

A Blue Beret in the CONGO

INTRODUCTION

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This is an account of what I saw and what I did during the time that I spent there. I am sure that it will be quite different in some places from the Official Record of Events because as the old saying goes, “There is the Official Report, and then there is what actually happened”. I have written in the Soldier’s vernacular, and I have used the old place names, because that is the way that I remember them. I have not included everything that happened because some of them were very unpleasant, and others, well there were others, and I’ll let it go at that.

I think that I was in the Training Area at Camp Gagetown at the end of the Summer Concentration in 1960, when I was told that I was going to the Congo. I didn’t even know where it was, but I had a vague idea that it was in Africa somewhere around the equator. We were sort of cut off from the outside world when we were out there, except for the local radio stations, and they didn’t do much except play music and advertise Joe Blow’s Garage in Burton. I knew that the UN was sending troops there to try and get the country squared away, and to try and stop the Natives from killing each other. And I knew that this was to be Canada’s second go at fielding a UN contingent, the first being Egypt. And like the first, this one was to be made up of communicators, and a few cooks and clerks. So as is normal when something like this happens I just waited to be told what to do next. Strangely enough, instead of the customary “hurry up and wait” procedure, things started to happen quickly. The Concentration had ended and we all went back into camp, but instead of going on leave, those who had been chosen started “pre-embarkation procedures”. Which consisted of a medical, dental, needles and being read the Riot Act about screwing-up. The medical consisted of, “How do you feel?” Me, “Alright”. The doctor then stamped a piece of paper “Fit for overseas duty”. It was all very scientific. The dental part was more personalized though, and anyone needing fillings got them right away. No waiting a month for an appointment this time, because dentist department shut up shop, and only dealt with the Congo Draftees for about a week. One poor kid named Leveque, got twenty-three fillings in two days, and the mess hall gave him baby food until all the swelling went down. It ended up that he didn’t go anyway, but he had a lovely set of teeth. We all went for needles in a small mob, and we got jabbed for everything they could think of, and then some. We all went to St. John one Saturday morning for yellow fever shots because the next nearest place that was authorized to give them was in Montreal. We got about twenty shots in three or four days, and I’ve forgotten what most of them were for, except for plague. I was a little concerned about that one, because I didn’t really want to go to a place where people had it, because I remembered reading about the Black Death in history books.

After all this had happened I was put into a sort of limbo. Some people were sent to the Congo straight away, and a few of us were put on “immediate standby”. This meant that we had to be ready to walk out the door with ten minutes notice, and there was no wandering off to the mess or anything like that. If you did have to go somewhere, you had to leave a note on your bed saying where you were.

The people who were sent straight off were all Francophones, because the working language of the Congo was French. The Natives spoke about four or five languages, and a whole load of dialects

thrown in for good measure, so they used French as a way of communicating with each other. It probably seemed like a good idea at the time to send French Canadians, but it didn't work out, and in fact, it caused a lot of trouble.

This was Canada's second go with the UN, and the first one had only been a couple of years before, so the High-Priced Help was still learning how to organize and maintain a UN Contingent. So, moving right along, when one of the flights carrying Canadians landed at the Leopoldville Airport, and they all started down the ramp wearing their Canadian uniforms and speaking French, the locals thought that it was the Belgians coming back. It didn't help that J..... was wearing his jump jacket and Airborne Beret, either. They thought that he was one of the hated Belgique Para-Commandos, and a mob attacked our guys. The officer in charge of that Draft was the first off the aircraft, and they got to him first and started to pound on him with anything they could get hold of. A VanDoo corporal threw himself on top of this officer and took a few good whacks himself, but he saved the guy's life. He got a medal or something, but it should never have happened, and everyone blamed J..... for starting it, because nobody liked him anyway. After that all Canadians were issued a blue beret before they left Trenton so that there would be no mistaking who they were anywhere down the line.

I in the mean time was still writing notes on pieces of paper every time I went to the washroom, and waiting to be told what to do next. After a few weeks, I was told to stand down, and that I would be sent later.

If I was going to the Congo, I was determined to find out as much as I could about it. There was no Internet in 1960, so I couldn't google it, and it wasn't long before I found out that there wasn't very much information about the place anyway. I did learn that it had been the private fiefdom of the King of Belgium for a hundred years or so, and that he did pretty well what he liked there, and what he liked was sucking as much money as he could out of the place. This country had more resources than you could shake a stick at. They had gold. They had diamonds, and a whole bunch of other stuff including uranium. It was rich; well, it should have been. One piece I read said that the uranium used to make the first atomic bombs came from there, but I always thought that it came from Canada. Anyway, as I have said, there wasn't much information about this place. Maybe the Belgiques didn't want people to know what they were doing, because as I learned for myself later, it wasn't something to be proud of. I had to rely on CHSJ television and The Daily Gleaner for most of my information, and they probably filtered the news anyway. And if they didn't, somebody did.

Sometime in December I was told that I would be going on a special draft to Leopoldville as a replacement for someone who was getting a medevac. That didn't sound quite right, because if someone became really ill overseas they were flown home immediately, and if they died or were killed, they were planted in the nearest cemetery. None of this sentimental stuff with flags and coffins that you see on television today. But if the people in the Head Shed said it was a medevac, then it was a medevac. It didn't make any difference to me.

When it came time for me to leave Camp Gagetown I had to "clear the camp". This normally meant walking around with a piece of paper in your hand, and going to places in a specific order to hand in stuff that you had signed out, or to draw special kit from the QM. It was a complicated procedure, and

we were allowed five working days to do it, because you waited in lines a lot, and waited for people to stop what they were doing to get your piece of paper signed. Not this time though. I was told to wait at the door of my barrack block with all the things that I had to get rid of in my hot little hand by 0800 hrs the next morning. And as of that moment I was on Embarkation Orders for Active Service, and if I screwed-up I would be in more trouble than I could ever imagine. That sounded like serious stuff.

At the appointed time a van showed up with a jeep full of Meatheads, (Military Police) in front of it, and another jeep full behind. In the front seat of the van was a Major, and several other people like me who were jammed in the back with all their stuff. We set off well above the speed limit, and that's when I realized what the Meatheads were for. Because those in the front jeep dashed ahead and blocked traffic so that we could speed through the junctions. It was like a Moscow Motorcade. Our first stop was at the QM where we were to drop off our unwanted items, and draw new tropical stuff. The Meatheads in the rear jeep went in ahead of us, and moved everyone away from the counter so that we could be attended to immediately. There was an officer's clothing parade going on at the time and they weren't impressed at all. The Major pulled rank on them, and the MP's looked intimidating. It worked, and we were all out of there in about five minutes flat. And that's the way it went in the three or four other stops that we made, except that we didn't go into the buildings. The Major took our clearance forms into where ever they were supposed to go, and we sat in the van. We cleared that camp in forty-five minutes, and not the five full working days that it usually took. Admittedly we used a shortened clearance form, but even so, it was amazing. The words "Congo" and "Active Service" had a strange effect on people, and put the fear of God into them. Too bad it didn't last.

I arrived in Trenton, Ontario a few days before my Draft was due to leave on the 15th of January, because we still traveled everywhere by train at that time. These few days were a buffer that allowed for people who were delayed to get there, and for us to be processed into "The United Nations Family" as one idiot called it. I got a blue beret and a UN ID card that was magic, but more about that later, and, following military procedures that have been in place for thousands of years, we waited.

On the 15th we all boarded an RCAF North Star for a five day trip to the Congo. This aircraft wasn't the pride of the Air force by any means, even though it did have a brass plaque that said HRH Queen Elizabeth had used it, whenever. I later learned that nobody used their best aircraft when they were going on UN flights, because as soon as they arrived in Pisa, Italy, as they all did, including those going to the UNEF in Egypt, the aircraft and crew came under UN control. This meant that the aircraft could be sent anywhere, for any purpose, and could be gone for an indefinite amount of time. That's why we were on an aircraft that wasn't pressurized, and thundered along on old piston engines.

We flew from Trenton to Gander Newfoundland and from there to an American Air force base in The Azores. We figured that we might be able to pick up a few things from their PX, but a USO troop had been there a few hours earlier, and had cleaned the place out. They bought absolutely everything except a ten gallon bottle of Bacardi's White Rum which was too heavy to lift, and they would have been allowed to take it on their aircraft anyway.

From there we took off for Lisbon, but just before we were due there, we were diverted to Gibraltar because of fog. Flying into or out of Gibraltar is quite an experience, because the runway has been carved out of the rock face, there is sea at both ends, and the main road from Spain crosses it halfway

down. We went to an RAF mess hall for something to eat, and learned that the Brits have only two ways of cooking. Frying or boiling. If food can't be fried or boiled they don't want it, and we got something fried called "Scotch Eggs". It's not surprising that so many people leave Scotland. Porridge is bad enough, but these things were diabolical. When we were taking off, a Spanish Taxi ignored the warning lights indicating that a plane was taking off, and headed across the runway. Our aircraft was already barreling along in takeoff mode, so the pilot braked a bit and barely avoided the taxi. He didn't have all the speed that he really wanted, so when we left the end of the runway we dipped a bit towards the sea. It scared the hell out of some people in fishing boats that were nearby and splashed water on all the windows. We laughed. As we gained a bit of height, we could see Africa off in the distance, but we had to go to Pisa, Italy first to check-in with the UN.

There was a Canadian Sergeant wearing a UN hat waiting on the tarmac for us, and he said that he was from Movements Control. He said that had to meet and organize all Canadian flights coming into and leaving Pisa and that he was being worn out. He got all the pay and allowances that we did, and he got a medal. And he didn't get sand in his boots or knocked on the head by a Congolese either, so he didn't have much to complain about. He said that we were going to an Italian Air force Senior NCO's mess, and that we would be provided with beds so that we could get some rest. He also said that we mustn't drink the water either, which I thought was an unnecessary thing to say to a bunch of young soldiers, but it was probably on his check-list.

