were no longer enough. A long-range interdictor was needed, something that could attack supply dumps and rebel transport deep in the Simba heartland. Nine newly remanufactured B-26Ks were hurriedly drawn from the 602 Fighter Squadron, 1 Air Commando Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida, and rushed to the Congo. These were among the first B26Ks delivered (and among the last—the aircraft became A-26As when deployed to Thailand, because the Thais objected to having bombers based on their territory). The B-26Ks operated from Albertville (Kalemi), starting in 1966, initially with USAF crews, though political worries soon led to their replacement by freshly

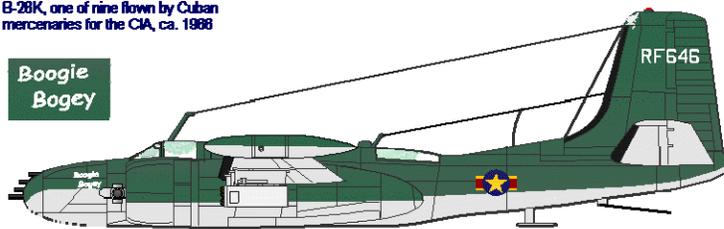
retrained Cubans. The shorter-ranged T-28s could now be farmed out to fields around the country, where they could respond to calls for close air support much more quickly than the B-26s. Though it never operated under more than nominal Congolese control, the unit was given a Congolese identity to disguise its all too obviously American character. It became the *211ème Escadrille, 2ième Groupement, Force Aérienne Congolaise*.

The CIA aircraft carried then-standard USAF COIN camouflage schemes. The T-28s were painted USN light-grey (probably FS595a 36495) above and white underneath. The B-26Ks were painted gloss emerald-green (FS 14062) on all upper surfaces and light-grey (FS 16492) underneath. At first, the airplanes carried few markings: partial USAF serial numbers on their fins and the Congolese star-and-bar insignia in the four, standard, USAF positions. A Congolese flag was soon added to the fins. Then the squadron added a unit insignia to the noses of the aircraft: the black bull trademark of the locally brewed *Makasi*-brand beer. Many of the airplanes had by now gained personal names as well.

Relentless pounding by the CIA's reinforced air unit rapidly weakened the Simba movement. While ground fire was now routine, it was still too ineptly directed to mount a serious threat to the Cuban crews. They could attack in a leisurely fashion that would have been unimaginable over the Laotian Plain of Jars. Simba columns still failed to disperse under air attack, and so suffered appalling casualties. While political considerations forbade the use of bombs or napalm, the approved .50-cal machineguns and 2.75-in (70-mm) rockets proved more than adequate against so ill-prepared an enemy. Led by incessant air strikes, mercenary Commandos and Congolese army units advanced steadily into Simba-held territory.

B-26K, one of nine flown by Cuban mercenaries for the CIA, ca. 1968

Boogie  
Bogey



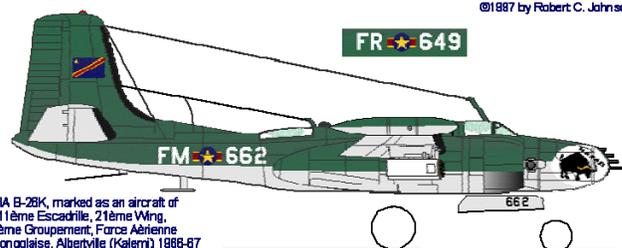
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As Tshombe's murderous hirelings closed in on the rebel capital, Stanleyville, Gbenye's followers seized over 300 Belgian and American hostages, including several of CIA's own agents. The Simbas threatened to kill the hostages if Tshombe's forces came any farther. The American President, John Kennedy, immediately dispatched the USAF's brand-new Lockheed C-130E Hercules transports to Belgium. Here they loaded Belgian paracommandos before flying on to the Congo. The Belgians jumped over Stanleyville airport on 24 November, and slowly fought their way into town. They were too late for 27 hostages, all of whom were shot and hacked to death as the first parachute canopies blossomed over the airport. The drop was clearly visible from the city center. More than 60 hapless civilians were wounded. The remaining 1600 non-Africans in the city were evacuated by road and air. A subsequent drop at Paulis failed to save 23 more hostages. More than 300 more died in isolated missions and plantations in the forest. But the Simbas had been crushed. An unknown number of Africans were massacred by the victorious mercenaries, who treated indiscriminate rape, murder, and pillage as the just rewards of their efforts.

At this point, the mercenaries were very much



CIA B-26K, marked as an aircraft of 211ème Escadrille, 21ème Wing, 2ème Groupement, Force Aérienne Congolaise, Albertville (Kalem) 1968-67

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aware of the power they could wield in a permanently anarchic Congo and no less conscious of the threat that a resurgent central government posed to this agreeable and profitable state of affairs. For five years, more or less, each Commando had been a law unto itself, accountable to no one. Individual troopers were free to do literally anything they wanted, including murder. Ongoing unrest guaranteed their officers the chance to extort protection money from the mines and the many native merchants that remained in the country. Schramme had even used 10 Commando to set up his own, quasi-feudal slave state in his area of operations—neocolonialism with a vengeance! Since they had, in their own eyes at least, won the victory, the mercenaries saw no reason why they shouldn't enjoy its fruits on their own terms.

So, when the government ordered the Commandos to demobilize and pay off their men, mercenary leaders tried to take over the country. This time, however, the CIA air support that had guaranteed them success during the campaign against the Simbas sealed their fate. T-28s and B-26s subjected the rebellious mercenaries to a merciless pounding. USAF C-130s ferried Congolese government reinforcements into the battle zones. The mutineers suffered a series of calamitous reversals. Casualties were heavy, a new experience for the fair-weather soldiers of 5, 6, and 10 Commando. When government forces executed 30 captured troopers from Denard's 6 Commando, morale broke, and the mutiny collapsed. Survivors fled to Rhodesia on hijacked C-47s or tried to join Schramme in his hopeless, last-ditch attempt to defend his petty slave state. The last mutineers surrendered at Bukavu, after an unsuccessful attempt to cross into Rwanda.

With the collapse of the mercenaries' mutiny, Mobutu at last achieved what he had schemed for since independence, complete control of the country. He deposed Kasavubu, exiled Tshombe, and abolished the office of the prime minister. He would now be President for Life. He renamed the country and its great river Zaire, and gave its colonial cities africanized names of his own choosing. There would be many future rebellions. But all would be quashed by the timely intervention of French and Belgian paras and USAF transports. All, that is, until Mobutu Sese Seko's fateful intervention in Rwanda and Laurent Kabila's triumphant return to his newly renamed Congo.

## **Kit Availability**

The aircraft of the Congo period have been well-represented on hobby shop shelves over the years. Matchbox had a 1/72-scale Canberra B(I) Mk 8 that can still be found. The SAAB J29B was released in 1/72-scale by Heller, with alternate parts for the S29C and decals for UN aircraft. Heller also offers a 1/72-scale T6/Harvard and a T-28. Airfix has a 1/72-scale A-26, although you would have to do the conversion work to make it a B-26K. In 1/48 scale Monogram/ProModeler has offered the T6, T-28D, and the A-26B. Resin B-26K conversion sets are offered by a number of manufacturers.