

Chapter 1

Planning, Organizing, and Commanding the Air Operation in the Congo, 1960

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Until Somalia and Bosnia in the 1990s, the United Nations Operation in the Congo (known by its French acronym ONUC: Opération des Nations Unies au Congo) was by far the largest peacekeeping operation ever conducted by the United Nations. The mission was authorized on 14 July 1960 and finally wrapped up officially on 30 June 1964. The weaponry and firepower employed by ONUC's military component included jet fighter aircraft, artillery, armored personnel carriers, and tanks. At its peak, the Force consisted of almost 20,000 troops from 28 countries. Over its lifetime 93,000 troops served in the force; 127 military personnel died in action and 133 were wounded, along with scores of European expatriates and tens of thousands of Congolese.

ONUC began as a conventional peacekeeping mission modeled on the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) based in the Sinai. Like UNEF, ONUC was mandated initially only to use force in self-defence. This idea was considerably extended as, for example, the need arose to protect civilians at risk. By robustly asserting its freedom of movement in Katanga ONUC was able to detain and expel foreign mercenaries and prevent civil war. By the time ONUC ceased to operate on 30 June 1964, UN expenditures amounted to over US\$400,000,000.²

The aim of this chapter is to tell the tale of Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) involvement at the beginning of the Congo operation in 1960 and to recall some of the things which stick in my memory over 50 years later.³

1 An earlier version of this text appeared as Carr, W.K. "The RCAF in the Congo, 1960: Among the Most Challenging Assignments Undertaken by Canadian Forces in the Peace Keeping Role", *Canadian Aviation Historical Society Journal* 43(1) (2005), 4–11, 31. It is republished here with permission from the Canadian Aviation Historical Society, with major updates.

2 This figure represents only what is termed "incremental costs", that is, those costs billed by contributing nations as being direct out-of-pocket expenses to them.

3 Article originally written in 2004; phrasing adjusted to reflect this.

Why Canada Became Involved and How the Operation Grew

The Congo, a country relatively unknown by Canadians until 1960, was granted independence that year, though it was ill prepared to assume the mantle of nationhood. For nearly 100 years it had been the private domain of the King of Belgium and later a totally dependent colony of Belgium. One factor that sped the decision to grant independence in 1960 was the example of no fewer than 17 former African colonies having recently won self-government.

The first government of the Congo was formed on 24 June 1960, with Joseph Kasavubu as Head of State and Patrice Lumumba as Prime Minister. On 29 June, in Leopoldville – modern day Kinshasa – they signed a Treaty of Friendship with Belgium. At the same time the Belgian King Baudouin proclaimed Congolese independence. Almost at once, a breakdown occurred in what had previously been a system of militarily imposed law and order.

The more than 200 tribes, speaking a myriad of languages, had never viewed Belgian colonization as a benefit, or a stabilizing influence on historic enmities. On 5 July, parts of the 25,000 member indigenous army/police “Force Publique” mutinied against their Belgian officers. This led to the widespread unrest. Belgium reacted by sending in troops to provide protection for its more than 100,000 nationals. Belgium was unable to gain legitimacy for this move by failing to convince Lumumba to invoke the Treaty of Friendship and seek help from the now more than 10,000 Belgian soldiers in the country.

During the second week of July more trouble and violence arose as the mutiny spread. After evacuating all Belgian nationals from the area, Belgian soldiers and warships attacked the port city of Matadi with a considerable loss of life among the local population. Hyped-up reports of this action carried on the Congolese army radio network, sparked new rounds of violence even in areas that previously had been quiet. Far from stabilizing the situation, the appearance of Belgian paratroops at widely separated locations resulted in even more unrest. Increasing numbers of attacks on the remaining Europeans followed.

In the midst of all this turmoil, Moïse Tshombé, the governor of mineral-rich Katanga announced the secession of the province. Lumumba flew to the provincial capital, Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), to seek conciliation, but his aircraft was prevented from landing. The incident led to a further breakdown of relations with the Belgian government, which supported Tshombé for financial reasons from behind the scenes.