They took us to a barracks that looked like a cross between a public toilet and a WWII air-raid shelter. There was one very dim bulb to light the place, and there were pools of water on the floor. There were some bunk beds, and each had a not very clean mattress on it, and a very tired looking grey blanket. No pillow, or sheets, just a grungy old blanket. So we dumped our gear on the beds and headed for the mess-hall. They gave us what they called a steak, and I couldn't even cut the one I had, and it looked as though it had been boiled. Maybe their cooks went to the same school as the Brits did to learn cooking. They gave us unlimited quantities of red wine and bread though, and both were excellent. So that's what we stoked up on, bread and wine. Much better than a boiled steak of dubious ancestry any day.

It must have been fairly late in the evening, but I don't really know, because we were at the end of our second day of continuous travel, and we hadn't bothered to change our watches. Several of us decided that we weren't going back to the Italian barracks, because we could sleep on the aircraft the next day. It was fairly late in the evening, and even though it was January, there were lemon trees on one of the boulevards. So we just wandered around for a few hours working the aches and pains out of our muscles. We didn't wander too far from the airport though, so we didn't get to see The Leaning Tower. We spent a few hours in an all-night pizza joint drinking beer, and then headed back to get washed up and see what the Italian Air force had for breakfast. They gave us more bread and some half-decent coffee out at the terminal building while we waited to take off for where ever it was that we were going next. We waited for quite a while, and when we did eventually leave, I still had no idea where we were going next.

After we had been air born for a bit, we were told that we were going to an RAF base at Idris in Libya where they had some V-Bombers. Great. We were going to get something else that had been boiled or

fried out of recognition, and we all looked forward to that. Later in what must have been the evening of the third day, we touched down in Idris, and the place was deserted. There were a few people wandering around though, mostly local hire civilians and one of those took us to a mess hall. The lights were on but nobody was at home, so we waited for someone to show up. After a few minutes, four Libyan civilians came in carrying a cook, and he was so drunk that he was as stiff as a board. Things did not look too promising. These guys had obviously done this before, because they laid him down where he wouldn't get trodden on and one went away. He came back with an oxygen tank and a face mask, and he gave the cook about five minutes of pure oxygen. At that time the cook was up on his feet, laughing and asking us what we wanted to eat. Someone said steak and eggs, and that's what we all got. About an hour later when we had finished the meal and were waiting around as usual, an RAF Officer came in for a "How was the meal Chaps?" routine. He blew a casket when he saw what we had been given, and started yelling at the cook. I don't know what he said, because it came out a bit garbled. I bet that it wasn't very complimentary though. That was the only decent meal that I have had in a Brit mess, and I have been to a lot.

We took off again and found that we were headed to Kano, Nigeria, and that we would get a rest stop there. We all woke up when the sun came up because the poor old North Star was bouncing around like a pea in a bucket. We were flying over the Sahara, and hot air was coming off the sand and giving us a good shaking. We couldn't go any higher to get out of it because the plane wasn't pressurized. We survived though.

We landed at a very modern airport in Kano, and immediately noticed that there weren't many Whites about. The Nigerians were running the place, and everyone was well turned-out, and seemed to know exactly what they were doing. Even the windows were clean, which is a bit unusual even in the best of airports, and Kano appeared to be a very dusty place.

We were taken to a tourist hotel where instead of rooms; each "room" was a replica of a native hut complete with grass roof. They had thick concrete walls which would have kept them cool in the hot season, and everything else you could want. On each bedside table was a brown quart beer bottle that contained drinking water, and it cost you a shilling if you opened it. We each got a "room" to ourselves, and we crashed for a bit. I just took my shoes off and was asleep in nothing flat. Most of us only slept for a few hours because we were too pumped up to sleep very long. On the ride in from the airport we had seen things we'd only seen in the National Geographic. Women with brightly colored robes and with babies wrapped up like bundles on their backs. And we had passed a market where everyone was yelling, and selling stuff that we hadn't seen before.

So I made myself presentable and wandered towards the main building. Before I got there, I ran into a group of our people who were heading back to Canada. These were the people that we were replacing, and none of them appeared to be sick enough to warrant a medevac. Then it hit me. These people were getting a psychovac, and were leaving because of "emotional problems" as we now say, and one of them was Jose..... the guy who had started the riot some months earlier. The Canadians had a policy in the Congo, which stopped trouble before it ever got started. Every Canadian in Leopoldville was armed 24/7 with a Sterling sub-machine gun, and 100 rounds of ammunition. And the only time that you didn't carry your weapon was when you went to the mess hall, for obvious reasons; some

cooks are better at their jobs than others. So arguments could turn deadly, especially among combat trained soldiers, who were to say the least, a bit edgy. So these guys were being sent home, some because they had malaria, and others for other reasons. A couple of us got a taxi and asked the driver to take us to a couple of places that the hotel people had recommended. We had each been given \$50 in American bills before we left Canada in case we encountered unexpected expenses. We knew that this was going to be our last time in civilization for a while, so we headed into town.

We went into a part of town that had mud brick buildings a museum, and vultures picking at garbage in the streets. It was there that we saw four or five Taureg Tribesmen – the Blue Men of the Desert, riding down the street on camels. This wasn't a John Wayne movie, this was for real, and the people in the street made way for them. These appeared to be people that you didn't argue with. They were impressive.

We stopped at a bar for some liquid refreshment, because we couldn't drink the water, and water in a bottle cost a shilling, right? A lot of people came over and asked us where we were going, because two or three white guys wearing blue hats sort of stick out in a crowd of native Nigerians. When we told them that we were going to the Congo, they started a rant that was going to become familiar in the next months. They said that the Congo was a disgrace to Africa, and they cursed the Belgians for not preparing the people for independence, and they cursed the Congolese for bringing shame to all Africans for their conduct since the Belgiques had pulled out. Nigeria had only been independent for a few months at that time, and they, and the Congolese had gained independence at about the same time.

Later that evening we headed off to the airport for the last leg of our journey, and to be quite honest with you, we were too tired to feel excited, scared, or anything. A few of our guys were missing, and just as we were being herded towards the departure lounge, they came roaring up in a taxi, and ran into the building. Immediately behind them was another taxi full of Nigerians who were definitely hostile and yelling and screaming, and demanding that they be arrested. I won't say what they did, but it was sufficient to start a mini-riot, and we got a chuckle out of it. You have to remember that this was 1961, and soldiers then were not like the choirboys you have now; they were a bit more uncouthed you might say. Anyway our Draft Officer got it squared away by telling the Nigerian cops that we were leaving the country in about twenty minutes, and wouldn't be coming back for a long time. He then turned to a Civilian who had been traveling with us, and told him that not a word of this incident was to get back to Canada, or he would never file a story all the time that he was over there. The civilian we found out was a reporter for Reuters and he reported what was going on for all the Canadian media.

We boarded our North Star and headed south towards the Congo, and we were going to leave the world that we knew behind, and go into something that we could not possibly have imagined.

CHAOS, CONFUSION AND CORRUPTION

Our plane landed at N'Djili airport at 1000 hours, on January 20th, 1961, and everything at first glance looked normal, except that it was very quiet. There wasn't that background hum that goes with a busy place, and there were a lot of Congolese standing around not doing anything in particular, and they all

had guns. The first thing that I really noticed was the air. As soon as we stepped out of the aircraft it was like walking into the steam-room at the “Y”, but not too unpleasant, and I eventually got used to it.

N’Djili is about a half hour drive outside of Leopoldville, so on the way in we had a chance to have our first look at The Congo. There were a lot of people walking in both directions alongside the road, and a lot of them were Congolese military, and they too had guns. There wasn’t very much vehicle traffic except for the ubiquitous white vehicles of the United Nations, because nobody except for the UN had any gas. The one thing that did make a lasting impression on that drive in was the smell. I have heard people say since that Africa has a smell that is like no other place on earth, and I believe them. It’s a smell that is made up of heat, humidity, rotting vegetation, garbage, sweating bodies, sewage, and God knows what else. It is not unpleasant once the novelty of it has worn off, and it seemed to be everywhere.

When we drove into Leo, (Leopoldville), we were all surprised at how modern the city was. We had driven through a landscape of grass huts and tin shacks and were now entering a city that didn’t appear to be more than five years old. We drove down a wide four lane boulevard that had brand-new multi-story office blocks and apartment buildings on each side, and was better looking than anything that I had seen in North America. But again, it was quiet. There was no road traffic except for the occasional white UN vehicle; it was a bit weird.

We were dropped off at what had been a girl’s boarding school, and very nice it was too. This was the Canadian Contingent’s Headquarters, and was where we were to live and work, and is know by Congo Vets only as “The School”. It must have been for the White kids because I couldn’t see any of the Congolese getting a place this luxurious; I figured that we lucked-in.

The School was built around a square garden that had a large tree in the middle of it, and this is where we were told that the Nuns, who had run the school, were raped and murdered early on by the Congolese Army. The School of course had a large dining room and a large kitchen which was ideal for us, and we each had a separate cubical with a wash basin and a bed in it. It was very nice; much better than I had expected.

We were given a lecture on what we were to do, what the situation was locally, in the country as a whole, and all the usual do’s and don’t. Later after I had been there a while, I learned that nobody really knew what was happening in the country, downtown, or even around the next corner, and I mean that quite literally.

Most of the Canadian Contingent were members of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals as it was then, and we provided communications between the various other contingents that were scattered around the country, and the UN Headquarters in Leo. Most of the Canadians were in Leo working in a tape relay station, where they sent and received teletype messages 24/7, and on CW, (Morse code) link to Kamina. I don’t know how many people were on the ground, because we didn’t see everyone all at the same time. There were Canadian detachments of six, eight, people attached to the various units around the country. There were outfits from Malaya, India, Ethiopia, and I can’t remember all the others, and the Canadians were pretty well spread out over a country that was about the same size as Western Europe. Only 421 Canadians went to the Congo from July 1960 to June 1964, so you can see that we were spread rather thin on the ground.

I can’t say that we quickly adapted to the daily routine of the place because there wasn’t one. What we did do, was adapt to an environment where things changed quickly and often. We went from watching movies on our time off to double guard duties. From walking downtown, in pairs of course, and only to certain areas, to Red Alerts that lasted for days. There were three alerts, green, yellow, and red.

