

# **THE BATTLE OF JADOTVILLE**

**IRISH SOLDIERS IN COMBAT  
IN THE CONGO 1961**

by Michael Whelan





**The Battle of Jadotville  
Irish Soldiers in Combat in the Congo 1961**

By

Michael Whelan

South Dublin County Council Celebrates  
50 Years of Ireland's  
Membership of The United Nations 1955 - 2005

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*The front cover shows a modern U.N. helmet to signify Irish U.N. service.  
Courtesy of Kieran Swords.*

This book is dedicated to the twenty-six Irish soldiers who died while on active service with the United Nations in the Congo between 1960 and 1964 and to the Irish peacekeepers who still serve Ireland and the world in places such as Jadotville.

Some stories have been told, others have yet to be told. These stories are an important part of Ireland's history

***Michael Whelan***

For  
Niamh, Mikey and Emily

## **Introduction by Mayor Thérèse Ridge**



South Dublin County and Ireland have been bravely served by Irishmen and Irishwomen who have served under The United Nations flag. As a nation we are committed to United Nations principles. Our commitment to these principles is borne in large measure by our soldiers who serve as United Nations Peacekeepers and especially when these soldiers serve at the sharp end in frontline situations.

In military and in official circles, surrenders or seeming surrenders are often forgotten about. The story told in this book seems to culminate in surrender. Yet, the reader who follows this story, as researched and told by Michael Whelan, will feel pride in the bravery and outstanding professionalism of those members of the Irish Defence Forces who represented us and the world at Jadotville.

To those Irishmen and Irishwomen who have bravely served the United Nations on active service, we are proud of your record and we salute you. We are delighted to publish this book as a mark of our respect and our gratitude.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thérèse Ridge". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

**Thérèse Ridge**

Mayor of South Dublin County

March 2006

## **Author's Introduction**



I would like to thank the small group of Congo veterans who still serve the Defence Forces, albeit in a civilian capacity in the Irish Air Corps, for their patience with my frequent insistence on hearing of their time in that country. I would also like to thank Mr Johnny McEvoy for his help, guidance and encouragement. He has my utmost respect.

Thanks is due to my sister Tracy for her assistance with the typing of this and of many more manuscripts as deadlines loomed.

To the friends I made on the B.A. course, I am most grateful for your encouragement.

Thanks are due to the following for their help, support and encouragement: Brigadier General Ralph James, Col. Paul Fry, Lt. Col. John Kirke, Professor Vincent Comerford, Dr. Ian Speller, Jarlath Connerney, Tony Kearns, Sgt. Pat Casey, Collette Allen, Staff of the Defence Forces' Library at the Curragh Camp, Staff of the County Library in Tallaght, Chris McQuaid, Francey O'Brien, Charlie Callinan, Wesley Bourke, Sgt. Dave Nagle, F/Sgt. Jim Perkins, Lt. Col. Ray Flanagan, Capt. Wayne Tyrrell and all my friends in the Air Corps.

John Gorman was most generous with his time. He recounted his memories of the battle and supplied photographs of his time in Jadotville. He has been a tireless campaigner for the recognition of the Jadotville veterans.

I am grateful to Mayor Thérèse Ridge for her introduction to the book,

to the members of South Dublin County Council and to Kieran Swords and Síle Coleman of South Dublin Libraries for their assistance and support with this publication.

People who undertake Adult Education courses know how much pressure is put on their families and friends and how much you come to rely on them. I am indebted to my family and friends for their constant support.

Undertaking a degree while working and raising a family is not easy. The great sense of achievement is worthwhile. I hope that this work sets an example for my children Mikey and Emily and encourages them to follow their dreams.

A special word of thanks is due to my wife Niamh for her constant support. My children Mikey and Emily were most helpful in giving me the space and support as needed. I could not have done it without you.

## **The Author**

Michael Whelan, a native of Tallaght, has been a serving member of the Irish Defence Forces for 16 years. He served with the United Nations peacekeeping forces in South Lebanon (U.N.I.F.I.L.) and Kosovo (K.F.O.R.) He works at Casement Aerodrome Baldonnel where he looks after the Air Corps Museum and Heritage Project. This book derives from the author's personal interest in Irish military history, in United Nations service and from work undertaken while completing a B.A. in Local History at N.U.I. Maynooth. This book stems from Michael's wish to reconcile differing views he had heard of the Battle of Jadotville.

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### Some Key Players in the Congo of the early 1960s

Brigadier Raja, K.A.S.	United Nations Force Commander in Katanga
Cyrille Adoula	Prime Minister of the Congo
Dag Hammarskjöld	Swedish United Nations Secretary-General (d. 1961)
Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien	United Nations Representative in Elizabethville, Katanga Province
Dr. R. J. Bunch	United Nations Under Secretary for Special Political Affairs
Frank Aiken	Irish Minister for External Affairs
Georges Dumontet	United Nations Representative to Katanga and predecessor of O'Brien
General Mobutu	General of the Congolese National Army
Jean Baptiste Kibwe	Vice President of Katanga and Finance Minister
Joseph Kasavubu	First President of the independent Congo republic
King Leopold	King of Belgium
Mahmoud Khiary	Chief of Civil Operations in the Congo
Moïse Tshombe	President of Katanga Province
O.N.U.C.	Organization des Nations Unis au Congo
Patrice Lumumba	Prime Minister of the independent Congo republic (d. 1961)
Pat Quinlan	Commander of "A" Company, 35th Infantry Battalion at Jadotville
Seán Lemass	Taoiseach of Ireland

## **The Battle of Jadotville**

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## **Chapter 1**

# **A Chronology of Events Leading to the Early Stages of Ireland's involvement in the Congo<sup>1</sup>**

### **30th June 1960**

United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld congratulates the Republic of the Congo on its attainment of independence.

### **1st July 1960**

Prime Minister of the Congo, Patrice Lumumba, requests admission to membership of the United Nations.

### **5th July 1960**

The Belgian Government supports the admission of the republic of the Congo to United Nations membership.

### **7th July 1960**

872nd meeting of the Security Council adopts a resolution recommending to the General Assembly that the Congo be admitted to membership of the United Nations.

### **12th July 1960**

President, Joseph Kasabuvu and Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba of the republic of the Congo request urgent dispatch of United Nations military assistance.

United Nations assistance was requested because the dispatch of Belgian troops to the Congo was in violation of the treaty of friendship between Belgium and the Congo. Thus the unsolicited Belgian action was an act of aggression, and the essential purpose of the military aid requested from the United Nations was to protect the national territory of the Congo against the present external aggression which was a threat to international peace.

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### **15th July 1960**

First Ghanaian and Tunisian troops of the United Nations force arrive in the Congo.

### **19th July 1960**

In Ireland, the Dáil passes the required legislation allowing Irish soldiers to serve outside the state on United Nations peacekeeping missions.

### **20th July 1960**

Representatives of the republic of the Congo arrive for a meeting of the Security Council.

Addressing the Security Council, at a night meeting, the Secretary-General commented that “the United Nations has embarked on its biggest single effort under United Nations colours, organized and directed by the United Nations itself.”

### **26th July 1960**

A communiqué is issued stating that the prime minister of the Congo informed the Secretary-General of the wish of the Congolese government and parliament, that Belgian troops withdraw immediately from the whole of the territory of the republic. The re-establishment of peace in the Congo was conditional on the immediate departure of Belgian troops.

### **29th July 1960**

The first battalion of Irish troops, to serve outside the state, arrived in the Congo as part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission. Irish troops remained in the Congo for four years.

### **20th August 1960**

Lumumba condemned the personal activity of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and demanded the immediate withdrawal of the white troops who had provoked the latest incidents and whose intentions toward the republic are *obviously hostile*.