Confronted with a situation beyond his control, Lumumba asked the United Nations for help on 12 July 1960. After Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General, offered a plan, the United Nations Security Council gave unanimous approval for a security force to be sent to the Congo.⁴ A Swedish General, Carl von Horn, then Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization in the Middle East, was appointed to command the force and arrived on the scene on 18 July.

4 United Nations Security Council, Resolution 143 (1960), 14 July.



Figure 1.1 Emperor Haile Selassie thanks US Air Force C-130 crewmembers before they airlift Ethiopian troops to the Congo

Source: UN Photo 183490, 25 July 1960.

The buildup of troops was rapid and within a month more than 14,000 military personnel were located throughout the country. They had been delivered directly to their final destinations within the Congo, mainly by aircraft of the United States Air Force (USAF) and the RCAF. Figure 1.1 above shows a USAF C-130 aircraft and its crew, who are about to ferry Ethiopian troops to the Congo.

Canada's Key Role

Because of its already well-earned reputation in UN peacekeeping, and having played a key role in every UN peace mission to that date, Canada became involved at the outset in the planning for the Congo operation. Specifically, the Secretary-General asked Canada to take on the job of running all air operations throughout the Congo and, in addition, to provide a long-range radio network for ONUC, which would be located at key centres. Canada agreed.

The Air Officer Commanding RCAF Air Transport Command, Air Commodore Fred Carpenter, accompanied by Wing Commander Jack Maitland, the Commanding

Officer of 426 Transport Squadron, which flew the long-range Canadair North Star planes, were dispatched immediately to survey the needs and make recommendations as to how they could be satisfied.⁵ Carpenter's recommendations were approved and, within days, a small air staff to implement the decisions was assembled and sent on its way to Leopoldville. Canada also agreed to establish and operate the UN forces' radio network as requested by the Secretary-General and, coincidentally, took on the task of reactivating and operating the civilian systems which had collapsed with the departure of the Belgians.

While this was happening, my family and I were holidaying at a lake west of Ottawa. I was the Wing Commander of the RCAF's 412 VIP Squadron. Early one morning in late July, the manager of a nearby airport drove up in his pickup and told me I was wanted on the phone by "some big-shot" at RCAF Station Trenton (a large Canadian military base)!⁶ I went to the phone and spoke to my boss; Air Commodore Carpenter. His words were "You're to go to the Congo tomorrow". Naturally, I politely asked why, and for how long:

You're to set up and run an air transport operation for the UN operations in the Congo. ... You're to jump on a plane and head for New York, where someone from UN Headquarters will meet you and brief you in more detail. From there you will head for Brussels where you'll get a detailed briefing on the situation in the Congo, and then you'll head by Sabena Airlines to Leopoldville. You should be away for a few weeks and, by the way, you're promoted to Group Captain as of today.

I did as I was told and arrived in New York – where no one met me. I phoned UN Headquarters and spoke to an advisor to Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, Brian Urquhart (later Sir Brian), whom I had met before, and went on to Brussels by commercial air. There, the RCAF air attaché met me, gave me a bottle of Scotch and wished me luck, having informed me he had no idea what was going on. The Belgians were too busy to brief me. The next morning I arrived in Leopoldville and was met by Jack Maitland, whom Air Commodore Carpenter had left behind to help out until the small air staff group from RCAF Station Trenton and I arrived on the scene.