Green meant that all was quiet and peaceful, well, as peaceful as it was ever going to get. Yellow was a state of caution, which was silly because you had to be cautious all the time. And red was “attack is imminent”. We had a lot of reds, a lot of yellows, and very few greens which was to be expected I suppose.

There was a large municipal swimming pool just across the road from The School that we used, and a lot of “mature” civilian women used to go there. It took a while for me to realize that they went there to ogle at us, which is a real case of role reversal if you think about it. There was a soccer field next to the pool where we had our Saturday morning parades, and it had a long line of dark green patches in the grass. This is where someone had laid some bodies. The nuns probably! Blood makes an excellent fertilizer. I expect that the Belgiques had done it because the Congolese would have just left them in a heap.

The Saturday morning parade was where we were supposed to be brought up to speed about what ever the high priced help thought was important, and we were given instructions on how to comport ourselves in general. This always attracted a bit of a crowd of Congolese, who thought that it was great fun to see white guys standing around in the sun. We often got our instructions on how to behave when we are on guard duty, delivered both in English and French. “If you have to fire your weapon, do not shoot to kill, but if possible aim at a point that is below the belt and above the knees”. It worked wonders. The Nigerians didn’t have any problems with the locals either, because they used to shoot anything that moved, and they didn’t get their garbage collected for a long, long time.

This parade would last about thirty minutes, or until the first person fainted, and someone usually did. We had a pot on how long the parade would last and everyone threw in a dollar a week. If nobody got within two minutes of the time then the pot carried on over to the next Saturday. Sometimes there was a fair chunk of cash in there. There was an ex Brit SAS guy on my shift named Frank Eustas, and Frank was absolutely fearless, and from him I learned a lot. Anyway, the pot hadn’t been won for a couple of weeks, and Frank chose the time of five minutes. We thought that this was way off the mark, and we figured that it was his age getting to him because he was forty-two. Our shift was on the parade that next Saturday, and soon after it began; Frank glanced at his watch and slowly sank to the ground. The CO, a Major C.... yelled “Eustas if you’ve won that pot I’ll have your ass”. He had of course, and we all found it hilarious, and I suppose that it was that kind of thinking got him into the SAS. It was a good lesson for me, because it showed me that it was often possible to create or change a situation, so that you control it. It kept me out of a lot of trouble in the coming months.

One day some bright spark thought that it would be a good idea if we had defensive positions dug around the school. That’s a posh term for trenches, and it’s a lot of hard work especially in that climate. I lucked-in because I was paired with Frank, and he knew what time it was by an eight day clock, as Sam Weller used to say. We each had a shovel and were standing along-side a road that went by The School, and I started digging. Frank soon put a stop to that, and waited until a couple of Congolese came along, and he told them that we were supposed to be digging up some valuables that some Belgiques had buried before they left. He said that we were too lazy to do it ourselves, and that we would share some of it with them if they dug the hole. When the hole/trench was to Frank’s liking, he told them that we must have the wrong place, and he gave each of them a Coke and a few cigarettes. I liked Frank. A few days later Frank and I were in that trench on one of the many guard duties that we did. We had been told that “the enemy” was expected to come up the road directly in front of us, and after a while I heard some shooting. I popped my head over the top of the trench to see what was going on, and Frank said, “If they don’t bloody well kill you, I will. Get your head down”. Like everyone the first time that they come under fire, I had done something stupid. They say that if you survive the first one, you’ll be alright in the future, and I was lucky that I was with Frank my first

time. Frank was a really nice guy, but unfortunately he was killed some years later while working in Kingston Penitentiary as a guard. He tried to disarm a con armed with a shiv, but he had slowed down a lot because of his age, and didn't make it. They said his Wife didn't bat an eye when they told her that he had been killed. She said that she had been expecting something like that ever since the day she first met him. I think that Frank would have preferred to die that way too.

Our lives were a routine, if you can call it that, of working and guard duty, with a bit of free time thrown in once in a while. A CBC entertainment troupe showed up one day much to our surprise. I think that they had been on a trip to our guys in Egypt, and some had volunteered to come down and see us. None of the "rich and famous" ones came, but those that did were very welcome indeed. It took a lot of guts on their part, because the Military said that their safety could not be guaranteed, and that it could be dangerous. They showed up one afternoon, put on two quick shows and were flown out immediately afterwards. I can't even remember their names. There were several women in that group too.

Once there was a reception for something or other, and we were told to attend if we were off duty. I can't remember what it was for, but it was to be a posh affair and we were read The Riot Act that afternoon. There was to be a Swedish band and people making speeches and some dancing. That's all that we were told, and that's all we needed to know I suppose. Anyway, a whole lot of well fed civilians, both male and female, turned up, and some of them made clever and important speeches that I took no interest in what so ever. After that was finished, the band played the Canadian National anthem, and then they started to play the Swedish national anthem, which obviously most of the civilians didn't recognize because they started dancing. We were still standing rigidly at attention because this had been part of our briefing, and some of the civvies must have noticed us, because if you live to be a thousand, you'll never witness a scene of mass embarrassment like the one that took place there. It was hilarious. The Swedes thought so too.

Our life in Leo was completely different from anything we had experienced before, because the whole of the Congo was in a state of anarchy. Inside The School was "normal". Outside was a complete breakdown of law, order, and government, except for that which was imposed by the UN. Life was cheap, and you could have someone killed for a couple of dollars if you didn't want to do it yourself.

Three of our guys, two cooks, and someone who worked in the stores, were caught with a barrack box full of drugs that they had bought locally. The Congolese used to smoke a form of hashish, drink beer, and be out of it for days, and these guys bought some of this stuff. They were to be sent back to Canada for a Court Marshall on the next plane, but in the mean time they were free to wander around. One afternoon I was sitting at one of the side-walk cafes that we grew to love and two of these guys were a couple of tables over. It was obvious that they had been drinking a bit too much because they were not discrete at all. They were arguing with a Congolese about the price of have Major C..... killed, because he was the one who was sending them back to Canada. The Congolese wanted five American dollars, and they only wanted to give him the equivalent of the five dollars in Congolese francs. So they argued for a bit, and then the deal was called off. I told this Major about it some years later, and he nearly had a heart attack.

This Major C..... was not a popular person at all, in fact, I am surprised that nobody had killed during his tour; it would have been so easy to do. Pump a round into him, then loose off a few more shots, and say that you had been returning fire. Who's going to argue with you? It happened all the time among the other contingents. C..... was not popular because he used to fine people \$100 for the slightest infraction of the rules. Diefenbaker had given us \$100 tax free a month for being there, and it was like getting an extra month's pay, and this is what C..... was taking away. One of the rules was that you

had to be able to touch your weapon without moving your feet, no matter where you were, except in the mess-hall. I think that the reasons for that are obvious. One guy was sitting on the toilet and he didn't have his weapon with him. One hundred bucks. Word of this quickly reached Canada, and a message came from Ottawa, uncoded, giving C..... a blast for his hundred dollar fines. Someone obviously wanted us to know that he had been jacked-up, and wanted him to know that we knew about it too.

The UN operation in the Congo, ONUC as it was called was very unusual because nobody, and I do mean nobody, really knew what was happening "out there", outside of Leopoldville. There weren't any news media people of any sort reporting about what was going on, and this was because of a number of reasons. First of all the Congo is a very large country, and travel from one place to another was extremely difficult, if not impossible for anyone who was not part of ONUC. Secondly, communications from one part of the country to another were impossible, because when the Belgiques pulled out, there was nobody to operate and maintain whatever communications system they had in place. And thirdly, the Contingents often did not report what was happening in their areas, especially if they thought that it would cause them "national embarrassment". The Canadians were guilty of this too, and I'll tell you about it.

We had a detachment in the port of Matadi, and for a couple of months it had been a very quiet place. It was so quiet in fact that the Canadians were considering deploying at least some of them somewhere else. One morning while I was in the tape relay, a message came in saying that they were under attack, and asking for permission to shoot back. I should mention that John Deifenbaker in his infinite wisdom had forbidden us to carry weapons outside of our own defensive perimeters, and not to engage in hostile actions without the permission of the Canadian Government. So there were these guys in the middle of Africa asking permission from a government in Ottawa to defend themselves. So a message requesting permission to return fire was sent to the ONUC Headquarters in Leopoldville, where it was relayed to Geneva, who relayed it to UN Headquarter in New York, who sent it to Ottawa, who gave it to Deifenbaker. He held an emergency cabinet meeting, where permission was given. A message was sent from Ottawa, to UN Headquarters in New York, who sent it to Geneva, who forwarded it to ONUC HQ in Leopoldville, who sent it to the Canadians. When the OK was sent to Matadi, there was no answer – the circuit was dead. The time from their original message to the time when they were given permission to fire back was three or four hours at least, so it wasn't surprising. These people were gone.

The next day we learned that whatever Contingent was looking after Matadi had regained control of the situation, and found that our guys had been captured by a rogue element of the Congolese Army. They had been freed, were on their way back to Leo, and that some had been banged around a bit. We also learned that the Canadian Liaison Officer for that detachment was missing, and that his body had not been found. This was not considered unusual because the Congolese used to do nasty things to the bodies of their enemies, and some tribes were known to be cannibals. So the chances of finding his body were a bit remote.

Eventually our guys showed up, and some were not in good shape at all. They had been worked over pretty good by the Congolese, but none of their injuries were life threatening. There was still no sign of their LO, a Captain B....., who was a Vandoo, the Royal 22nd Regiment of Canada, who was now considered to be "Missing in Action". The next day Captain B..... showed up at The School minus those parts of clothing that would have identified him as a member of the Canadian Contingent. He said that when the shooting started he got away from the building where our guys were under fire, and hid in a ditch at the side of a road. When the shooting stopped, he hid his blue hat, epaulettes, UN and Canadian insignia, and made himself look like a Belgian civilian. He then hitch-hiked his way back into Leopoldville, so that he could tell everyone what had happened. Things happened real fast after

that. He was arrested and put in protective custody, because everyone had a gun, and awaited being returned to Canada for a court marshal on the charge of “Desertion in the face of the enemy”. This is the most serious crime that a soldier can commit, worse even than murder, and he had done it. I never expected to see anything like this, ever.