## **The Battle of Jadotville**

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### **1st September 1960**

In summing up his experiences in the Congo, the Secretary-General expressed the belief that never in the history of international organisation has the spirit of co-operation been as evident amongst all organisations: the United Nations, specialised agencies and indeed private institutions involved in the Congo for the last two months. Never before had there been so generous a response on the part of the nations of the world, large and small, to an appeal for aid.

### **8th December 1960**

Nine members of an eleven man Irish United Nations patrol are ambushed and killed in Niamba by Baluba tribesmen. There were twenty-seven Irish fatalities and many casualties before the mission ended in 1964.

## **The Battle of Jadotville**

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## Chapter II

### Some context for a study of the Battle of Jadotville

***There should not be any hesitation, because we are at a turn of the road where our attitude will be of decisive significance, I believe, not only for the future of the United Nations Organisation but also for the future of Africa. And Africa may well in present circumstances mean the world.'***

*Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld, addressing the Security Council, 22nd July 1960<sup>2</sup>*

The main objective of this book is to examine a small but important event in Ireland's armed forces' involvement during the independence movement of the Congo between 1960 and 1964. The events described in the story had far reaching effects not only for that country but also for the United Nations, for Ireland and for its Defence Forces. Yet it is a forgotten part of modern Irish military history. Even when the incident is remembered, it is often misunderstood.

The sound of the placename Jadotville in the title is reminiscent of eighteenth and nineteenth century exotic landscapes where Irishmen were fighting for the British Crown. The reader will see that this could not be further from the truth. Jadotville is a name which should be synonymous with exemplary valour on the part of the Irish Defence Forces.

Ireland's armed forces are generally not thought of as being prepared to fulfil a major combat rôle such as that which occurred in the Congo. Such an action did take place in the Congo in 1961 and it involved Irishmen who belonged to the sovereign Defence Forces of the Irish Republic who were engaged on a mission with the full knowledge of the Irish Government.

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The book details the events surrounding the surrender of a company of Irish soldiers who held out for six days and five nights against overwhelming numbers in a major combat environment, all the while, fighting for their lives. These Irish soldiers only capitulated after they ran out of ammunition, food and water and after the failure of two relief attempts.

The recent book by Declan Power entitled *The Siege at Jadotville* is a powerful insight into the experiences of those involved in the Battle of Jadotville.<sup>3</sup>

This book goes beyond the battle itself in an attempt to understand conservative Ireland's rôle in the United Nations during the 1960s. It details the reasons why these troops were there, what happened and why this story has been forgotten. The incident is examined against what was happening in the wider political sphere and the book concludes that the action at Jadotville was unjustifiably an embarrassment to the United Nations, to the Irish government and especially to some in the Irish Defence Forces. It will show that although the United Nations did not want to take a side in the conflict or influence the outcome in any way, it was however, seen to do exactly that. As a result of events, the Irish government was also seen as taking a side, despite committing troops to the mission on foot of a United Nations mandate and wanting to be seen as taking a rôle in the prevention of a secessionist move in Katanga while helping with the process of creating a stable environment for the evolution of a central government,

Using eyewitness accounts, Irish army unit histories, published accounts such as United Nations and government literature along with other historical sources this book examines the overall mission. It revisits the Battle of Jadotville. It argues that, while other actions involving Irish troops in the Congo were also honourable and in keeping with the Irish view of personal sacrifice for freedom and peace, the Jadotville incident was not. The notion of blood-sacrifice in Irish history can be traced to P.H. Pearse and to a view of the symbolism of sacrifice attached to the 1916 Rising in Dublin. In the 1960s, many had memories of the Irish War of Independence and Civil War. Some senior politicians had been involved forty years earlier.

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For example the Taoiseach, Seán Lemass was actively involved in the War of Independence and in the Civil War while his brother Noel was a Civil War casualty. Seán Lemass speaking at the ceremonial unveiling of a plaque at the military church of the Sacred Heart, Arbour Hill, Dublin on 8th November 1961, commemorating the Irish soldiers who had died in the Congo to date, identified with this sentiment of sacrifice when he said:

*‘The task is not yet completed, and already gallant Irish soldiers have died in Niemba, Elizabethville and elsewhere in that troubled land, as many of their comrades in other contingents comprising the United Nations force have died, and in the ranks of our Irish Army their memory will always be kept in honour.’<sup>4</sup>*

The Battle of Jadotville did not and has never received the attention that it deserves because no Irish soldiers died. The book shows the reasons why this came to be so. The Niemba Ambush and Battle of the Tunnel incidents, though tragic were very good for the image of the country, of the Government and of the Defence Forces. The events at Jadotville would have had the same effect, had not a whole company surrendered after killing approximately 300 enemy soldiers and inadvertently forcing the United Nations into a hostage situation. The Niemba Ambush and Battle of the Tunnel incidents are commemorated every year and those serving in the Defence Forces are conscious of the fact that soldiers died in those incidents but not many know of Jadotville. “A” Company 35th Infantry Battalion, commanded by Commandant Pat Quinlan consisted of a not inconsiderable 150 men when they fought and surrendered.

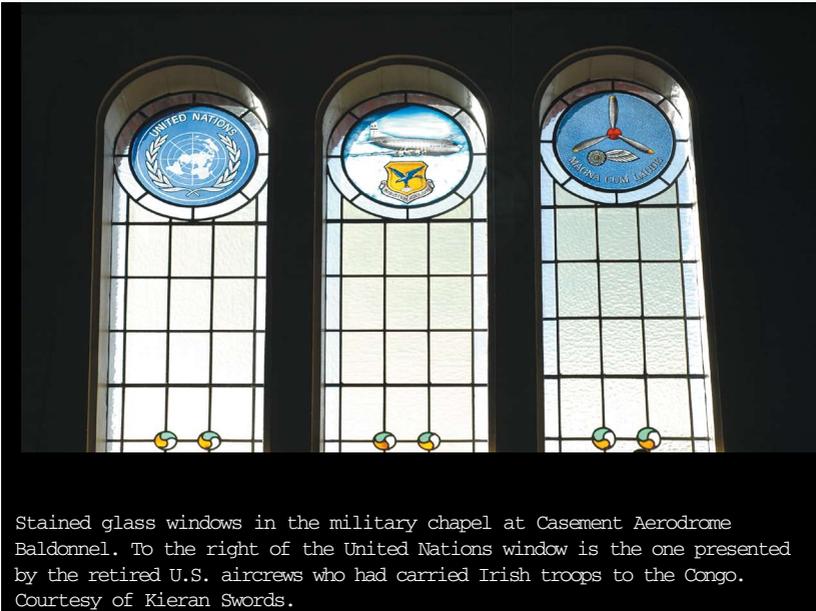
During the summer of 2004, a series of commemorative events took place around Ireland in recognition of the fortieth anniversary of the ending of Ireland’s involvement with the United Nations peacekeeping operations in the Congo between 1960 and 1964. Many of the events were held in military posts, veterans’ establishments, etc. and were used to remember the mission, the incidents and the twenty-six Irish soldiers who died while on active service there. The ceremonies were attended by veterans and families as well as by politicians and senior military figures who remembered the sacrifices made by those involved and reiterated Ireland’s commitment to the United Nations and to world peace.<sup>5</sup>

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One of these events took place on the 16th May 2004 in Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel, home of the Irish Air Corps. The significance of holding the event there was not lost on many of those attending, including the retired American aircrews who transported the Irish contingents on giant C.124 and C.130 Globemaster aircraft from Baldonnel to the Congo during the period. The U.S. Government supplied the military transport capability to the United Nations during the Congo crisis for prompt location of troops to the area of operation.

During the ceremonies a Mass was said in the small military chapel in which a stained glass window which had been presented by the retired U.S. aircrews was unveiled. They also presented a model of a Globemaster aircraft to the Air Corps Museum, in recognition of the part they played in the airlift of Irish to the Congo. After this important ceremony the groups gathered in the Air Corps museum where a small photographic display had been mounted. The display included photographs of the airlifts, taken between 1960 and 1964, and of the various troop organisations that had travelled.