The Role of the UN Air Transport Forces in ONUC

The press release from UN Headquarters stated that I was – to use their phrase – "to command all UN air forces in the Congo". Obviously, this was a

5 The Canadair North Star was a 1940s Canadian development of the Douglas C-54/DC-4 long-range transport aircraft.

6 RCAF Station Trenton became Canadian Forces Base Trenton in 1968 with the establishment of the Canadian Forces (the merging of the RCAF, the Royal Canadian Navy, and the Canadian Army). It is a large Canadian military base several hours east of Toronto, on Lake Ontario (detail not in original; provided for readers unfamiliar with the Canadian military).

further endorsement of Canada's reputation and had little to do, I suspected, with my particular talents. The role of the United Nations Air Transport Force (UNATF) was to operate and control aircraft, air traffic, and the facilities needed to support the ONUC commander in the effective execution of his mandate. Our arrival within days of the receipt of the request by Ottawa saw our crew of 10 Canadian airmen undertake an operation which had no precedent in UN peacekeeping history.

On arrival, I had met with General Von Horn, ONUC's "Supreme Commander" (as he liked to be called) and came away with a vague understanding of what the mission would need by way of air support. I found Von Horn a warm, smart, and dedicated UN commander put into the most difficult role the UN peacekeepers had seen to date. He fought for his troops and did well for them. The fact that he may have lacked experience that would have better equipped him for the job is a moot point as there simply was no precedent for ONUC.⁷ My first job was to write my Terms of Reference (list of duties) and define our role as precisely as could be done. The General immediately approved what I put in front of him.

The air transport job would include the control of External Airlift and the operation and control of Internal Airlift. The External Airlift involved the movement of military units and equipment, and ingoing logistic support from overseas to the Congo. The Internal Air Transport would include the movement of UN military and civilian personnel and materiel throughout the Congo. In addition it was to provide the resources to be able to deploy by air a battalion group of infantry to trouble spots as might be required to help local UN commanders re-establish stability in their particular region.

We soon discovered that this not only involved operating numbers of different kinds of aircraft over a very wide area but also that it would require the operation of an air traffic control system and the airfields which would be used. To cap it all, the air navigation and communications systems, as modern as any in Europe, had been abandoned by the Belgians and no local Congolese had been trained to the level necessary to put them back in operation. In some cases the equipment had been sabotaged while in others it had been vandalized.

With more than 15,000 UN troops already on location at many widely spread points, we obviously could not wait to produce a nice neat plan to put the whole project together. The troops had to be fed and supported. The limited road and rail and very expansive river transportation systems used by the Belgians were

7 "I liked Von Horn. I respected him and was loyal to him. I felt sad and resented the fact that his UN bosses, aided by input from a very ambitious Secretary-General Military Advisor who yearned for the CINC appointment, on occasion openly chose to ignore Von Horn's counsel. I was greatly honoured a couple of years later to help host Von Horn during his official visit to Canada and made sure he knew we thought he had done a first-class job". (This footnote and the preceding three sentences in the body of the text appears in the author's review of fellow chapter contributor Kevin Spooner's book on ONUC: Carr, W.K. "Canada, the Congo Crisis and UN Peacekeeping, 1960-64' by Kevin Spooner". Book Review. *Royal Canadian Air Force Journal* 1(1) (2012), 84-7.)

no longer in operation. Simultaneously, we would have many activities on the go. All of these, hopefully, would lead eventually to the neat (and very expensive) package we could see down the road, but had neither the time nor the information to create in the rush. Inundated with demands on their talents and time never before experienced, our ten intrepid members managed it with aplomb and perhaps many shortcuts. We did have help from a Pakistan Army motor transport company in assembling loads and dispatching aircraft. And we increasingly commandeered people and equipment from the various headquarters and on the road to get the job done.

Evolution of the UN Air Transport Forces

With the Security Council's decision to create the mission, Dag Hammarskjöld's staff had immediately appealed to selected member nations for the resources they believed to be necessary to meet the mandate. With total confidence in their infallibility, and some limited advice from an eclectic array of ex-military UN employees, infantry units and air force personnel and aeroplanes were requested from different sources. In the army case it worked out well, as some expertise was evident in the staff and useful offers were made and accepted. In the air force case, however, no such knowhow seemed to be on hand when the non-specific requests for airmen and aeroplanes went out. And, unbelievably, before the requirement could be defined in detail, numbers of each appeared on the scene.