He was sent back to Canada, but he was not charged with the crime. It was decided that a court marshal would bring disgrace on his regiment, the Canadian Army, and Canada as a whole, so it was dropped. His regiment would not have him back, in fact nobody wanted him, because it was a big open secret about what had happened. I don't know where he ended up. After his return however, the Reader's Digest ran a story about “A Canadian Hero's Adventure in the Congo”, because Captain B..... had signed up for a speaking tour while he was on leave and the Reader's Digest had caught the story. He was quickly jumped on with both feet by the Canadian Military, and yanked off his tour. Canada didn't do anything to deny the story in the Digest because it was thought that it was better for Canada to have a hero than a coward. But we all knew that he had deserted, the most serious crime that a soldier can commit.

Another incident of what may have been a cover-up came about in an unusual way. During a quiet time in Leo an Irish soccer team stayed with us while they were doing something or other, and for lunch that day we had “Irish Stew”. They went berserk, as only Irishmen can do. There was yelling, screaming, and swearing, and it took quite a while to get them calmed down. It was all because the Irish had lost a whole patrol a couple of months before with only a couple of survivors, to some Baluba tribesman, and all the bodies had been recovered except one. The Balubas were known cannibals and it was figured that the missing body had gone into a cooking pot. We didn't know anything about it. We hadn't even heard a whisper. This may have been because when the loss was reported in Ireland, it created a real fuss, and it was blamed on insufficient training and poor leadership, which was probably true. Again something that a country would be reluctant to advertise. Not a nice thing for the Irish, but we got a laugh out of it anyway. There were other cover-ups I'm sure, and I'll deal with another major one later.

We quickly adapted to the conditions under which we lived, even though we were not prepared for most of them. Poor and insufficient food, long periods without sleep, and always being alert and not relaxing – ever. Like that feeling you used to get as a little kid when you were in a dark room, and you expected something to come out from under the bed and kill you. Well it wasn't a fantasy for us because someone could kill you either with a bullet, a poison arrow, or a spear at any time. And the long periods on guard duty alone, were hell on the nerves. One guy, who wasn't on my shift fortunately, used to leave his post and hide whenever he was on guard. One night, someone found him hiding and quite literally stuck a rifle in his ear, and told him to smarten-up or they would kill him. He asked me the next day if he should report the incident, because he took the threat seriously. I told him to smarten-up instead, because someone was bound to do him in if he kept goofing off. He was a danger to us all, and I had no sympathy for him. As far as I know he is still alive, so I guess he smartened-up.

One thing that we had a great deal of trouble with was skin rashes. We used to get the most appalling rashes under our arms, down the rib cage, around the waist, and inside the thighs. It came from our clothes which were always damp from the humidity in the air and perspiration. So everywhere our clothes made close contact with our bodies we developed a rash which often bled quite a bit. We had showers three or four times a day, and got rid of our constrictive clothing whenever possible, but it was a losing battle. Sometimes we didn't get a change of clothing for twenty-four hours or more, and that certainly didn't help. The Medics gave us all sorts of weird and wonderful stuff to put on them, but nothing worked. One day we stumbled on Dr, Scholl's Foot-powder, and it worked like a charm. I

don't know why it worked and the other stuff didn't, I didn't care all that much. It worked and that was it. I think that what we had was the same as diaper rash, and the older guys should have picked up on it.

Sometime in March I think it was, I was sent to Stanlyville. Time meant very little to us, because we were not governed by days of the week. Wednesdays and Sundays were all the same to us, the only day that we had an eye on, was the one when we would return to Canada.

I knew little or nothing about Stanlyville, and when I asked I was told, "That's where Lumumba came from.", so I knew that it could be a trouble spot. I think that I have mentioned it before, but we were totally uninformed about what was happening in the outside world. Ottawa would put out a compilation of news everyday known as "The Press", and it was sent via teletype to all embassies, consulates, and so on. We got a copy sometimes if the circuits weren't too busy, and they usually were. So I may have known that Lumumba had been killed, but not too many details, and I certainly didn't know of all the politics that were involved with his death.

STANLEYVILLE

There were only two ways to get to Stan. One was by riverboat, which would take days and not be a safe way to travel at all. And the other way was to fly, which on the face of it, seems to be a much better choice. So I flew.

When I got to N'Djili, I found a beat-up old DC-3 that had been painted white, and had UN markings on it. When I got close, I was almost floored by the most awful smell that you can imagine. It turned out that on its previous flight it had transported goats and that this time it was loaded with dry fish. It was a smell that would make billy-goat puke and the high heat and humidity intensified it. The crew consisted of a pilot and co-pilot who were both UN civilians, and they both looked like something out of a Humphrey Bogart movie. After we had taken off I went forward to talk to these two to find out what was going on, and all that sort of stuff. There was the pilot with his feet up on the instrument panel eating sardines out of a can. When he finished one can, he would throw it over his shoulder and grab another out of a cardboard box. The other guy was flying the plane, and the pilot who was a Cuban, told me that he was letting him fly even though he was the flight engineer, because he was going to try and get his pilot's license, and he needed the practice. It didn't sound very kosher to me. I asked him how long it would take to get to Stanlyville, and he said that all depended on how many problems we had along the way, but not to worry because we had enough fuel for a complete round trip. He showed me a map that he had for navigation, and it was a map of the whole Congo, with most of it being blank. He was flying the old Bush Pilot way of IFR, "I follow Roads", and his map had pencil notes, and lines drawn on it that zigzagged all across the country. The notes were something like, "Depart N'Djili at 290 degrees and fly for twenty minutes at 280 knots. At small clearing with six huts fly 019 degrees for forty-five minutes to village, then....." This was the way we got to Stanleyville. This Cuban may have not looked like very much, but he knew what he was doing. And his was the only type of flying that worked in that country. A pilot used to modern facilities and navigational aides would have been completely lost.

On the drive in from the airport to the hotel where the Canadian Detachment worked and lived, I was given a running commentary on the points of interest as we passed them. The places were where various killings had taken place as well as a mini-massacre that had happened in front of a portrait of Lumumba. The area around this portrait was a no-go area for us, because the locals regarded it as a shrine. There were a lot of no-go areas, and I wondered if I would remember them all. When I got to the Wagenia Hotel which is where we were staying, I got a briefing from our Liaison Officer, a Captain S..... He was a Brit who had joined the Canadian Artillery because jobs were a bit scarce where he

had settled, and he had been in the Brit Artillery at sometime or other. He told me that Stanlyville was “communist country”, and that there were a number of Russians in town because they wanted the province to go communist, and that we were to have nothing to do with them. He also said that there were a number of CIA people there too, but they were the good guys. This was at the height of the Cold War, and it all sounded very exotic and exciting, just like a movie.

The Contingent (support troops) in Stan were Ethiopians, who were Emperor Haile Selassie’s bodyguard, and these were the elite of the elite. The hotel was their headquarters, and we got along very nicely with them. The hotel was good and still run at the pre-troubles standard, and we didn’t have to do guard duties, which was great. I settled in for a nice little holiday. Boy was I in for a shock.

Across the road from the hotel was a very high brick wall that was at least a hundred meters long, and this was one side of the city jail. Every morning at about six-thirty, all the prisoners were kicked out and not allowed back until evening, and they were easily identifiable, because they wore dark blue short-sleeved shirts, and shorts that were the same color. This may seem odd, but there was a bit of a famine going on at that time, and the authorities didn’t have to feed them if they were out on the street. The prisoners wanted to get back inside in the evening so that they could get something to eat and have a place to sleep. The prisoners could also get odd jobs during the day and earn themselves a few francs. A lot of them were garbage collectors. - It was a weird arrangement but it seemed to work and nobody was very concerned about it.

We didn’t have much to do when we were not working, except for our own logistical stuff, and once in a while we were able to wander about a bit. Still no guns though, we were told that it, “Frightened the Natives”. It didn’t seem to matter that they frightened us, and that it was open season on Canadians as far as the Congolese were concerned. We used to joke that you didn’t get your medal until you had been beat-up or robbed. It was very lucky that nobody was killed. Deif the Chief was not one of my favorite people. One morning I was asked if I would drive the hotel Manager’s wife to a laundry because she couldn’t go on her own. I really was asked, because the laundry was in one of our no-go areas, and it could be dangerous, and, it was not part of our official duties. The laundry was usually delivered, but this time there had been mix-up somewhere, and a visit was unavoidable. So I drove her to the laundry. She was scared s...less, and her husband should have gone instead of her. Maybe he was scared too and forced her into it. It didn’t bother me too much, because I was twenty-four years old, invulnerable, and going to live for a thousand years, right? In other words, I didn’t know enough to be scared. When we arrived at the laundry a crowd quickly gathered, because the UN car was easily identifiable, -and they could see that the only occupants were a rather attractive white woman and one lone Canadian soldier. I think that they were too surprised and curious to make much of a fuss, which was fortunate for us. She wasn’t in there for too long, and we quickly made tracks for the hotel. When we got back, there was quite a crowd waiting on the steps for us to arrive, because it was even money that we wouldn’t make it. Our LO should never had allowed it to happen. The Ethiopians could have given her an armed escort, which would have made much more sense than an unarmed Canadian driving a Volkswagen Bug.

This Liaison Officer of ours was a nice enough guys, but he didn’t have both oars in the water if you know what I mean. He had been at another detachment before Stan and been kicked out of there. Apparently he had been refused entry to a restaurant because he was drunk, so he drove a heavy piece of road-making equipment into the front of the place, and wrecked it. At night before he went to bed, he would kneel down in the mess and say, “God look after my Wife and Children, and God bless the Prime minister of South Africa.” We didn’t think that it was a joke; in fact we were quite concerned about it. Every week a psychological evaluation was done on everyone in the detachments by their LO, but nobody was doing one on the LO’s. This guy could be dangerous. His second in command was an

older Sigs guy, and he told us not to worry because he was keeping an eye on him, and he wouldn't let him get out of control. Good thought, but as I'll tell you later, it didn't work.