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Retired U.S. aircrews presented a model of a Globemaster to the Air Corps Museum at Baldoon in recognition of the part they had played in carrying Irish troops to the Congo. Courtesy of Kieran Swords.

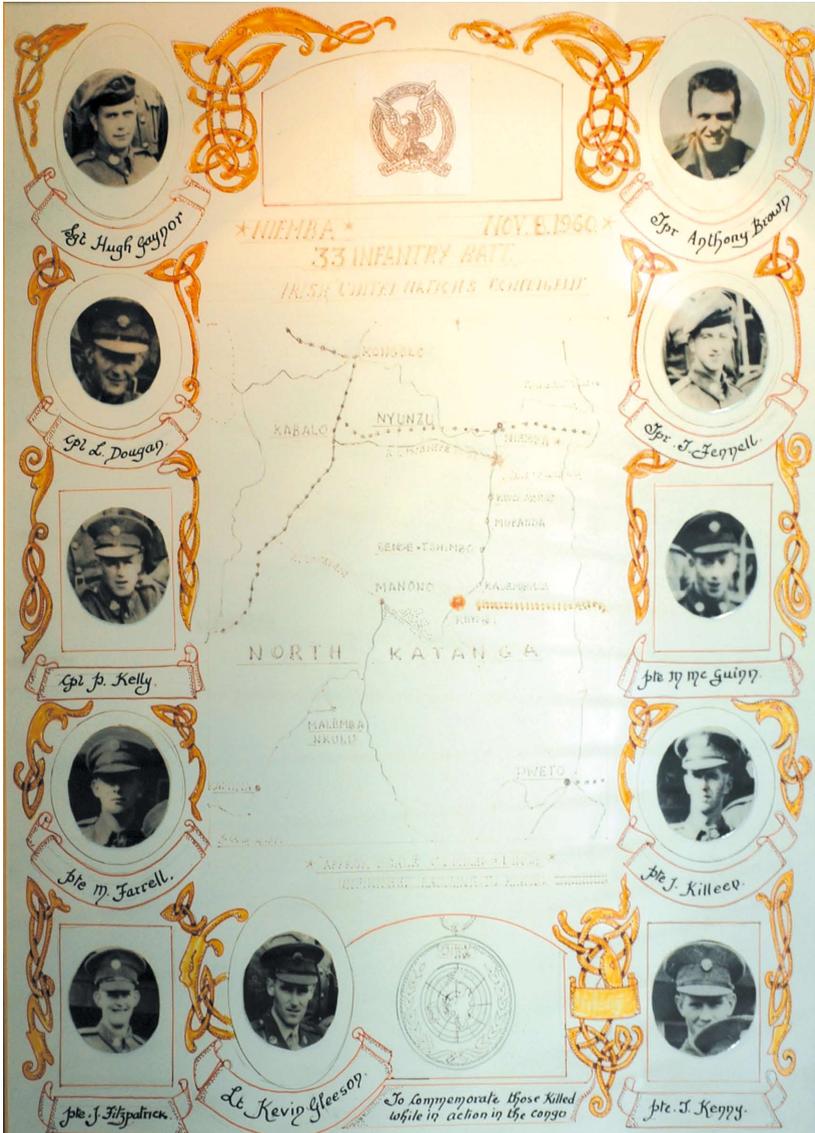
## The Battle of Jadotville

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A small weapons display was organised and the veterans were able to travel down memory lane to revisit moments in their youth. For this writer the Congo story has always been a fascinating one and to hear these men talking of their experiences forty years earlier was a unexpected opportunity. One aspect was most noticeable on that day. The same themes and events were discussed while others were omitted. Events such as the Niemba Ambush on 8th November 1960, in which nine men of an eleven man Irish patrol where brutally killed, and the Battle of the Tunnel, which occurred on 16th December 1961 where Irish troops where involved in spearheading an attack on the main artery to Elizabethville Town and Airport, thus securing a logistical route were remembered. The December 1961 incident resulted in the deaths of three Irish soldiers of the 36th Infantry Battalion. They had been in the country less than two weeks. While this operation cost the lives of Irish soldiers, this victory like the Niemba massacre is seen as an important event in Irish military history and is commemorated each year almost as martyrs' sacrifices. The Niemba Ambush and The Battle of the Tunnel are commemorated in messes and barracks around the country. In most barracks, a carefully crafted plaque or picture is on display depicting the events and those involved. Other events such as Jadotville are forgotten, possibly airbrushed from Irish history.

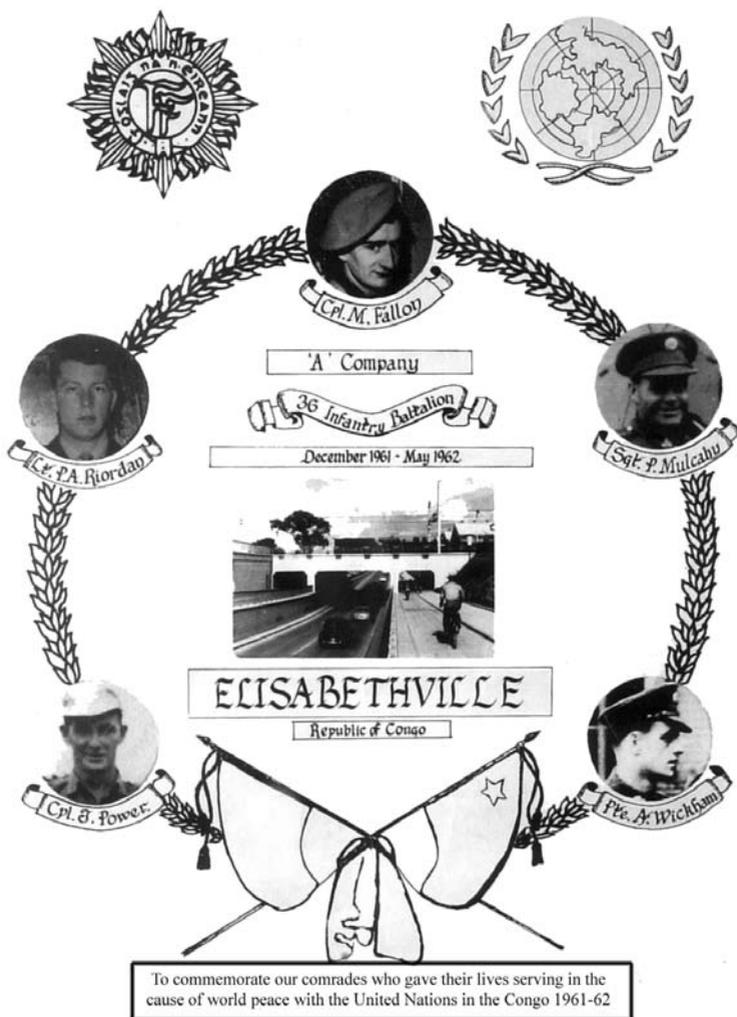
The story of the Irish troops at Jadotville has been largely forgotten. The troops were left without decisive orders: they were given an uncertain task. The Jadotville incident did not conform to the self-sacrificing nationalistic type of rhetoric which the government had been using to interpret the other incidents. The Irish Government had been very outspoken on the other occasions when soldiers lost their lives. No Irish were killed at Jadotville. After forty years, the surviving veterans of the Battle of Jadotville during *Operation Morthor* still don't understand why they were forgotten about, and more importantly why they were sent to such an exposed area, so unprepared for the combat scenario that developed.<sup>6</sup>

# The Battle of Jadotville



Typical plaque which can be found throughout many Irish military installations, commemorating the Niamba Ambush of 1960 and the actions of the 33rd Infantry Battalion. The plaque pictured here is in the N.C.O.s' Mess, Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell  
 Courtesy of Kieran Swords.

