

Katanga 1961

The long shadow of French rogue officers

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“Dag Hammarskjöld’s Plane Crash The Continuing Search for Truth”

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Good afternoon,

My name is Maurin Picard, I am speaking from New York, and very glad to join this assembly today.

I am a journalist by trade, and here in the capacity of an author and researcher.

When I first came upon the Dag Hammarskjöld investigation eight years ago, the first people I spoke with raised the issue of France’s troubled relationship with Dag Hammarskjöld and the United Nations in 1961.

One was **Roger Lipsey**, Dag Hammarskjöld’s biographer. He took time to explain how strained the relationship between the French government, led by President Charles de Gaulle, and the 38th floor in New York, had become, mainly because of the decolonization crises in Algeria and Tunisia.

The other was **Susan Williams**. She suggested that the French officers involved in Katanga deserved more attention and a thorough investigation.

I set out to do exactly that: establish what responsibilities French decision-makers and foot soldiers could possibly bear in the crash of the Albertina - and the Katangese crisis as a whole.

The outcome of this research has provided the grounds for a book published in 2019, detailing French involvement in the plot against Hammarskjöld, known as “*Monsieur H*”.

But it wasn’t enough. There is still a lot of information that needs to be collected, archives still classified. I endeavored to locate and meet the last witnesses, the last living players of this clandestine game. And there will be a second book in June, delving more specifically into the lives of the 25 French so-called “*mercenaries*” spotted in Katanga at the time of the events.

I will try to be short and concise. For 5 years, I have researched French, Belgian, and UN archives, and tried to corroborate what I found with American, British, and Swedish diplomatic archives.

Here are my findings - and a bit of background - to the extent they can clarify the chain of events leading to the crash of the UN Secretary-General's DC-6 near Ndola.

Let me take you seven months before the crash.

The time is February 1961. Katangese hardliners have managed to convince President Moïse Tshombe he should hire a select group of elite French officers, all veterans of decolonization wars in Algeria and Indochina. Their goal will be to train the army and prepare for war against the Congolese national army. The French government makes no obstacle to this plan, as it will help to remove some dangerous characters from Algeria, where a military putsch is brewing against de Gaulle. Having men such as Colonel Trinquier and Major Faulques flown away from Algiers carries its advantages. Their skills will be put to good use for a good cause, but not only that: Paris is seriously contemplating a takeover of Katanga and its mineral resources, notwithstanding the hostility of the Belgian Government, UK and South African mining interests, the Congolese central authorities, the UN, and even Moscow. First, send a diplomat and open a consulate. Then, if conditions allow, be the first Western power to recognize Katanga's independence and transform the consulate into an embassy. A French airline company, UAT, gets exclusive access to the capital, Elisabethville. Fighter jets called Fouga Magister are to be transferred to the nascent Katangese air force, while Trinquier himself begins to recruit men for his small enterprise.

Things rapidly do not go to plan: Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba has been abducted and murdered by his captors in Katanga. There is worldwide shock and anger. Paris backtracks and orders Trinquier to abort his mission. He travels nonetheless to Katanga and is forced to leave, but his lieutenants manage to settle in Katanga, pretty much incognito. Under Major Faulques's orders, they will evade the UN's attention and stay under the radar. On August 28, 1961, when the UN moves aggressively for the first time against white mercenaries, almost all French officers take to the bush and remain out of reach.

This is the breaking point. What these men do next will unleash a chain reaction with dramatic consequences. The UN is soon informed that the French officers have created a "liquidation list" of personalities to be targeted for murder. At the top of that list are UN officials. It is also learnt they are preparing for a guerrilla war, of the kind they learnt in the jungles of Indochina and the streets of the casbah in Algiers. They are ready to wage an insurrection against the UN. Ideology plays a disproportionate role here: these men, under Faulques's command, believe

the UN has completely surrendered to Afro-Asian interests and that it will do everything it can to destroy the last “bastion of the white man” in this part of Africa. This for them cannot be tolerated. Where these men failed in Algeria, they now want to succeed in Katanga. The only way is to militarily defeat the blue helmets, inflict heavy losses and force them to withdraw completely, while the Security Council will be forced to recognize the reality of Katanga’s independence.

When Operation Morthor, the second strike against the mercenaries, is launched on September 13, 1961, the French officers are on a war footing, ready to hit back with small armed mobile groups. Major Faulques leads the fighting in Elisabethville, while two of his men – Lasimone and de Clary – manage to encircle an Irish company in Jadotville. A relief column for the Irish is stopped by the last operational Fouga Magister. The fighting recedes around Saturday, September 16. The next day, while Dag Hammarskjöld prepares to fly to Ndola, Faulques and most of his men are nowhere to be seen. They seem to have fled to the Rhodesian border near Kipushi, where Moise Tshombe is hiding.