We ate in the Ethiopian Officer's Mess because their food was considered to be closer to what we were used to. The ordinary Ethiopian soldiers ate "Ethiopian" food, whereas what we were getting was "European", and it wasn't all that bad. For breakfast we got a pint mug of coffee, a very thick slice of bread, and half a fruit that looked like a mango. It was the same color as laundry soap and absolutely bland. Some morning we got some dried egg instead of the fruit, which I didn't mind at all. I'd eaten dried eggs as a treat when I was a kid during WWII, but some of our guys didn't like them at all. I guess that they had never been hungry. Some of them complained that they couldn't eat the food because the Ethiopian cooks put palm oil in everything, which they did, even "Beef" stew. They wanted us to get a per diem so that we could eat at a local hotel; ours didn't have a dining room. Either that or have our food flown in on the supply runs. Captain S..... wrote a letter to our HQ and explained the situation. Our people sent up a medic who was to explain to the Ethiopians in polite terms that we couldn't handle the palm oil. Well some couldn't. The medic went to the kitchen to explain to the cooks what our problem was, and he was back in nothing flat. He said the Ethiopian Officer's Mess was as of that moment out of bounds to Canadians because it was a health hazard. He said that there was meat hanging up that was all colors of the rainbow, and the kitchen was filthy. S..... sent a message to Leopoldville informing them of the medic's findings and asking for permission to run up a tab at the restaurant down town.

In less than an hour a message came back from Leo telling us not to go down-town, because the Ethiopians were really ticked off that we "Were too good to eat with the officers of Emperor Haile Selassie's Bodyguard". There was an international incident taking place and we were stuck in the middle of it. We were told not to go to the Officer's mess either, but to buy food by local purchase, and that we would be reimbursed later.

I have already mentioned that there was a famine in Stanleyville, and food, our kind of food, was very expensive. So we pooled all of our American dollars, because Congolese francs were absolutely worthless and nobody wanted them, and a couple of guys set off to buy something. They came back with one loaf of bread which had cost them ten American dollars; and this was in 1961. We had been scrounging around our hotel and had found a ten pound can of jam tucked away in a cupboard. So we each had two thin slices of bread and jam and a liter of beer. We needed the beer because we were right on the equator, and the recommended minimum fluid intake per day was eight quarts. The local water plant had been flooded, and the water that was coming out of the pipes was probably contaminated, so no water to drink. The local Coca Cola manufacturer got its water from the water plant, so no soft drinks either. The only source of reliable fresh water was the local brewery, and we found that they wouldn't sell us water, even though we offered to pay the same price for it as beer, because, "They made beer and didn't sell water". You can't argue with that kind of logic, so we started into a regime of two slices of bread and jam a day and eight quarts of beer. We asked for permission to use our emergency rations, but this was denied because we were not in an emergency situation. We didn't know what idiot made that decision; maybe it's lucky for him that we didn't. We only expected this situation to last for a few days at the most, but it lasted for three weeks, and we were not in very good shape when it ended. The "international incident" had snowballed, and had made its way to Ottawa and Addis Ababa and the politicians were involved. That's never a good thing at any time. The problem was solved by Ed Broadbent who later became the NDP Leader, who as it turned out had a personal friendship with Haile Selassie, and got the situation ironed out.

We went to a restaurant downtown for lunch and dinner each day, and I suppose that we could have gone for breakfast too, but not many people wanted to go, and it was not a good idea to go alone. It was in the restaurant that we met the Russians. I only used to see two, but I suspect that there were

others around somewhere. One said that he was a reporter for Pravda, and the other was an “Agricultural Advisor”, and of course, we didn’t believe either of them. They were friendly enough, and bought us the occasional beer. We had as little to do with them as possible even though we were not prohibited from fraternizing. There had been quite a few Russians in Stanleyville at one time, and a few weeks before I arrived one of our guys was badly beaten-up out at the airport. He was treated by Russian medics, and I think that he spent some time in their care. Years later he tried to get a pension for the injuries that he received, and I don’t know if he was successful or not. His medical records were in Russia, and so were the witnesses to his beating, which made it sort of difficult for him to prove his case. So, he tried to contact people who had been in Stan at the same time that he was, and that wasn’t easy either. The detachment was only about six people, and some of those may have died off.

At about this time conditions started to ease a bit locally. I don’t know if it was because the famine had eased a bit, or that the Congolese Army had been paid, anyway, something happened, and we were able to move around a bit more. On May 1st, 1961, I went to a May Day Parade in beautiful downtown Stanleyville. It was the first and the last one that I had ever attended, and I went because I knew that the likelihood of my ever having the opportunity again were pretty remote. There were thousands of people there, and I can’t remember who I went with, probably Bill O... because we had come from the same unit in Canada and I trusted him. We were the only Whites among thousands of potentially hostile Congolese, and looking back on it, it was a stupid thing to do. I also took a camera, which was a good way to get yourself robbed, and or killed, and not a clever thing to do either.

In the crowd was a Congolese wearing a monkey skin hat and a cloak made out of hundreds of leaves from some tree or other. So I took his photograph and all Hell broke loose. He started to yell and scream, and shouting something at me. The crowd pulled back until Bill and I were in an open space about four meters in diameter. I recognized one of the hotel staff from where we were staying, and asked him what was going on. He said that the guy in the cloak was a powerful witch doctor, and that he had placed a death curse on me. I was expected to die immediately, and the crowd was a little surprised that it hadn’t already happened. After a couple of minutes the witch doctor, a Muganga, said that I would die eventually and my magic was keeping me alive, but that his magic was much stronger and I would die at some time in the future. I thought that was a pretty fair assessment of the situation, and as it turned out, it helped me considerably.

I should explain this last remark because it brings up something that we were totally unprepared for, and that was the enormous difference between the North American culture that we were used to, and that of the Congolese, at all levels of their society. The Belgians had kept the Congolese in a state of ignorance from the day that they arrived as colonialists, to the day that they left when the country got its independence. A Congolese might get as far as grade eight in school if he was lucky, and I say he because girls were not educated. This enabled him to do menial office work for his Belgian masters, who didn’t want educated Natives getting ideas of any sort. This meant that their society was very much the same as it had been for hundreds of years, and it meant that they believed in magic, evil spirits, forest gods, and so on. So when they saw us walking around without guns, and apparently fearless, they thought that we must have some powerful sort of magic protecting us. And when I didn’t die after being cursed by the witch doctor that confirmed it, we were invulnerable. The Ethiopians, who were Africans despite their sophistication, had played on this ignorance by spreading a rumor soon after they arrived, that an evil spirit was heading towards town that had the head of a chicken and the body of a dog, and that they were the only ones able to control it. It worked like magic, if you’ll excuse the expression.

The Congolese Army Commander-in-Chief lived in Stanleyville, whose name was Victor Lundula. He had been a Sergeant Major at the time of Independence, and the new government had fired General

Janssens who was a Belgian, and he got the job. Needless to say he wasn't up to it. He once wrote a letter to the UN Headquarters in Leopoldville, in which he complained that the Ethiopians had "battle magic" and were able to turn bullets into water. He was sure that this was against the Geneva Convention, and he wanted it stopped. I don't know what the reply was, but I'm sure that it was diplomatic. I have mention Lundula and given an example of his mind-set because he played an important role in an incident that affected us all.

Now that we were going into town on a regular basis, we were meeting more of the Europeans who were about the place. Among them were two Englishmen who ran the local Belga cigarette factory, and they were pulling out. They invited us out to their villa for a farewell party, and invited us to take all the cigarettes that we wanted while we were there. We didn't take any as it turned out because they were awful. They had Belga Rouge and Belga Jaune. One was flavored with cloves, and the other with some hot spicy stuff – I don't remember which was which. Even the smell of them was pretty bad. Anyway they had some beer, and something to eat which was alright. I volunteered to go back to the hotel so that the guy on duty could come of to this farewell bash, which only consisted of us and the two Brits anyway.

It was Bill O..... that I relieved, and he soon came back and said that everyone had been arrested soon after I left, and that they were all being held in the local Army camp. Captain S..... said that he was going to get them out, and went to get his nine millie side-arm. The Senior NCO that I mentioned earlier, the one who said that he would stop S.... from doing anything stupid, was helpless. So S..... stormed out of the hotel on his rescue mission, and we figured that he was gone for good. A few hours later he was back with our guys but the two Brits were still captives. He said that he had gone to Lundula's villa, and straight into his bedroom. There he put his pistol against Lundula's head and told him to get our guys out of jail. It worked of course, but the mystery was, how did he get in there? There must have been guards about the place somewhere, and he just walked through them. Whatever it was, it added to our mystique, and was much appreciated.

The incident was reported to Leopoldville, probably by all sorts of people, and S.... was ordered out on the next aircraft for a debriefing. He didn't come back. He was supposed to bring back some money to reimburse us for what we had spent on our ten dollar loaves of bread, and that amounted to quite a bit. Later from Canada he said that he had put in it an envelope and mailed in before he left. Maybe he did, and maybe he dropped the envelope in a garbage can, who knows? He was right out of it at that time and may have done anything with it. Anyway we asked the Canadian authorities not to proceed, because we were told that he would have to reimburse us for the lost money. It wasn't really a big deal, and he had a wife and kids. In Canada he was probably a very nice guy.

His replacement came in on the next aircraft from Leo, and it was a VanDoo captain named H..... He seemed to be a nice enough guy, and it was obvious right from the get-go that he didn't have the street smarts that we had learned in that God forsaken country. On his first evening down at the restaurant he said to a Congolese waiter, "As tu....." something or other, and the waiter popped his cork. He was being spoken to as an inferior just like the Belgians used to do, and he was upset – very upset. We got it smoothed over, but for a long time the restaurant staff would have nothing to do with H....., and we had to order his meals. I made a point of not speaking French to any of the Congolese, and spoke Kitchen French, a mixture of French and Swahili when I wanted to say something. When they heard English they said that it was "Flemant", Flemish which is a "Belgian" language according to them. You had to be careful of what you said, because even a small innocent remark like "As tu" could start trouble, and you could end up dead.