# The Battle of Jadotville



Another typical plaque commemorating those who died at Elisabethville.  
Courtesy of Irish Air Corps Museum, Baldonnel.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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Teddy Fennelly in his introduction to the book *'The Congo 1960'* written by Archie Raeside in 2004 states that:

*'The gallantry and military skills displayed by the Irish during the Battle of Jadotville must rank as one of the Irish Army's proudest achievements, yet the bravery and professionalism of the officers and men have never been recognised by the country or its people'*

The United Nations and the Irish Government published material showing the origins of both their respective rôles in the Congo. This material also explains the political innuendo and manoeuvring, which took place. The costs of funding missions was to be borne by all United Nations members. During the Cold War, some of the permanent members vetoed certain aspects of missions according to their Cold War stance. This Cold War element of brinkmanship was an important part of the political involvement of those governments. In addition, the Security Council was involved in an internal struggle to find a way of



Nine members of No. 2 Platoon, "A" Company, 33rd Infantry Battalion died when they were attacked by Baluba tribesmen at Niemba in 1960. Among the dead were Front Row: Cpl. L. Dougan (2nd from left), Lt. Kevin Gleeson (6th from left), Sgt. Hugh Gaynor (6th from right), Cpl. P. Kelly (3rd from right). Second Row Pte. Davis (5th from right) was killed in a separate incident. Third Row Tpr. T. Fennell (3rd from right), Pte. M. McGuinn (extreme right). Back Row Pte. '57' Kenny (extreme left) and Pte. J. Fitzpatrick (5th from right) both survived. Killkenny men Dave McGrath (4th from left Front Row) and Teddy Brennan (5th from left Back Row) were victims of other incidents. Pte. J. Killeen, Tpr. Anthony Brown and Pte. M. Farrell, the other victims of the attack joined the platoon after the

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financing its rôle in areas of conflict. The United Nations and the Irish Government were worried that the Congo would become a Cold War battlefield between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. United Nations missions on the ground were compromised as a result of the mix of these factors.

One quote from a Security Council debate shows that the search for a satisfactory system for financing operations was needed for the benefit of the organisation. The existing system was recalled by the Secretary-General in 1965 when speaking on the work of the organisation. He noted that:

*'the policy of piecemeal extension of peace keeping operations, to be financed by voluntary contributions which may or may not be forthcoming, makes their efficient planning and economical running almost impossible.'*<sup>7</sup>

Military operations are and were greatly hampered by political intransigence, financial problems and lack of positive identification of missions and rôles.

The following chapter examines the background to the United Nations mission to the Congo between 1960 and 1964 and the lead up to *Operation Morthor* in 1961. *Operation Morthor*, was the name of the plan put together to arrest and evict foreign personnel and mercenaries from the Congo under United Nations Ordinance No. 70. During the research for this chapter it became apparent that there was an abundance of material to be found relating to the United Nations and to Ireland's involvement but very little on the Battle of Jadotville as it panned out on the ground. As a result the overall picture, the background to the period and the lead up to the battle will be based on available secondary sources such as Defence Forces' publications and general histories, but will be linked with primary Irish Defence Forces' and United Nations source material. Secondary sources have been used as the range of literature available on the actual battle itself is very limited. Veterans feel that this may have been the result of deliberate policy.

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As a result the primary sources for the battle, which will be the focus of Chapter IV entitled *Operation Morthor and the Irish Action at Jadotville* is based on unit histories, personal accounts, eyewitness accounts and news reports. In this way a general understanding of the period and the factors which contributed to Irish involvement in the Congo can be outlined, with the main topic being detailed as it happened on the ground using as far as possible, primary sources.

Chapter V, titled *Captivity and The Aftermath*, will discuss the political and military outcome for the Defence Forces, for the Irish Government and for the United Nations resulting from the surrender of the Irish soldiers. Both primary and secondary sources including general histories and media reports will be used. Primary sources are the main source of information due to a dearth of published material. These primary sources will help to build a picture of what happened, outlining the picture that is not covered by secondary sources.

Within the four decades since Jadotville, there has never been an official enquiry. The Congo mission was the first time since the Irish Civil War that Irish troops had come under fire and had found themselves in a sustained combat environment. Jadotville was also the first time an Irish unit was to find itself in a hostage predicament. Information from all literature on the affair shows that Irish troops, in the early stages, were ill-prepared for the mission to the Congo. There was no issue of tropical uniforms or equipment. Unsuitable and outdated weapons were supplied to soldiers and they were not properly trained for the combat scenarios they were to face.

As a member of the Irish Defence Forces with sixteen years service, the author feels that he has some understanding of what war looks like and what war brings. After serving with a United Nations peace keeping mission in the Middle East during the early 1990s (U.N.I.F.I.L.) and with a United Nations backed N.A.T.O. peace enforcement mission to the Balkans in 2000 (K.F.O.R.)<sup>8</sup>, he, like many others in the Defence Forces, has seen its destructive nature, its disgusting inhumanity and at the same time tried to think morally and to think of his family in the hope that he was making a difference: that his actions would be moral and

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courageous and that if he were lost, his actions and his memory would be respected and his remains brought home in honour to Ireland. When you are part of such a mission, you rely greatly on your friends and they on you but most of all you rely on your superiors, your government and your country to have your best interests and safety at heart, all the while ensuring that truth and honour are paramount. All sacrifices made and hardship endured in the cause of peace should be remembered.

This subject has been chosen as a book topic as it is an important incident in Irish military history that has not received the attention it deserves. One cannot understand Ireland's involvement in the Congo without examining this incident. During the battle and ever since, those involved have been castigated both professionally and publicly. At the time these men were branded as cowards, a label which we will see was unjustified and they are still denounced because no one has examined their stories.<sup>9</sup>

Only in the last few months has their story surfaced and their bravery and professionalism been recognised. After forty years, it is too late for many of them. However this incident bears re-examination.

## **Chapter III**

# **Background to the Mission to the Congo and the lead up to Operation Morthor.**

***'In the United Nations lies the only hope for the future of all nations. We should all of us, therefore, be most careful not to do anything which impairs its authority.'***

*President Kwane Nkrumah of Ghana, 17 August 1960<sup>10</sup>*

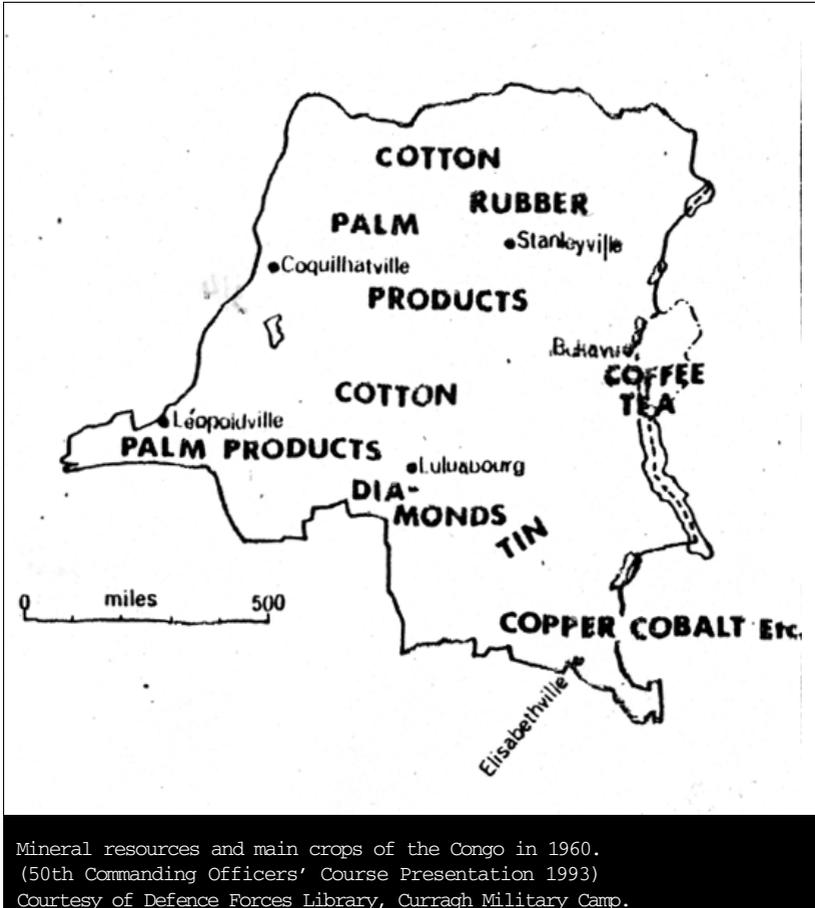
### **Geographical location of the Congo**