On our arrival, we discovered 17 C-47s (military DC-3s) had arrived, along with five C-119s. These had apparently been dug out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) war reserve in Europe and, until their delivery, some had not flown for upwards of 15 years. A mixed bag of helicopters and several Beaver and Otter fixed-wing aircraft as well, had been generously shucked off from Middle East UN missions and US Army units in Europe. While this raised our eyebrows, it was nothing compared to the surprise we got when we discovered that we had, or would shortly have on hand, aircrew and ground crew in uncoordinated lots from 11 different nations! The one encouraging offer of assistance was an Indian Air Force C-119 Squadron which would come as a formed unit. It was followed a short while later by an Italian Air Force C-119 Squadron.

In this confused atmosphere, we soon discovered we had pilots who had never flown the types of aircraft we had inherited and mechanics who were not qualified to fix them. To make matters even more difficult, there was the Yugoslav contingent of mechanics, real experts on their Russian version of the DC-3, but who had no facility in either of the languages that our Brazilian and Argentinian pilots spoke. The pilots spoke good English but the Yugoslavs spoke only Serbo-Croatian, with their sergeant able to speak some French. Initially this, too, created a problem, but the expertise of the Yugoslav mechanics soon convinced our South American pilots that these foreigners were as good, or better, than any they had worked with at home.

UNATF, with a fleet of obsolescent aircraft, many aircrew unqualified to fly them and mechanics of questionable skills and knowhow, was not off to a very impressive start – from the outset it would be expected to logistically support a field force of upwards of 20,000 troops widely dispersed over an area of nearly 1,000,000 sq mi. However, with the unqualified dedication and ability of a few key members, we were soon running conversion courses to qualify personnel and were routinely doing pilot check rides on all our pilots, whether they liked it or not. Flight safety, if nothing else, required it. We were responsible for the safe results of our efforts and had to make sure an acceptable standard could be met.

Flight checks were done using RCAF check standards. There was no sitting in the office and having someone else do it. After the initial run-through we were able to recruit others to accept some of the responsibility. Obviously the Indian Air Force and Italian Air Force squadrons maintained their own air force standards, even though the first time I flew with an Italian C-119 crew, I was a bit surprised to see a wicker-covered bottle of Italian vino in an especially fitted holder between the two pilot seats. (The explanation that potable water simply was not available in the Congo, and seldom in Italy, left me a bit uncomfortable, despite its purported logic!)

Progress

By the end of August, the dust had begun to settle. We were running regular flights to the main UN troop locations and had a better sense of safety regarding the situation on the ground at the airfields we were using. Not only did we operate the airlift but we also inherited several main airfields and their facilities. However, we lacked the expertise to fill the necessary air traffic control slots vacated by the departing Belgians, so we brashly contacted the International Civil Aviation Organization (headquartered in Montreal). Surprisingly and fortuitously, this generated a quick supply of the several professional air traffic controllers we urgently needed, to augment the few bilingual air traffic control tradesmen the RCAF had been able to provide.⁸ At the outset we had asked much of the aircraft crews in having them operate into insecure and uncontrolled airfields where the local political situation was uncertain.

The Canadian Army signallers at most of these sites were of inestimable help and our crews went out of their way to make sure that the needs of the signal detachments and our tradesmen took priority. Much innovation was involved in acquiring vehicles, accommodation, and such amenities as we could locate. The UN support system was simply not geared for this kind of operation. However, their ignorance was our bliss!

⁸ The preceding three sentences appeared in Carr, W.K. (2012). “‘Canada, the Congo Crisis and UN Peacekeeping, 1960–64’ by Kevin Spooner” (see Note 7). The original text was modified to accommodate this additional insight.