While I was arranging some of the things that happened in Stan in my mind, prior to tapping them out for this paper, one incident struck me as being a bit odd, and I hadn't noticed it before. There was a Canadian civilian in town who worked in one of the UN offices. He had been in Sigs the same as us, had got out, got himself a UN job, and ended up in Stanleyville. I can't remember what his name was so I'll call him Marcel. One afternoon while I was sitting around slack and idle, Marcel asked me if I'd do him a favor. He had a truck outside, and he was to deliver a load of stuff to Antoine Gizenga's villa. I'm not sure if I have mentioned that Gizenga was the President of the province which Stanleyville was in, and a "graduate" of Moscow University. He was also known as, "Krushev's favorite puppet". I thought that would be interesting, so I went along.

What we delivered was about thirty cases of gin, and a few cases of vermouth; I had thought that it was going to be furniture or something like that. So I liberated a few of cases because I figured that if he and his people were poking back that much booze, they wouldn't miss three or four cases, and we could always say that the airport people had taken them. On the way back Marcel told me that he had been tasked with making sure that Gizenga always had a good supply of gin, and that the idea was to keep him drunk as much as possible.

That much gin was not easy to obtain anywhere, and it would have to have been flown in to Leopoldville. Any liquor warehouses that may have been left by the Belgians, I can guarantee were looted within minutes of their departure, so it had to come from outside. Who decided to keep Gizenga drunk? Was it the UN? Was it the Congolese Government? It had to be someone with a lot of influence to get that amount of gin flown in. Someone who didn't want him making decisions that's for sure.

Marcel kept one of the cases and no doubt used the bottles as currency. Money, unless it was American dollars, was useless anywhere in the Congo so other things were used instead. Cigarettes were used most of the time when dealing with the Congolese, and UN employees preferred alcohol. If you wanted anything done, and done in a reasonable time, you always had to offer a "gift". I was persuaded to store the remaining cases in Captain H's bedroom for safekeeping, but a couple of weeks later when I asked for a bottle for some reason or other, I was told that he had drunk the lot. He must have gone through more than a bottle a day. No wonder we didn't see very much of him. Our Senior NCO said that "H" had told him that he had drunk it because he missed his family. Another fine example of leadership from the VanDoos.

Stanleyville became relatively quiet eventually, and we were able to move around a bit. Always in a vehicle though, well most of the time anyway, because being in town on foot could be risky. I was wandering around one afternoon and a lady told me to come into her house because there was a truck load of Para-Commandos, a branch of the Congolese Army, in the area. I stayed there until they were gone, and didn't repeat that stupid mistake again. Some of the Congolese were nice to use, but not many.

One evening I told everyone in the Mess, that I was fed-up with being harassed, manhandled, and generally abused by the Congolese, and that I was going to kill the next one that looked at me sideways. And I could have, and would have done it too. So I got shipped back to Leo, and Stanleyville was designated a "hardship" posting and nobody was to go there for more 12 weeks. I can see now that it was a smart move, because I could have ended up dead.

Leopoldville Again

I arrived back in Leo via a side trip to Entebbe in Uganda, to find that we were still living in The School, which was a surprise, because there had been rumors of us being kicked out of there. It was

supposed to revert back to being a school once things had calmed down, but I suppose they hadn't. Life was much easier there now, and I can't remember if we had to do guard duties or not. There was a D and E, (Defense and Employment) Platoon of infantrymen who were supposed to take care of that sort of thing, and they did, except when there was an Alert. People were still turning up dead in town every morning, but not as many as there had been a few months earlier. And some mornings there were no bodies at all.

This did not mean that we could relax when we were outside our own defense perimeter, and we still had to go out in pairs. The calm was due to the excellent job that the UN Cops were doing, and there were none better than the Nigerians. They had sent some of their British trained police force down, as their contribution to ONUC, and they were a sight to behold. They were all very tall and muscular, and immaculately turned out. Shiny boots, carefully pressed uniforms, even in that heat, the whole nine yards. I think that they had been specially chosen to represent their country, because they were impressive. I think that they were the ones who were responsible for the relative calm in Leo, because I saw them in action once.

Chris B... and I went to the Leopoldville Zoo one afternoon. He had been one of the people in Matadi, and had elected to stay on. And it was a very pleasant outing until we walked out of the zoo gates. We were confronted by two or three locals demanding money, and it didn't take long before a small crowd gathered. This could have been very detrimental to our health had it not been for the Nigerian cops. Because just when things were getting a bit ugly, three or four of them came out of nowhere and disbursed the crowd. They did it by grabbing those people at the back and knocking them flat. Of course the Congolese were facing us and didn't know what was happening behind them, and when they found out, they took off running, those that hadn't been decked that is. It's always nice to see professionals in action, and these Nigerians really knew their job. No fuss, no mess, no yelling and screaming, just quiet efficiency. They didn't even work up a sweat.

Life in Leo had settled into a dull sort of routine when compared to what it had been before I went to Stanleyville. There were still alerts once in a while, but that was to be expected in a war zone. We were supposed to be on a peacekeeping operation, but right from the start it became peace enforcement, because the Congolese were engaged tribal warfare on a grand scale in some areas.

Now that most of the danger had gone I decided to ask for a few months extension on my tour. We were only supposed to be there for six months, and then be sent home, unlike Egypt which was a one year tour. I was due to get married in December, and a few months of extra pay was very attractive. I had learned how to stay out of trouble most of the time "downtown", so I was pretty confident that a few extra months wouldn't do any harm.

There was still a fair amount of action going on around the country, and we would hear what was really happening via "chat" with our guys when the circuits were quiet. The Sitreps, Situation Reports, that were the official accounts of the goings on, were often incomplete or outright fabrications for one reason or another, and I'll deal with that later.

There is one incident that I'll tell you about without leaving out too many facts, and it involved some Canadian Officers. All the Officers lived in villas near The School, and it was not as grand as it sounds. Anything that had four walls, a roof, and running water was called a villa, and some of them were sort of run down. So the guys in one villa asked if they could move to another which was vacant, because it was larger, etc., etc. They got permission so they moved in. Their new place had a swimming pool in the backyard, and they set some of their houseboys to draining it of the dirty water that it contained, and making it neat and presentable. When they got to the bottom of the pool they

found the bodies of some Indonesian Officers who had been reported missing, and they had been there for a while. I don't know how many there were, because the number got inflated every time someone repeated the story, but it was definitely more than two. It was a complete surprise to everyone because we didn't even know that they were missing. Every week, each Contingent would send a message into ONUC Headquarters saying how many people they had, how many were fit for duty, and so on. Once in a while one of the contingents would report someone as "Missing", and after a couple of weeks that person would be listed as "Missing presumed dead", if they hadn't shown up. We hadn't seen anything from the Indonesians, and if they had reported it, it would have been common knowledge among the Communicators in nothing flat. So much for Official Reports.

After I had been in Leo for a while, and I honestly don't know how long it was because time has no meaning in those situations, I was told that I was being sent to a new detachment that was being opened up in Bukavu. I was told that because I had spent so long in Stanleyville, I was being rewarded with a nice cushy posting up in the mountains. I didn't believe one word about it being a "cushy posting" because I stopped believing anything that the High Priced Help told me before I finished Recruit Training.

BUKAVU

Our plane landed just outside Bukavu, across the border in Rwanda Urundi, which at that time was still a Belgian colony, and we had an audience of the hated Belgian Paras the whole time that we were there. It was only a short drive from the airport, across into the Congo, and up a hill into Bukavu. This border crossing, an empty hut at one end of a bridge, became well known years later when it appeared frequently on news broadcast, showing people fleeing the troubles in Rwanda.

My first impression of Bukavu was, "WOW!" It was about 6,000 feet above sea level, so we were out of the tropical atmosphere of places like Leo and Stanleyville, and it had been built as a posh holiday resort for the Belgiques. They had cleared away most of the native trees and other vegetation, and replaced it with stuff imported from Europe, it was on a lake, Lake Kivu, and it looked very nice indeed. It looked even better when we got to the villa where our detachment was set-up, because it was out on an exclusive peninsular, which was a good defensive position by-the-way, and the house was set in about two acres of landscaped garden. Maybe this place was as good as it was rumored to be, but I had my doubts, because there's always a catch to go with something like this.

There were eight or nine of us in the detachment, and the Det. Commander was another VanDoo named Captain K..... He seemed like a nice enough guy, until he said that he had been in charge of the VanDoo boxing team at Valcartier. When I had arrived in Leo in January, the D and E Platoon was made up of the whole of the boxing team from Valcartier, and the story was that there had been some trouble, and they had been shipped out of the country for a while. When they went back to Canada K..... had been sent over, to keep them apart I suppose, and this alerted my newly acquired street-smarts. There was something about this guy which meant that he couldn't be trusted. He was a Brit who had a French mother so he was perfectly bilingual, and he had spent time in Malaya which was a bonus, because we were attached the Malayan Contingent.

It didn't take long for us to settle in and it was made a lot easier because the UN in its generosity had hired six or seven Congolese to work for us. This was very uncharacteristic of them; maybe someone made a mistake. We found that we got along with the Malays very well indeed, because they were still very British, and some even had Cockney accents. But again we had trouble with food. It wasn't a hygiene problem, it was something else. Besides the villa where the detachment was set-up, we had another house where the lower ranks stayed that had a fully equipped kitchen, and we were supposed to cook our own meals, with food supplied by the Malays. That normally would not have been a problem,

but it was. The Malays were made up of Chinese, Indians, Native Malays, and a few Europeans who I was told were descended from Portuguese. This meant that there were Confusionists, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians, and the only food that they could agree on among themselves in the meat department, was chickens and goats. It should have been alright, except that we never did master the technique of cooking goat meat and so we ate chicken and rice. Lots and lots of rice. We decided to hire a cook, pay him ourselves, and see if he could do anything with the rations that we were getting. So we did. He was a nice old guy, and the first meal that he prepared was cauliflower cheese, and very nice it was. The next day he cooked cauliflower cheese and the day after that too. It was the only thing that he knew how to cook, so Al Church, one of the older guys who didn't have much to do anyway, tried to teach him how to cook. It didn't work out. So we gave him a couple of weeks pay and a carton of cigarettes, which were like gold, and sought permission to eat downtown. We got it without too much delay, and we settled into a very comfortable groove.