The Congo was and is the third largest country on the continent of Africa after the Sudan and Algeria. Located astride the Equator, it includes the greater part of Africa's vast Congo River basin. It is bordered by Angola and Zambia to the south, by Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania to the east, and by Sudan and the Central African Republic to the north. At 900,000 sq. miles the Congo is almost as big as Western Europe. It is dominated by the Congo River, which bends in a bow nearly 3,000 miles long from its source in the Katangan highlands to its mouth in Mataldi. This vast area with its huge river basin ends in a coastline of twenty-five miles. About half of the Congo, particularly in the centre and north, is dense tropical rain forest, while the remainder is mainly bush and tundra.

In 1879, Belgian interest in the Congo commenced with a group of investors led by King Leopold II who financed the establishment of trading concessions in the area. In the late nineteenth century the Congo was independent in name only and was considered by other European countries as belonging to King Leopold himself. During his tenure the mineral, commercial and economic resources of the country were exploited while many atrocities were committed on the native populations. These natives mostly, rural in nature, belonged to almost 200 different tribes. Although no one tribe was dominant, the Baluba tribe did command a position of authority within the national hierarchy



## The Battle of Jadotville



On 1st July 1960, following nationalist riots against their Belgian rulers, the people of the Congo declared an independent republic. A few days later the province of Katanga, a mineral rich area of the country, threatened to cede from the Republic and this caused anarchy to prevail. The Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba appealed to the United Nations for help and as a result the Security Council directed Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld to recruit a military force to restore order and to re-establish the integrity of the country. There was a prevailing fear among countries that the Congo would become a battleground of the Cold War.

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Setting the scene for Irish involvement in the Congo, Baldonnell, 1960. The newspaper tells the Cold War story of the U.S. spyplane shot down over the Soviet Union and tells of the first Irish troops departing for the Congo. The picture includes Kevin Boland, Minister for Defence, O.C, Irish Air Corps, and a senior American Officer. Courtesy of Irish Air Corps,



Minister Kevin Boland bids farewell to Irish soldiers bound for the Congo, at Baldonnell, in 1960. Courtesy of Irish Air Corps, Baldonnell.

Ireland was asked by the United Nations to contribute troops and in reply the first Irish peacekeeping force began to assemble during July 1960. The Curragh Camp, Co Kildare, was used as a training and forming-up facility for the troops. Out of 3,000 soldiers who volunteered from around the country, 689 men were selected to form the 32nd Irish Infantry Battalion.<sup>11</sup> This formation was destined to become the first battalion of Irish soldiers to serve outside the state of Ireland since its foundation. A group of Irish officers had previously served as observers with the United Nations in the Middle East. There have been many more United Nations missions.

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Ordinary Irish people along with families of departing soldiers in front of a Globemaster at Baldonnell, 1960. The departure of peacekeeping troops stirs the nation's pride.  
Courtesy of Joe Williams.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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U.S.A.F. Globemaster at Baldonnel, July 1960.  
Courtesy of Joe Williams.

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Ireland had been a member of the United Nations for a mere five years at this stage and when the government passed the required legislation in the Dáil on 19th July, it marked the beginning of a four year watershed in which the Irish Defence Forces came of age and took its place on the international stage, committing almost 6,000 of her troops.<sup>12</sup> The Congo had been granted independence from Belgium in June 1960 and given only five months to prepare itself for the handover. As a result it was found to be lacking in established native political or military leaders. All of the commissioned officers in the 30,000 strong army were white. It was no surprise that chaos reigned.

Belgian nationals were attacked and the Belgian government sent troops to their former colony to protect them, refusing to remove her soldiers until the safety of her citizens could be guaranteed. This was not the only interest Belgium was protecting. Union Minière was a mining company whose rights were owned by Belgian business interests. France, Britain and the U.S. also had vested interests in the area.<sup>13</sup>



Preparing for departure, Baldonnell, 1960. Some soldiers preparing to leave loved ones behind.

Courtesy of Irish Air Corps, Baldonnell.

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Irish troops board U.S.A.F. C.130 Globemaster transport aircraft bound for the Congo at Baldonnell, 1960.

Courtesy of Irish Air Corps, Baldonnell.

From this chaos two dominant figures emerged, President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba was later deposed by Kasavubu and reported dead in February 1961. Lumumba, who was de facto leader, was a volatile character who threatened to call on assistance from the U.S.S.R. to remove the Belgian soldiers. The Congolese Government viewed this action by the Belgians as an unauthorised incursion on sovereign territory and appealed for help. Unfortunately Lumumba was unable to unite the country and within a few short days the army had mutinied and Katanga province had declared its independence. Katanga was the mineral-rich province of the Congo and as such its breakaway was seen as detrimental to the country's economy. This led to civil war in the province between those in favour of secession, led by Moïse Tshombe and the pro-Lumumba side. It was into this maelstrom that a United Nations force of many nationalities, including Irishmen, arrived. The first Irish troops arrived in July 1960.

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Leading members of the Irish Government and senior military staff review troops bound for United Nations service in the Congo at Baldonnell, in 1960. Included are: Taoiseach, Seán Lemass; Minister for External Affairs, Frank Aiken; Minister for Defence, Kevin Boland and Chief of Staff, Irish Defence Forces and Force Commander 1961-62, General Seán Mc Keown. Courtesy of Irish Air Corps, Baldonnell.



Taoiseach, Seán Lemass takes the final parade of departing Irish troops bound for the Congo at Baldonnell, in 1960. In the background is a United States Air Force c.130 Globemaster aircraft which the soldiers are about to board.

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### **Katanga and Union Minière**

Katanga was an area of relative calm compared to the rest of the region during the early period of the United Nations involvement. After the Belgian troops were compelled to withdraw from northern and eastern Congo, they had been covertly reorganising themselves in the south. The main area of concentration of these forces was around the *Union Minière* mines at Kolwezi, at the Kamina airbase and along the road and rail routes that linked the mines with export points to Portuguese Angola and to Northern Rhodesia.<sup>14</sup> The Anglo-Belgian *Union Minière du Haut Katanga* supplied much of the world's copper, cobalt and large quantities of uranium. It was considered a vital asset for western interests. Uranium from this area had been used in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. It was closely tied to the Belgian government and military as it was to French, British and U.S. interests.

Using company money, Belgian officers recruited, trained and equipped a large private army for *Union Minière* and the Katangan gendarmerie, using it to protect its uninterrupted production and to enforce order in south Katanga.<sup>15</sup> During the political and military strife that gripped the country, the clandestine covert mining cartel that controlled the Congo's copper and cobalt resources, *Union Minière*, was working



Union Minière mine at Jadotville, September 1961. This mine was the source of uranium used in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs.  
Courtesy of John Gorman.