By mid-September we had aircrew of 11 nationalities flying 78 aircraft of 13 different types. Despite the language barriers, inadequate training and lack of supplies, we were getting results. We still required the backup of Air Congo (a politically less offensive name invented for the Belgian air carrier Sabena) charter C-54s, as well as the maintenance and repair of our aircraft.

Air Marshal Hugh Campbell, the incomparable Canadian Chief of the Air Staff, was well known for keeping his ear close to the ground on all matters affecting his RCAF members and what they were doing. He called one day from Ottawa, via the long-range radio, and asked how things were going and whether there was anything we needed: I briefed him on some of our aircraft serviceability and aircrew proficiency problems and mentioned that we had a very large backlog of vehicles and equipment urgently needed in the field. He asked whether a couple of C-119s on temporary duty (with crews) would help. I, of course, said “yes” and within three days they were in Leopoldville! (I wonder if today’s brass could react so quickly and completely.) In the two months we really needed them, these two borrowed aircraft and crews moved 386,000 lb of freight backlog and hundreds of passengers. Also, during the ONUC operation, the RCAF’s 426 Squadron North Stars, in 392 flights, had airlifted more than 2,000 t of freight and 11,476 UN passengers into and within the Congo.

To further give body to UNATF, Canada had purchased four de Havilland Caribou aircraft and offered them to the United Nations for internal airlift. The RCAF in Canada was busily training the aircrews and ground crews to ferry them to the Congo and operate them as part of the UNATF when the Secretary-General, bowing to Russian pressure, refused the offer. This was a blow to our hopes. The Russian pressure was reportedly because of Canada’s strong position in NATO, as well as its membership in the Commonwealth, which had a history in African affairs not necessarily covered with glory. The Russians also openly supported Lumumba, even after he had been fired by Kasavubu.

The records show that by the middle of October our “mixed bag” UNATF had actually moved more 10,000 t of freight and hundreds of passengers in its military aircraft. We had also met the UN’s voracious need for paperwork by having issued Organization Orders, Air Staff Instructions, Supply Demand forms, job descriptions, and other “useful” documents. (They were all actually modified RCAF Forms printed locally with ONUC letterhead.) The world wondered how such a small and busy bunch of airmen could produce this stuff and still run an air operation. I still marvel at it!

An interesting political situation existed during this period when, for a while, no one knew who the government was. Lumumba claimed the job, of prime minister because he had been appointed into it, even though Kasavubu, with outside encouragement, had fired him, and Joseph Mobutu, recently promoted officer in the Belgian-officered Force Publique (renamed on independence Armée Nationale Congolaise or ANC), further promoted himself and led a coup d’état. Dr Bunche, the Secretary-General’s Representative on the spot recognized Mobutu as the point man to deal with. The Russians objected strongly, but the Secretary-

General supported this position. Russian support for Lumumba was strong, even before Congolese independence had evolved. They saw him as the means to get re-established in Africa, having lost their footholds in Egypt and Tanzania.

The Russians tried to pressure the United Nations into allowing them to participate in the provision of aid and, despite the denial of overflight clearances by NATO nations as a result of a timely Canadian recommendation, the Russians did try. At one stage a dozen Il-12 aircraft loaded with “equipment” for Lumumba arrived in Stanleyville, via a very circuitous route, intending to proceed further to Leopoldville. The Ethiopian commander at the airport called on the radio and told me the aircraft were loaded with arms and ammunition. General Von Horn agreed that we should try to prevent this from being delivered. Since we airmen controlled the airfields, we ordered the UN detachments at the usable airfields to block their runways by parking vehicles or 45-gal. gas barrels on them as soon as we gave them word that the Russians were airborne. Our UN commanders did as requested, and the Il-12 pilots, on learning there was no Congolese destination open, had no alternative but to return to Khartoum. Not a word appeared in the press nor was heard from the Russians later.