Life in Bukavu was very nice indeed, with swimming in the lake and excellent meals downtown. Our houseboys were a nice bunch, and somehow or other I found myself in charge of them. Maybe it was my ability to communicate with them, or maybe it was my interest in them as people, I don't know, but I got along pretty good with all of them. One whose name was Emmanuel stood out from all the rest. He was exceptionally bright; in fact he was probably the smartest person that I have ever met bar none. He told me that he had been schooled to about our grade eight level, and that was as far as Congolese were allowed to go. That was a real waste of talent. He was very philosophical about it though, and didn't appear to be too angry with his circumstances. Actually his circumstances were very good compared to those of the average Native in those parts. He was paid about three times what he would have got from a Belgian, and we used to give them stuff, like cigarettes and cans of Coke.

Our good relations with these guys paid off in an unexpected way, and probably kept us out of a lot of trouble. Up the back of town in the Native village was a "talking drum" that could be heard for miles, and every once in a while Emmanuel would tell us not to go into town that day. He would never say why, only not to go, and that was good enough for us. Sometimes when the drums were going, all the Houseboys would be laughing, and we were told that someone had not been home for a couple of days, and that his wife was very angry with him. Different things like that, or, "bring home a loaf of bread and a bunch of bananas" sort of thing. For a couple of francs anyone could have message thumped out, but of course, there was absolutely no privacy in what was sent. I asked Emmanuel about these drums, and how they sent their messages. I asked him if it was like our morse code, and he said that it wasn't, and that the drums "talked", and children learned to understand them at the same time, and at the same speed that they learned spoken language. This was the first time that I had heard them, although I had read about them of course.

The house where the detachment was set up belonged to a Doctor Petite and his family, which consisted of him, his wife, and a daughter of about fifteen and a son of nine, name Albert. They lived in a section of the top floor of the two story villa, and we very rarely saw them. They were undoubtedly afraid of us and all the Malays who were out on the peninsular, and they were the only civilians left. They stayed because Petite was a doctor, and being on the peninsular was a very safe place to be. The Malays had a 50cal. machine gun set up on the road coming in, and that thing would stop anything short of a tank.

Albert, the son used to hang around with us as much as possible, and he was encouraged to do so by his parents because he was able to practice his English skills. He wasn't a bad kid, and he did as he was told, well he did when we told him anyway. One morning I came across him in the garden yelling at his family's house-boy, and slapping the guy's face. This was a thirty-something Congolese male, and there was a nine year old Belgian kid slapping his face. The house-boy didn't move or say a thing. He

just stood there. So I got a grip of Albert, and took the guy into our house for a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Someone went into see K..... and report the incident, because this native guy was bound to tell people about the abuse when he got back to his village that evening, and if we hadn't done something we would have been seen as condoning what happened. Petit was told that the colonial days were over, and such behavior was no longer permitted, and it could get him killed. He used to go into town everyday to do his doctor stuff, and he was vulnerable. The kid was only imitating what he'd seen his parents do, and it shows how the Belgians treated the locals. Some of our house-boys had witnessed this incident, and they were very quiet and solemn until I stepped in and stopped it. After that Emmanuel who had been picking up English at a remarkable rate said, "Canada number one", and I knew that we had made some friends. I'm sure that it went out on the drums that evening, because they just weren't used to White guys being nice to them.

One day, September 18th as a matter of fact, Emmanuel came up to me and said that the drums were saying that our "Boss" had been killed. I asked if it was K....., and he said that it wasn't, and that the drums couldn't say his name. A message was sent to Leopoldville who didn't reply. A short time later we received a priority message from Leo saying that Dag Hammarskold's plane was missing and did we have any information about it, because it was supposed to be over our way somewhere. We told them about the drums, and they said that it was an unreliable source of information. Several hours later we heard that the plane had crashed about 500 kms away and that Hammarskold was dead. The drums had passed that info from one village to the next, and through several languages, much more efficiently than we could with our modern technology.

I've said before that Bukavu was a quiet sort of a place compared to what was happening elsewhere, and maybe that was because the Congolese hadn't got themselves organized yet. They were still killing each other of course, but not on a grand scale, and the killings had more to do with personal stuff. For example, the local Congolese Army Commander, a Lieutenant Simba, wanted to be a General, and he killed anyone who he thought stood in the way of his ambitions. He was still a lieutenant when I left, so his efforts didn't get the results that he thought that they would.

Because it was fairly quiet, well most of the time anyway, I managed to take a few trips away from Bukavu. Some of our guys didn't go off the peninsular except to eat, not because they were afraid, but because they had no desire to do so. I wanted to see what was out there, and have a look around.

During our trips to the restaurant we had met an English civilian about our own age named Arthur. I honestly can't remember his other name, and it's possible that I never heard it. His family owned a coffee plantation just outside of town, and when the troubles started, his Mother and Father took off back to England. Arthur stayed behind to try and salvage what he could, and then he too was to leave. When we met up with him he was in the process of trying to convert a large amount of Congolese francs into something that would be of value on the outside. This was not as easy as it sounds because there was nothing to buy. He needed something that had value and was easy to carry so he chose gold. Not the gold that you would buy through a bank, but gold panned straight out of the rivers, and bought on the black market. This took a long time of course, and what he bought had to be soaked in nitric acid to see if was genuine or not. He also bought some rough diamonds, but there weren't too many of those around. So in the meantime, he used to hang around with us.

One day he asked me if I would go on a one day trip with him to Usumbura which is in Burundi. K..... said OK, and off we went in Arthur's VW bug. When he had said Usumbura it didn't mean much to me, because my knowledge about the geography of that area was almost non-existent. I was quite surprised when we crossed the border into what was still at that time a Belgian colony. What a difference. Everything seemed to be so neat and tidy, and clean too. No rubbish in the streets or

anything like that. My United Nations uniform got some curious looks, but nothing more. I can't remember very much about the trip except that we came down to sea level again, and I noticed the change in temperature and humidity. It was the first time that I had seen cotton growing in fields too. Arthur concluded his business and we bugged out of there, because we wanted to be back at the border before dark, so there was no sightseeing. On the way back Arthur told me that he had been arranging to get himself smuggled out of the country. So I advised him to keep it to himself, and I didn't ask questions. I wondered why he needed to be smuggled out, when we had driven into Burundi with no trouble at all, other than a couple of packs of "American" cigarettes. I suppose he wanted to hang on to the gold and diamonds he had collected; because there was no way that he could have carried them over. One day Arthur was gone, and we heard that he'd had himself ferried across the lake into Rwanda. I don't know if he made it back to England or not, but he probably didn't. He was carrying some valuable goods, and he was in some hostile country.

We used to mail our letters home from a civilian post-office just over the border in Rwanda, because they arrived in Canada much quicker than they would have if send by "official means". They also got some fancy Rwandan stamps which the people at home used to like, and it got us off the peninsular for half an hour or so.

Normally these trips were uneventful, but like always there are exceptions. One afternoon, Bill Bird and I had been over to mail some letters, and we got stopped part way up the hill on the Congolese side of the border on the way back. We were stopped by a patrol of Congolese troops, and they were completely out of it on beer, and their own form of hashish. I doubt if they even knew what planet they were on. They were zonked right out of their minds, and of course this made them even more dangerous than they would normally have been. A bunch of drunks are difficult to deal with at any time, and drunks armed with guns, hand grenades, and God knows what else, is very much worse.

I told the guy who appeared to be in charge that we were Canadians, and that we were on our way back to the peninsular. He wouldn't have any of it. He said that we were Belgians, and that we had stolen the uniforms, and were trying to sneak into the country. You have to admit that he had a point, because we were leaving a Belgian colony, Rwanda, and the UN didn't have any troops there. After a bit of an argument I showed him a tattoo that I have on my left arm, of a North American Indian wearing a war bonnet, and the word "CANADA" tattooed over the top of it. I told him that this was the guardian spirit of my tribe and that anyone who harmed me would be hunted down by this spirit and killed very slowly. He and the others agreed that it was best not to take chances, and that I was to be left alone. They then turned their attentions toward Bill Bird. Where was his tribal mark they wanted to know? I told them that I was the keeper of the spirit and that he was covered too, but they wouldn't have any of that either. The leader told me that they knew all about magic and tribal spirits, and that wasn't the way they worked at all. So they started to argue among themselves about how they were going to kill Bill. Most were in favor of just shooting him, but one who had a big chunk of rope on his belt wanted to hang him. He wanted to tie one end of the rope around Bill's neck, the other to the jeep that we were driving, and push him off the edge of the road down a fairly steep slope. The others said that it wouldn't work and they would end up shooting him anyway. Poor Bill kept asking me to translate what they were saying because he had no idea what was going on at all. I didn't tell him just in case he got upset, because there was no point in getting him all worked up if it could be avoided. Just when things started to look a bit desperate for Bill, a couple of Malay scout cars came over the brow of the hill and pointed their 30cals at the Congolese. This had the desired effect, and we were out of there in double quick time. The Malays had been alerted because we had been gone for longer than expected. That was a standard procedure when we went anywhere. We said where we were going, and when we expected to be back, and that time it paid off big time. I told Bill later when he had calmed down a bit, what the Congolese had been arguing about, and he got pretty wound up about it. He sells real estate in Belleville Ontario now, and we exchange Christmas cards once in a while.

Since the Det opened we had been speculating among ourselves why K... had been separated from his boxing team, and why they had been sent over six months apart. I had met all the boxing team and K... of course, and I couldn't figure out a reason, then one day it all became very clear.

K... told me to accompany him while he visited one of the Malay High Priced Help, and he told me that if he lost his temper, I was to drag him out of there using what ever force was necessary. I knew that wasn't going to happen for all sorts of reasons, but I didn't say anything, and just went along. He and the Malay Officer started to talk about something or other, and I wasn't really paying all that much attention to what they were saying. In an instant K... had popped his cork and was preparing to do battle with the guy, and he would have if the Malayan hadn't called for back-up from troops that were nearby. K... didn't have a short fuse – he didn't have a fuse at all. And he got all worked up when we were outside, and said that I was going to be court-marshaled for disobeying a direct order and not dragging him out of there. I suggested that he think about that again and consider what he would say to a Court-Marshall about his conduct. He obviously did because nothing happened, and when he was calmed down, he was a pretty nice guy. I don't know what he did in Valcartier, but it must have been fairly serious to get him a six month holiday in a tropical paradise, and the boxing team must have been in on it too. Yelled at the wrong person probably.