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behind the scenes to ensure the continuance of its monopoly by all and any means.<sup>16</sup> As the anti-foreign policies and weakness of the premier and of the government became clear *Union Minière* realised it had to protect its own interests. It set about detaching the provinces of Katanga and the diamond-rich area of Kasai from the rest of the nation.

Using Belgian military and intelligence services, it organised the independent separatist claims of organisations and groups established from an assortment of ambitious tribal leaders, local politicians and remaining European settlers.<sup>17</sup> Moïse Tshombe who was the leader of the CONAKAT party, declared Katanga an independent nation on 11th July 1960 and made himself head of government. The two provinces expected little opposition as they supplied almost all revenue collected by the central government.<sup>18</sup> Tshombe hired mercenaries to lead his army in defence of the secession. However, as Katanga was mineral rich and its wealthiest province, the Congo could not afford for it to cede from the larger entity.

### **The United Nations Action and the Political Situation**

The situation in the Congo was largely chaotic. Tshombe played a double game throughout negotiations. He agreed to the terms of one painstakingly crafted agreement after another, only to denounce them when the agreements were made public. He hoped that the resulting delays were working in his favour.<sup>19</sup> He would agree with United Nations policy and subsequently rubbish it. He agreed to disband his mercenaries in public and later rehired them in secret. A wreath was sent by Tshombe to the funerals of the Niemba Ambush victims in Glasnevin cemetery.<sup>20</sup> Less than a year later he was directing his forces to kill Irish United Nations soldiers and to capture the company at Jadotville so that they could be used as hostages. Tshombe was a major thorn in the United Nations side.

Lumumba, in the early stages, was always suspicious of the United Nations and accused the Secretary-General of secretly backing Tshombe and the breakaway province against the Congolese government. President Kasavubu sacked Lumumba as Prime minister. Lumumba in turn sacked Kasavubu as President although both remained in office.

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To compound the situation the Congolese army Chief of Staff, Joseph Mobutu, dissolved the government and appointed a college of commissioners to run affairs with himself as kingmaker. These combined circumstances led to the breakdown of law and order in the country. The United Nations added to the confusion by continuing to recognise Kasavubu and Lumumba. Within this chaotic situation O.N.U.C. had to operate without any clear mandate.

On 21st February 1961 the Security Council approved a resolution to take all appropriate measures to prevent the occurrence of civil war in the Congo with the use of force, if necessary. A report from the officer in charge of the United Nations operations in the Congo to the Secretary-General on the implementation of Paragraph A.2 of that resolution reads:

*'...urges that measures be taken for the immediate withdrawal and evacuation from the Congo of all Belgian and other foreign military and paramilitary personnel and political advisers not under the United Nations command, and mercenaries.'*<sup>21</sup>

The largest concentration of the Belgian and other personnel mentioned in the resolution, about 500 persons, was to be found still administering the Katangan army. The implementation of this particular provision had to be pursued at the start by legislation and as a result remained for several months without any definitive outcome.

On 24th August 1961, the President of the Republic of the Congo, on the advice of the government enacted Ordinance No.70, which provided for the expulsion of all non-Congolese officers and mercenaries serving in the Katangan forces, not under a contract with the central government. The Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo requested United Nations assistance in the execution of this ordinance and in ensuring the evacuation of personnel so described. Up until this period the United Nations had no great legal authority and had to use negotiations as a means to an end. The enactment of Ordinance No.70 gave the United Nations legal rights within the Congo to carry out its mission and to use force if necessary.<sup>22</sup> The enactment of this resolution and the ordinance was to have disastrous results later that same year for a

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company of Irish soldiers of the 35th Infantry Battalion serving with the United Nations multinational force when they were posted to the Jadotville area of the breakaway Katanga province.

The demands of the United Nations centred on the removal of foreign forces and equipment from the Congo and especially from Katanga. The Secretary-General's Irish deputy to Katanga, Conor Cruise O'Brien, was ordered to enforce the United Nations new mandate. As a result of growing pressure from United Nations commanders on the ground and his own broad understanding of his instructions, O'Brien and his staff commenced to put together a plan to neutralize the foreign leadership of the Katangan military. This operation was code named Operation *Rumpunch* and went into effect on the morning of 28th August, achieving almost complete surprise. United Nations forces belonging to Indian, Swedish and Irish contingents captured military posts through the province while Ghurkha soldiers attached to the Indian contingent seized the radio station, telephone exchange and gendarmerie headquarters in Elizabethville. United Nations forces began to disarm Katangan gendarmes and to repatriate foreign mercenaries.

One of the reasons this operation did not succeed in the long term was that the repatriation of these foreign personnel was not fully complied with by either the Katangan leaders or the Belgian government. Many of those who were repatriated found their way back into the Congo through places such as Rhodesia. Some of these foreign personnel were white mercenaries and veterans who had learned their trade in Algeria as well as through serving with such forces as the German SS. They gradually took control of the Katangan gendarmerie and organised it to resist the United Nations approaches in the province.<sup>23</sup>

O'Brien by this stage had put together with his staff a new plan codenamed *Operation Morthor*, the Hindu word for "smash". This plan called for the same objectives as before but on a larger scale and also sought to capture Tshombe and his ministers. This part of the plan failed as the Katangan forces resisted the attackers just long enough for Tshombe and his officials to escape and as a result he was able to launch a further series of attacks on United Nations forces.

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### **Chapter IV**

## **Operation Morthor and the Irish Action at Jadotville.**

*'by sending troops to the Congo in 1960, the United Nations averted, or helped the major powers to avert, an occasion of international war'*

*Conor Cruise O'Brien, Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Katanga.<sup>24</sup>*

### **Operation Morthor (13th - 21st September 1961)**

Most of the following account of the battle of Jadotville is based on interviews with veterans of the Congo mission, the unit history of "A" Company, 35th Battalion and the testimony of its commander, Commandant P. Quinlan. Newspaper and other written accounts also assisted the author in arriving at an interpretation of key events.<sup>25</sup> The largest part of the 35th Battalion had been engaged in fighting in the Elizabethville area of Katanga under intense enemy fire for a number of days while the Jadotville events were taking place. This account has been shortened somewhat by selecting the most salient points. It is intended to chronicle the events and hardships endured by this group of Irishmen.

Katanga occupied O.N.U.C.'s attention, as it was the primary stumbling block to complete Congolese independence.

On 2nd August 1961, Adoula was elected premier of the central government. On the following day, he announced that his government intended to end the secession of Katanga. The enactment of Ordinance 70 gave him the desired powers to expel the foreign elements with the help of the United Nations. So began Operation *Rumpunch*, which as has been mentioned, was not entirely successful. As a result civil war seemed imminent and anti-United Nations feelings resurfaced, especially within the gendarmerie.

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On the 5th September O'Brien informed Tshombe that the new resolution would be applied if his actions did not stop forthwith.<sup>26</sup> *Operation Morthor* as has been explained was an extension and adjustment of the previous plan in order to finally put to an end the activities of the Tshombe faction, to evict the mercenaries and pave the way for Congolese independence. It went into effect on the 13th September. During the previous few weeks thousands of Balubas were streaming into United Nations refugee camps for protection.<sup>27</sup> On 11th September groups of white mercenaries were observed organising Africans in the Jadotville area to attack peacekeepers.<sup>28</sup> That night Katangan forces positioned themselves around Elizabethville in readiness for the United Nations advance.<sup>29</sup> They occupied the radio station, post office and other strategic points within the city. At 20:00hrs on 12th September orders for *Operation Morthor* were issued to the 35th Irish Battalion to sieze, hold and control the radio station.<sup>30</sup> By 04:00hrs on the next day all the objectives of the Irish Battalion had been taken against strong resistance and heavy fighting.<sup>31</sup> This was the first time in forty years that Irish troops found themselves under fire and in sustained combat environments. The United Nations operation continued throughout the country for eight days.<sup>32</sup>



"A" Company  
35th Infantry  
Battalion  
photographed  
at Custume  
Barracks,  
Athlone prior to  
departure for  
the Congo,  
1961. The  
pennant bearer  
is Sgt. Frank  
Gilsenan.  
Courtesy of  
John Gorman.