In retrospect, it is amazing how easy it was to get things done when one judiciously avoided being trapped by the UN bureaucratic network. A few times I was chastised for not seeking authority ahead of time. But when the results looked good and all could take a bow, shorting the system was overlooked. The fact was, we were far too busy to waste time on details when the course of action was obvious. Again, their ignorance was our bliss.

Observations

How to Ground a Russian Tu-104

Late one afternoon in October a Russian Tu-104 military transport jet landed in Leopoldville. General Von Horn informed me that its likely purpose was to lift Lumumba out of the country, and this was not what the United Nations wanted to happen. He wondered if we airmen could quietly arrange to delay his departure for a few hours. I met with two of our intrepid, innovating airmen, stated the problem and was reminded that a high performance jet could not taxi or take off with flat tires. Since we controlled the airport and our good buddies the ANC guards were now very friendly with us (because we had arranged that they be paid their overdue wages), in the dark of night the deed was done.

The Russians were most upset when, late the following morning, they explained to us why they needed to borrow our air compressor. They departed Leopoldville that afternoon and Lumumba was not on board. The Secretary-General’s Representative would later mention how lucky ONUC had been that the Russian aircraft had had a problem and Lumumba was unable to get away as he had planned. We choose not to enlighten the UN staff on what happened. With

hindsight, had we sought CYA authority,⁹ it would never have been granted and Lumumba would not have been stymied.

Official Dinner Guests

While Lumumba was in power, he hosted a black tie dinner to which some UN staff members were invited. Lieutenant-Colonel “Johnnie” Berthiaume, a Canadian Army Officer in the Royal 22nd Regiment – the Van Doos – were seated at the head table. Berthiaume also was one of the ablest and best officers I have ever met in the Canadian Forces. He was an incredibly supportive and loyal aide to General Von Horn, who trusted him completely.¹⁰ At the appropriate time our host decided to speak to his guests, including the US representative, and update them. His speech soon developed into an anti-Western harangue in which Canada in particular was vilified. Colonel Berthiaume and I listened for a while and with Lumumba still in full flow decided simultaneously, I think, to depart the gathering in protest. We were featured in the local press the following day. While we felt some political upsets might follow our actions, I personally was more worried that one of Lumumba’s AK47-armed and highly visible guards might shoot us in the back as we left.

The UN Supply System

In ONUC, the UN civilian staff handled all logistics and this included accommodation and ground transportation and there were official forms for everything, including for the bits and pieces we needed to repair aircraft. The UN supply system, though, was hopelessly overloaded, out of its depth, and was virtually impotent when it came to aircraft support. To say it was a slow process is being generous. Another case in point concerns the lack of vehicles for getting

9 CYA is defined here as “Cover Your Ass”. A perfectly good and frequently used expression to suggest there was rational thought in the activity referred to!

10 “Berthiaume was superbly politically sensitive and he could sway even the most ardent UN bureaucrat to act! He and Colonel Joseph-Désiré [later changed to Sese Seko] Mobuto, a central character in the chaotic Congolese political situation, became close friends. The UN brass did not take to Berthiaume because they knew he knew more about the Congolese political situation than they did. When the Secretary-General’s UN representative ordered the closure of the airports to forestall some perceived Lumumba – the first legally elected Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo – exploit, we of course said ‘yes’ and ignored it. After the fact, Berthiaume told General Von Horn, who laughed loudly and warned us he had not heard what he had just been told! We had to feed the troops and we had to allow the inflow of external airlift by Canada and the United States, not just ‘knee-jerk’ react to some inane political solution to a perceived problem”. (This footnote and the preceding two sentences in the main body of the text appeared in Carr, W.K. (2012). “‘Canada, the Congo Crisis and UN Peacekeeping, 1960–64’ by Kevin Spooner”. The original text included here was minimally edited at this point.).

crews from their accommodation to the airport and for other administrative purposes. No civilian transportation systems were operating either locally on the few highways and rail spurs, or on the river system. Early on, this shortage hamstrung our efforts, so having had no response from the UN system one can-do RCAF Flight Lieutenant conned his UN civilian supply friends into giving him the forms to requisition the vehicles we needed. He did, and four years later I received a query from the United Nations in New York asking the whereabouts of a dozen or so vehicles I had signed for in August 1960.