There was a member of the Danish Contingent in Bukavu, and he looked after the Movement Control duties for the UN at our end. The Danes looked after all of the Movement Control for ONUC, and they recruited their people straight "off the street", that is, they were not members of the Danish military, and they signed a contract just for that one operation. They were signed into the Danish military but they didn't get any special training other than what was required for their job, and they all spoke excellent English and were competent at what they did. One day this guy, his name was John Borup, came in, and asked if I would accompany him to Goma, which was at the other end of the lake about three hours drive away.

So early the next morning we rattled off in John's jeep towards Goma, and we really did rattle because the road wasn't in very good repair, and neither was John's jeep. It wasn't bad though, and I could hang on with both hands in the bad spots because I wasn't driving. At the Bukavu end of the road there were a number of sharp turns as the road went up and down some fairly steep hills. And every once in a while we would see a wrecked car where someone hadn't quite made it, and that provided a real incentive to get back before dark. Near the Goma end we finally came out of the jungle and could see Mount Nyiragongo the volcano that was not too far from the town. It was the first active volcano that I had seen, and to be quite honest with you I was not impressed. There was a bit of smoke near the top that looked like wispy clouds, and it didn't look threatening at all. But in 2002 it erupted, and most of the Goma that I saw was destroyed by monster lava flows.

The trip back was fairly uneventful, except for having to wait for a gorilla to move off the road. We'd heard in Goma that a gorilla had pounded on a Belgiques car a couple of days earlier, and the man and woman in it had been cut up pretty good. I guess even gorillas can have a bad day. Anyway this thing eventually moved off, and I talked John out of going into the bush to get a photograph of it, by threatening to shoot the first thing that I saw coming out, even if it was wearing a blue beret. I'm glad he didn't go because I don't think that he had ever cleaned his weapon, and it could have been dangerous to fire it.

It was the Canadian's policy to pull people in out of the detachments about a week before they were due to rotate back to Canada. This was to allow whatever paperwork there was to be done to be squared away, give you your medal, and to take up the slack if there were delays with the aircraft,

because each Contingent usually only got one or two aircraft a week. The evening before I was due to leave, H..... a young guy in our detachment, sat in the middle of the floor and started crying, and saying that we were all trying to poison him. He got a psycho-vac, and my seat on the aircraft the next morning, which was a real bummer. On active service these things happen, and you have to learn to roll with it, and provided nobody else cracked-up, I would be out of there in a week.

It was during this next week towards the middle of November that I went to Goma again with John. Nothing much happened on that trip up, and while John was doing his stuff at the airport, I wandered off to have a look around.

There wasn't much to see except some old colonial buildings, and the remains of what had once been some elaborate gardens, so I wandered over to watch some ivory carvers at work. While I was watching them a Congolese came over and asked me if I wanted to buy some Italian lira. I told him that it was not of much use to me because I would only be in Italy for a short time on my way back to Canada, and may not even get out of the airport. He offered a good rate, almost double the official price I think, but I didn't have the American dollars he wanted anyway. I told the Danes when I went back to look for John, because being offered Italian lira was very unusual. They went nuts. They said that the day before a whole load of Italian Airforce people had been murdered by the Congolese, and asked if I would recognize the guy if I saw him again. I said that I would, but that it would be a waste of time looking for him among the twenty or thirty thousand people that were in town, and anyway, that was a job for the Malays not us. I think that they had watched too many John Wayne movies, and weren't living in the real world. That happens when you put civilians in a uniform sometimes. They start to act out fantasies.

On the drive back, John said that he had been told that all the Italian Detachment had been killed, and that whoever did it, took everything that they could pick up and carry away. He said that for a long time, the Italians had been smuggling ivory up to Italy and selling it to the Beretta Firearms Company. He said that it was probably the ivory poachers that had killed them, because the Italians had tried to rip them off. That made sense to me, because these people may have been a bit primitive, and they were certainly dirt poor, but they weren't stupid. He said that the Goma Danes were surprised that we hadn't heard anything about it, because news like that travels fast. And from the way he talked, I got the impression that this had happened at the Goma Airport. I wouldn't have gone there if I'd known that, and certainly not on my own.

LEO FOR THE LAST TIME

I made it out of Bukavu on the next plane, and got down to Leopoldville via Albertville, and when I got there I was very glad that H.... had got my seat a week earlier. The Canadians had moved out of The School into an apartment block that looked like something out of a Hogarth engraving. It was a nice building, or at least it had been, but now it looked like a bit of a dump. And it was made even worse by a wood fired oven right outside where the Indians cooked their chapattis. There were eight or more people crammed into each apartment, and the elevator didn't work. I was glad that I wasn't to be there very long.

I was walking in front of the building shortly after I got there, and someone tossed my medal out of the window to me, then I had to climb God knows how many stairs to go and sign for it. Well, it's better than standing on a parade anyway. There were a few other admin things to get squared away before I left, and they were quickly taken care of. I saw H...., the guy who got my seat out of Bukavu, when he was on a daytime guard duty. I don't know if the rifle he was carrying was loaded or not – I wouldn't have given him a loaded gun. He didn't appear to be interested in talking to me, so I left him alone. Maybe he thought that I was going to thump him or something.

Eventually I left the Congo, and I had been there for ten months, two days, four hours, and twenty-five minutes. I had got out of there alive, reasonably sane, with no serious injuries, and the survival instincts of a sewer rat. I was a completely different person from the one who had got off the plane in January. I had picked up a lot of self-preservation skills, I didn't trust anyone, and I now know that I had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I don't think that it had been invented at that time, and it took a long while to get over. Several years in fact, because I went to Egypt about fourteen months later.

It took longer than expected to get back to Canada because we got stranded in France for a week, but that is a long and complicated story, and we weren't supposed to be there. I got back to Trenton, Ontario and was put on a train for the hospital in Halifax, where we were checked out for parasites for three consecutive days, and I won't go into that either.

I got back to Fredericton a few days before I was due to be married, and my Wife-to-be was very glad to see me. The Military wouldn't tell her where I was while we were stranded in France, and she thought that I had done a runner. I was glad to be back, even though December in Fredericton was nothing like December in Leopoldville. I nearly froze.

CONCLUSION

I have written this account of my time in the Congo straight out of my head as it were, and I have not resorted to any other source, except to verify the spelling of various words, and to confirm some facts and figures. I have been either blessed or cursed, depending on your point of view, with an excellent memory so the task was not too difficult. I have omitted a lot of material because it would cause grief and embarrassment to individuals and their families, come under the heading of "Hero War Stories", that is where the narrator puts themselves in a heroic role, or I thought that they were not very interesting. I also left out most of my encounters with the Congolese people because they were not very pleasant, and I left out all of the "blood and gore" that was a part of everyday life there.

I have been highly critical of the Canadian Liaison Officers that I encountered, and rightly so. When the Canadian Contingent was being formed a request was made for bilingual officers to fill that role, and it is obvious that some Regiments took the opportunity to rid themselves of people that they didn't want. An argument can be made that nobody in Canada, or anywhere else for that matter, had any idea of the magnitude of the problems that were to be encountered in the Congo, nor how to deal with them once they were known. ONUC was intended to be a Peacekeeping Operation similar to the one in Egypt, but it quickly became obvious that it was to be a Peace Enforcement Operation instead. The majority of the Canadian officers that I encountered lacked basic leadership skills, especially under hostile conditions. I have spoken to several other Congo Veterans while writing this piece, and they are of the same opinion, that the officers were incompetent and sometimes dangerous in bad situations. Luckily all of the Communicators, who were the majority of the Canadian Contingent, were members of The Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, were combat trained, and could look after themselves if they had to, and there was at least one incident that I know of where they did. Otherwise some would have been killed I am sure.

I have mentioned several times that we had no idea of what was happening around the country, and about the unreliability of reports that did make it out. When reading any report, from whatever level, it is important to remember that you are only reading what someone wants you to know. The majority of reports are either sanitized versions of what actually happened, downright fabrications, or they are incomplete. I doubt if the encounter that Bill Bird and I had on the hill up to Bukavu was accurately reported, if it was reported at all. If it had, there would have been questions. "What were they doing

visiting Rwanda?’ ‘Who gave them permission to go?’ and so on. Sometimes it is best just to keep quiet about the whole affair.

The danger of keeping quiet is that where credible accounts of events do not exist, rumors rush in to fill the vacuum. The death of the Italian airmen is such a case. I was told one account, from what I thought was a reliable source, which differs from Time Magazine of November 24th, 1961 which has too many colorful embellishments to sound reliable. But then, maybe it is written a style that was in vogue in the 1950’s and 60’s. The Congolese did mutilate corpses by cutting off their hands and lips, so that the dead person’s spirit could not harm them. And if the attackers were under the influence of a psychotropic drug, as they often were, then the mutilations could have been more extensive. The use of drugs by African “warriors” before a battle is widely documented. I think that what John Borup told me about the ivory smuggling was the reason behind the killings, because it seems a bit odd that the Italians were suddenly mistaken for Belgians.

Accounts of the Irish Massacre can be found by googling “massacre niemba”, “massacre Thomas Kenney”, “massacre Private Fitzpatrick”, or any combination thereof. This was an unfortunate incident, and was brought about by the inexperience and naiveté of the participants. I will not comment on this event.

The United Nations Operation in the Congo lasted from July 1960 until June 1964. There were 245 military fatalities and 5 civilians. Three Canadians died, all from natural causes, and they are still there. The Canadians were one of the few Contingents where the troops did not kill each other, which is something that we should all be proud of. Only 421 Canadians served with the ONUC Peacekeeping Forces, and I am not sure how many are left. It probably isn’t more than a couple of hundred spread all across Canada.

Canada should be proud of these people, because they didn’t go overseas in groups of hundreds, to be greeted by cups of Tim Horton’s coffee and donuts. Today’s troops don’t leave home – they take it with them. The Congo Canadians were in an extremely hostile environment, and they had no precedents to go by. Luckily they were tough, both mentally and physically, and it’s a miracle that nobody was killed.