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Some members of "A" Company 35th Infantry Battalion photographed in the Curragh prior to departure for the Congo. L-R Johnny Stanford, Donal Manley, Bobby Bradley, Simon Finglas, Tony Dykes and John Gorman.  
Courtesy of John Gorman.



The Jadotville area in 1961.  
Courtesy of a Congo Veteran.

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On the road to  
Jadotville from  
Elizabethville,  
September  
1961.  
Courtesy of  
John Gorman.



From l to r. Private Matt Quinlan and Sgt. Walter Hegarty prepare a defensive trench in Jadotville, September 1961.  
Courtesy of John Gorman.

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### **The Battle of Jadotville (13th - 17th September 1961)**

A few days prior to the commencement of *Operation Morthor*, "A" Company of the 35th Irish Infantry Battalion, drawn mostly from Custume barracks, Athlone and from the Western Command, composed of approximately 150 men, was posted to an area of Katanga known as Jadotville. At the time there was some controversy as to why they were moved there as some days earlier another larger United Nations force had been withdrawn from the area. The position occupied by the United Nations forces in Jadotville was not ideal defensively as it was located just outside the town about ninety miles from the Irish headquarters along the main Elizabethville road. In addition it was in the vicinity of the *Union Minière* mining company.

The population of the area was very hostile to the United Nations and the gendarmerie had been reinforcing its positions and preparing itself for confrontation.<sup>33</sup> The Irish peacekeepers however had received orders to protect the white population who lived in the vicinity.<sup>34</sup> They endeavoured to carry out these orders but to their dismay found that the white population did not need or want their protection.<sup>35</sup> The Irish Company began to dig in and prepare defensive positions while at the same time reporting to headquarters on the situation at hand.<sup>36</sup> They were ordered to remain in position.

### **Day 1 (Wednesday 13th September 1961)**

At approximately 7.00am on Wednesday 13th September the Jadotville forces received a radio message from Battalion Headquarters informing them that *Operation Morthor* had been successfully accomplished. This was the first indication that "A" Company had of any operation or action planned for Elizabethville.<sup>37</sup> At this time, all the men, except for those who were manning defensive positions, were assembling for Mass.

A group of approximately thirty gendarmes and soldiers rushed the forward Irish positions on foot and in jeeps. The gendarmes were taken unawares when they found troops concealed in the trenches and at other defensive positions.<sup>38</sup> The gendarmes opened fire. The Irish troops returned fire and after about ten minutes the gendarmes broke off and fled. In the words of Commandant Quinlan:

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September 1961, Irish troops attend Mass. The attack on "A" Company 35th Infantry Battalion commenced while soldiers were attending Mass. Courtesy of John Gorman.

*'I am convinced that the gendarmerie received a telephone signal from the garage depot that we were assembled for Mass and they hoped to get us off guard. All our men who were attending Mass carried loaded weapons and were in action almost immediately'*<sup>39</sup>

For approximately two hours, there was a lull in the fighting. The Irish soldiers could see the gendarmes massing in great numbers into positions on their flanks. The Irish reported later that they could have inflicted heavy casualties at that point but the mortars and heavy machine-guns were ordered to hold fire in order to save lives. The news from Elizabethville was good and they hoped that the early morning action by the enemy was not a co-ordinated attempt. During the morning though, Commandant Quinlan had received intelligence that the enemy were expecting reinforcements and preparing to launch a major attack at 11.30am. Meanwhile, he ordered that all available containers be filled with water as he began to realise that they might be in for a long stay.<sup>40</sup> Later that day the water supply was turned off by the gendarmerie.

At 11.30am the attack opened with very heavy mortar and small arms (hand-held weapons) fire. The Irish returned fire and quickly destroyed the mortar position. Some of the fire must have hit the ammunition

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dump located close to the mortar as it burned all day and night. During the day, the Irish broke up a number of other attacks from different sectors at long range.<sup>41</sup>

*'Our mortars, MMGs (mounted machine-guns), armoured cars and LAs (light arms) destroyed at least three enemy mortars and crews on this day'*<sup>42</sup>



Troops preparing defensive positions in the Congo. Courtesy of a Congo Veteran.



Preparing defensive positions, Jadotville, September 1961. Courtesy of John Gorman.

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Their position would become untenable if the enemy attacked in strength so the Irish commander consolidated his defences and not long after dark these were fully reorganised. The new positions held by "A" Company, were in an area approximately 250 yards by 120 yards. It was on fairly high ground and there was thick bush and dead or hidden ground at ranges from 600 to 1,500 yards. There was no means of observing the Elizabethville road at the rear and about a twenty yards field of fire. A hill about 300 ft high and a mile to the rear was very strongly held by the enemy. There were trenches and fortified villas within the location. Commandant Quinlan's plan was to break up all attacks at long range and as far as possible prevent the enemy from getting into the dead ground and thick bush surrounding the Irish positions. At about 4.00pm however the enemy succeeded in gaining possession of a house about 300 yards in front of the Irish forward position and brought heavy fire to bear on the platoons nearby. Under cover of mounted machine-gun fire, an anti-tank crew destroyed the enemy in this house. At this stage the enemy asked for and received a cease-fire. Ambulances arrived to collect the dead and wounded from the building and when this was completed they opened fire once more on the Irish positions without warning. This continued all through the night and into the early morning.<sup>43</sup>

Jadotville,  
September 1961.  
Commandant Pat  
Quinlan is on the  
left.  
Courtesy of John  
Gorman.



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On Wednesday when the hostilities had quietened down somewhat the Irish commander had contacted the Burgomaster or Mayor and requested that he use his influence to bring an end to the fighting.<sup>44</sup> The Burgomaster said that if the Irish did not surrender he would also attack them. Commandant Quinlan informed him that surrender was out of the question and that whoever attacked his position would be cut down without mercy. He also told him that he would hold him personally responsible for any bloodshed as a result of an attack. This did not have the desired effect and later the Irish commander stated that the phone line was used as a means of carrying out psychological warfare on the peacekeepers. Each night the enemy would ring and ask for the immediate surrender or face dire consequences. The telephone connection would have been broken earlier in the week except that the Irish commanders were playing for time and hoping for reinforcements.

### **Day 2 (Thursday 14th September 1961)**

At approximately 1.00pm on Thursday a Fouga jet plane reconnoitred the Irish positions.<sup>45</sup> It was identified as a Katangan Air Force jet. It was later found that it had been flown by a Belgian mercenary.<sup>46</sup> The Irish evacuated the buildings in the vicinity of the garage, expecting them to be targeted by the jet. The aircraft returned at 3.00pm and at 5.00pm. Each time it dropped two bombs and strafed the positions with machine-gun fire. During the day the aircraft damaged all military and civilian transport used by the Company and injured Privates Tahaney and Gormley when a bomb landed near their trench.<sup>47</sup> Each time the jet approached from the same direction and was targeted with small arms fire from the Irish soldiers. This happened again on the following day, Friday and it was targeted with machine-gun fire from armoured cars, which hit it. After this the jet always attacked from very high altitudes with inaccurate results.