We only have a very partial knowledge of what happens next. Long-forgotten witnesses have revealed that there was a party of around of six to eight white men in two Land Rovers with some radio equipment on the Albertina crash site.

Knut Hammarskjöld, Dag’s nephew, on 5 February 1963, writes about “*a psychological warfare commando, led by famous French Colonel Faulques*”. Firsthand witnesses recall such a commando, two of them mentioning strange uniforms, never seen before. When shown leopard fatigues typically worn by French paratroopers in Algeria, those witnesses were fairly certain this is what they saw that night. These men also spoke with a strange accent. One of the accents was possibly Afrikaans. In Elisabethville, Roger Faulques himself later said he had been unexpectedly reinforced by South African snipers. We also know now that two of his subaltern officers, Lasimone and Bourdeaux, had met a British intelligence officer the week before the crash in the bush, along the Rhodesian border. The goal was to set up a rear base, and benefit from Rhodesian assistance.

The last intriguing point is a detail of the crash itself: amidst the wreckage, there were four bodies located around the cockpit. Two of them were the pilots. The other two were a Canadian secretary and a Haitian bodyguard. Give or take Hammarskjöld himself, they were the only two francophones aboard the Albertina. And they had nothing to do in the cockpit when the plane went down. So, what caused them to go to the cockpit, forcing the flight engineer to take a back seat with the other passengers, where he was found strapped to his seat? What was Alice Lalande and Serge Barrau’s special task at this very moment? Does it mean they had been summoned to the cockpit to use their language skills for some outside communication? Were there some French speaking mercenaries either in the air or on the ground trying to speak with the crew? And what was their

message? Without recordings from the control tower or declassified radio intercepts from the NSA, we may never know what went on in the cockpit that night.

None of this, however, is sufficient to confirm some sort of French responsibility in the tragedy.

There are however other sources, more recently discovered information, that lead us towards some kind of involvement, at least, some form of plotting against Hammarskjöld.

- A facsimile of a death threat against the Secretary General signed OAS (Secret Army Organization, pro French Algeria) was found buried deep in French National Archives.
- A sinister warning, signed OAS Katanga, was sent to the UN spokesperson in Katanga, Michel Tombelaine, on August 30, urging him to leave in under 48 hours, “or else”.
- An obvious sign of OAS influence inside the separatist state of Katanga: an identical motto, *Katanga vaincra*, or *Katanga shall win*, just like the official one from the OAS, known for its sombre black and white posters on the walls of French and Algerian towns, with a knife slicing through the country. We know the head of propaganda inside Katanga was Yves de la Bourdonnaye, an openly pro-OAS officer, just like other Faulques subordinates, such as Michel Badaire, Léon Egé and Edgar Tupet-Thomé.
- The whereabouts of some French officers are intriguing as well. Having completely vanished right before September 17, three of them “reappear” in Johannesburg, then Ndola, in the days following the crash, right before making their way back to Katanga, through clandestine networks. It is important to note these three men – La Bourdonnaye, Egé and Badaire – had not been expelled by the UN. Egé even writes a letter to a correspondent in Paris, saying “H is dead, good riddance”.

Their absence from Elisabethville, in the midst of guerilla warfare led by their charismatic leader Roger Faulques, is puzzling. All three of them were serious fighting assets. They do, however, represent very specific skills : Badaire is a former “11^e choc” paratrooper (special forces) who fought in Algeria, La Bourdonnaye, as we noted, is an expert of psychological warfare and a veteran paratrooper, while Egé is a battle-hardened clandestine radio operator in Indochina. These skills make up for a perfect commando unit of three or more special forces soldiers.

Although the French Government has formally cooperated with the UN investigation since 2017, it is puzzling, again, that no document whatsoever

regarding these men, all sent to Katanga by the French Ministry of Defence and the Elysée Palace, was ever retrieved and communicated to Judge Chande Othman. Not even a single piece of information about the actions of the most famous of them, Roger Faulques, who curiously went on to take other semi-formal assignments, supported covertly by SDECE, the French Secret Service, in Yemen and Biafra.

Even though French archives are mute about the Faulques outfit and show some obvious lack of cooperation with the UN investigation, most of the revelations here do originate from Katangese archives, stored in Belgium, where no one ever thought or tried to make them disappear. It is the proof much can yet be found, in unsuspecting places, and it bring us closer to solving one day the riddle of the Albertina.

Thank you very much.