On the suggestion of an RCAF supply sergeant in our crew, we fashioned with his buddies back in Canada at RCAF Station Trenton an arrangement whereby we could request bits and pieces for all our aircraft directly from the RCAF's Air Materiel Command, even for the Italian and Indian aircraft, and RCAF Supply would meet our demands and then bill the United Nations for repayment. It worked beautifully and amazed many, including the foreign aircrew and the out-of-depth UN logistics staff. The UN civilian staff was more than pleased and soon became very cooperative in things Canadian originated by the RCAF and the Canadian Army signallers.¹¹

Other Tales, Other Times

The cultural and political sensitivities of contingents from 28 different national sources created many headaches for staffs. For example, bivouacking flip-flop-shod Guinean troops alongside American infantry-booted Liberian troops caused the Guineans to demand that they be kitted just as well as their neighbours. The United Nations complied and, in passing, had real trouble rounding up boots big enough to fit previously unshod feet. A similar problem arose over UN service allowances. Egyptian soldiers claimed US\$6.00 per day, Canadians US\$0.30 per day!

An example of politics entering day-to-day affairs was the case of the Israeli-packed and labelled canned-pork products doled out to the Egyptian contingent by the UN quartermaster. A political crisis ensued, with the Egyptians accusing all and sundry of a deliberate attempt to embarrass them. While members of a UN force, they were still enemies at home!

The chasm between officers and other ranks in some contingents were eye-openers also. For example, we had one group whose Wing Commander complained that their officers were expected to ride on the same bus as their mechanics and this was unacceptable. He wanted separate buses. I suggested to him that if his government would indicate its willingness to buy an additional crew bus and supply a driver, we would have no objection. But in the meantime, perhaps they

11 Much of the text in this part of the chapter on the UN supply system has been modified and supplemented with material from Carr, W.K. (2012). "'Canada, the Congo Crisis and UN Peacekeeping, 1960–64' by Kevin Spooner".

could arrange to share the bus, with some sitting up front and the others at the back. I heard no more from that source.

African military personnel, especially those from former colonies, seemed prone to respect the authority of us foreigners more than they did that of other Africans. I could cite many examples of tribal attitudes being basic behaviour driver. but one sticks out. The Force Publique/ANC detested the Ghanaian officers, who bossed them in the provision of airport security. When one group of French-speaking Canadian troops arrived and were mistaken for Belgians, it was an on-site RCAF officer who stopped the mayhem, with absolutely no help from the Ghanaian officers, who stood by and watched. These officers claimed the Congolese soldiers paid no attention to the orders given them.

Compared with the Commander-in-Chief's job of keeping his troops from 28 nations fed and happy, our job to help, while critical to his courses of action, had few of the political and sociological factors to distract us. We had untrained personnel, but they were being trained, and our multinational air force was making good progress. Safety of our crews and passengers was paramount and for the most part, luckily, we were successful.

The Royal Canadian Air Force North Star Lifeline

During the deployment phase of the ONUC operation, 426 Squadron's 13 North Stars were flown at the – until then – unequalled rate of 180 hrs per month each, for a total monthly flying rate of 2,340 hrs. The unit played a critical role in terms of support to the whole UN Congo buildup.

Being unpressurized, the aircraft usually operated below 10,000 ft, especially with passengers on board. There was no passenger oxygen installed. Consequently, and unlike today's high-performance passenger jets, the North Star crews spent much of their time flying on instrument flying rules rather than above the weather. It was hard, tiring work and poorly paid, but a challenge these professionals accepted and relished as their duty. A round trip for a North Star crew from RCAF Station Trenton to the Congo was approximately 70 flight hrs. Through the use of en route "slipcrews" the aircraft could be back in Trenton in a little less than four days. The crews, however, limited to twelve-hour duty days, could be on the route for eight days or more.¹²

The initial Canadian deployment route was from Trenton via The Azores to Dakar, thence to Accra and on to Leopoldville. After these deployments were finished a twice-weekly scheduled flight via Pisa, Italy, normally used for the RCAF Middle East shuttles, was instituted at the request of the United Nations. These flights continued until the wind-up of ONUC in 1964 (from late 1960

12 "Slipcrews" is a term denoting aircrews established in situ on the way to replace arriving crews who will have run out of "duty time", or would do so were they to proceed further. The arriving crew rests and replaces the next incoming crew, and so on. So crews "slip" back to the next flight.

onwards they were carried out by the Yukon, the new and much more operationally capable North Star replacement).

The UN Air Staff

Our airmen from eleven nations, speaking six languages, were nothing short of amazing in what they were able to do. They needed little supervision or direction and, regardless of nationality, seemed to be blessed with the knowhow and understanding which led to the on-the-spot innovation and action that produced the results needed and normally would not have been seen to be possible, even from personnel of much higher rank and experience. Biased I may be, but in retrospect the glue in the whole operation provided by the small group of highly motivated, dedicated and loyal RCAF officers was the key to the amazing success which was achieved in the early days of ONUC.

Despite the differences in operational techniques, flying standards and discipline, only one incident arose requiring the removal of a senior officer from command of a squadron. He was quietly sent home and I was severely chastised for being so “politically insensitive”! (He was not a Canadian.) With the direct link our long-range radios provided to our base in Trenton and to the Canadian capital, Ottawa, we were able to get support results that astounded the top-heavy UN Headquarters in Leopoldville and New York. Our Pakistani, Norwegian, Swedish, and Indian staff members working alongside the small Canadian staff deserve much credit also for helping to make this complex operation realistic and workable. To all of us, the 426 Squadron North Stars brought spares, Thanksgiving turkeys, and otherwise unavailable potables to supplement UN quartermaster provisions.

Retrospective

In retrospect, it is easy to see why the granting of independence to the Congo in 1960 was bound to fail. Belgian colonial policy had prevented native Congolese from holding positions of any authority above a basic level. Even in the indigenous 25,000-man Force Publique/ANC, the most senior Congolese rank was Sergeant – all the officers were Belgian. Thus, at their departure, the Force was virtually leaderless. Many members promoted themselves and Sese Seko (born Joseph-Désiré) Mobuto, a sergeant under the Belgians, made himself a colonel at the time of his coup d'état, a couple of months after they had left.

What education system there was taught only some reading, writing and mathematics – basic skills to peoples identified by the missionaries and other church officials as having potential. By 1960, only one indigenous Congolese, reportedly, was a university graduate. Some trade schools were run by the Belgian military, as were apprenticeship courses by the airline and mining interests.

However, no basic intellectual or educated infrastructure existed to take on the business of government. In this sad country, these problems still exist today.¹³

Conclusion

Much of the success during the early days of ONUC was due to the wholehearted manner in which the Canadian government responded to the UN request. It provided, with few strings attached, the best Canada had to offer. At the forefront of this largesse was the skill and universally admired professionalism of the Canadian soldier and airman. RCAF Air Transport Command's ability to get the job done was once again in evidence. The USAF of the day lauded our operation as the best military air transport in the world, not excepting its own military air transport system.

The RCAF was a key factor in ONUC's early success. Through name changes and force realignments, the core function continues to uphold the RCAF's tradition of, "Excelling at every task it ever undertook". *Sic Itur Ad Astra!*

13 In the original version of this chapter, as a paper in the *Canadian Aviation Historical Society Journal*, the author included further discussion of the historical, geographic, and social context of the Congo. This has been removed, as Kevin Spooner's contribution to this volume (Chapter 3) provides an overview of these issues and frames the broad historical context.