At 5.00pm two white mercenaries in civilian attire, travelling from Elizabethville, were captured by the Irish. They were found to possess two machine-guns, two FN rifles, grenades and revolvers. These prisoners were interrogated and reported that they had just come from President Tshombe's residence where he had told them that an Irish

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Company had been taken prisoner at Jadotville and were to be held as hostages by Katanga.<sup>48</sup> This lends credence to the theory that the United Nations troops were ordered into a pre-planned trap.<sup>49</sup> The mercenaries did not expect to be captured by Irish soldiers as the gendarmes at the nearby Lufira Bridge had told them the same story. This again could be seen as evidence for a plan to capture a United Nations contingent. The mercenaries also informed the Irish officer that more aircraft were due to be delivered from Rhodesia to take part in attacks on the United Nations troops.

Private Dominic Harkins from "A" Company 35th Infantry Battalion in a foxhole at Jadotville, September 1961. Courtesy of John Gorman.



During Thursday and Friday, approximately eight to ten attacks were carried out on the Irish positions. When fire was opened from all sides, a group of about sixty enemy soldiers would come forward. Their assembly points were out of range of the Irish 60mm mortars and they could not be targeted by heavy machine-guns as they were behind a rise. As soon as these groups came within range of the Irish weapons they were broken up by devastating fire from the armoured cars, mortars and machine-guns.<sup>50</sup> The Irish casualties at this stage were as follows: on the morning of Wednesday 13th Private Reidy had been shot in the leg. On Thursday 14th Privates Tahaney and Gormley were caught by an aerial bomb, Sergeant Hegarty was injured by a mortar shell which had landed within a few yards of him as he was visiting his platoon and Private Manning was shot in the shoulder by a group who managed to infiltrate to within twenty yards of his trench. This group was destroyed with grenades.<sup>51</sup>

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### **Day 3 (Friday 15th September 1961)**

On Friday the Company commander received word from Katanga Headquarters that heavy reinforcements were to capture the Lufira Bridge on Saturday morning. Large convoys of enemy troops were observed on Friday night and Saturday morning moving towards the same bridge. The Irish soldiers engaged these convoys with mortar and machine-gun fire from their armoured cars and caused the route to be blocked for quite some time because of the destruction caused by their effective fire.

Conditions in the Irish trenches were described by the Irish commander:

*'The men were fed between 20:00hrs and 21:00hrs daily because it was dangerous to cook during daylight hours. The cooks made a kind of warm stew and biscuits and defended their trenches during the day. Tea and biscuits were again served at 04:00hrs in the trenches. During the remainder of the time the men had to survive on bottled water. The thirst was the greatest enemy as the men were all day under the sweltering heat of the trenches. The excitement, fighting and lack of sleep consumed a lot of water. By Friday the water we had was stale. By Saturday it was almost putrid and on Sunday what was left made the men sick. There was a grave danger of disease due to burst sewers from bombed buildings and flies swarming everywhere.'*<sup>52</sup>

### **Day 4 (Saturday 16th September 1961)**

On Saturday a helicopter arrived at 9.00am with a re-supply of water which would scarcely be enough for twenty men. The water was also contaminated by diesel and of no use.<sup>53</sup> A few minutes after the soldiers had emptied the helicopter under fire, the Fouga jet returned to intercept the aircraft. The helicopter crew had heard ground to air instructions being passed to the jet to do just that. The trenches opened up with all their light weapons on the Fouga. The helicopter was not hit but in this incident the enemy troops gave away their concealed positions with their fire on the aircraft. They were very close indeed, some as close as fifty to one hundred yards.

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The Irish then engaged those enemy positions with accurate and devastating fire. The helicopter was later hit by enemy fire while on the ground. The battle continued for two hours, stopped for another hour and then the Irish opened up again for another hour with concentrated fire.

Large numbers of the enemy were injured and many died of wounds.<sup>54</sup> This was realised later when their bodies were discovered in the bush. White enemy officers were also shooting their own men in an attempt to stem the retreat from the Irish fire and to get them to attack again. During the day the jet frequently passed over but it was later found out that it was attacking the United Nations reinforcements, which contained amongst others, further Irish soldiers.<sup>55</sup> The troops at Jadotville were able to warn their Battalion Headquarters to inform the relief column each time the jet was about to approach them. The Jadotville troops did not have direct communication with the reinforcements.

Around this time, the surrounded company at Jadotville heard a loud noise. They thought that it might be the bridge the expected reinforcements would use to reach them being destroyed. The bridge was still intact but the incident must have disappointed the troops.

At 2.00pm the Burgomaster, on the instructions of a white advisor, rang Commandant Quinlan asking for another cease-fire. Commandant Quinlan refused to discuss it on the telephone and arranged to meet him under a flag of truce in no-man's land. The Burgomaster also requested to be allowed to send ambulances and this was also refused as the Irish officer said that:

*'They had learned from previous experience in Elizabethville that the gendarmerie had an ambulance with a machine-gun mounted inside, manned by two mercenaries'*<sup>56</sup>

They rang again at 3.00pm requesting a cease-fire and promising to remove their troops from around the Irish positions. The Commandant told them that all persons moving would be shot. When they asked to

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send officers forward to prevent their men from firing, the Irish officer told him that they would have to approach under a white flag and walk upright. The meeting for cease-fire terms was arranged for no-man's land at 4.00pm but no sooner had they put the phone down than a white mercenary had his leg shot off by a burst of fire from an Irish heavy machine-gun.<sup>57</sup> The enemy claimed that he was moving forward to stop the shooting but he was not under a white flag.

At the meeting to discuss cease-fire terms, the Irish officers tried to hold for time in the hope that the relief column would get through. They tried to get the enemy to halt the jet from bombing the position and the bridge where they thought the relief column was fighting its way through. They were unaware that the column had already failed. Terms were formalised for the cease-fire with dual supervised patrols along with other conditions. The Irish officer informed Battalion Headquarters of the cease-fire and conditions.<sup>58</sup> That night was relatively quiet.



Helicopter used to re-supply "A" Company at Jadotville. The water they brought in was contaminated by diesel. In the cockpit is CQMS Paddy Neville and Cpl. Bobby Allen poses on the exterior.  
Courtesy of John Gorman.

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### Day 5 (Sunday 17th September 1961)

On Sunday morning at 7.30am the Irish soldiers paraded for mass. While there the jet flew over and they thought the cease-fire had been broken. This, it appeared, was not the case. The troops observed large numbers of gendarmes and paratroopers being organised around the Irish location. The enemy promised to withdraw the forces and they discussed the accommodation to be used by the Irish as the original had been destroyed in the fighting. All seemed well at this stage but later the gendarmerie sent a Major Makita to demand that the Irish store their weapons in one villa while they themselves were to be housed in another area. This was the first of many indications of sinister intent. The Irish asked for the water supply to be turned back on in accordance with the agreement. The Major replied that it would only be turned on when the Irish weapons had been secured. Commandant Quinlan later stated *'that he knew this was a trick and that they had no intention of keeping to the cease-fire agreement.'*<sup>59</sup> The Irish officer refused to comply and continued with more negotiations while still hoping that a relief column would get through. Commandant Quinlan informed Battalion Headquarters who told him to threaten the enemy with the arrival overhead of United Nations jets at which they seemed worried but the officer did not know nor did the opposition that the United Nations did not have jets in the arena at that time.

The availability of United Nations jets was a contentious issue. Conor Cruise O'Brien considered that the governments of the United States, Britain and Belgium were duplicitous in their approach to the Katangan problem. He considered that they were purposefully creating obstructions. He blamed them for the delay on these aircraft both at Jadotville and Elizabethville when silly technical excuses were used. This problem did not arise in the later fighting of December 1961.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless the enemy became harsher in their demands ordering the Irish troops to move to a hotel in the town but Quinlan noted that

*'There was still no question of surrender. They claimed the reason for moving was due to lack of suitable accommodation elsewhere and they could not get the water back on.'*<sup>61</sup>

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Commandant  
Quinlan  
kneeling as he  
discusses  
tactics with his  
officers and  
NCOs at  
Jadotville,  
September  
1961.  
Courtesy of  
John Gorman.



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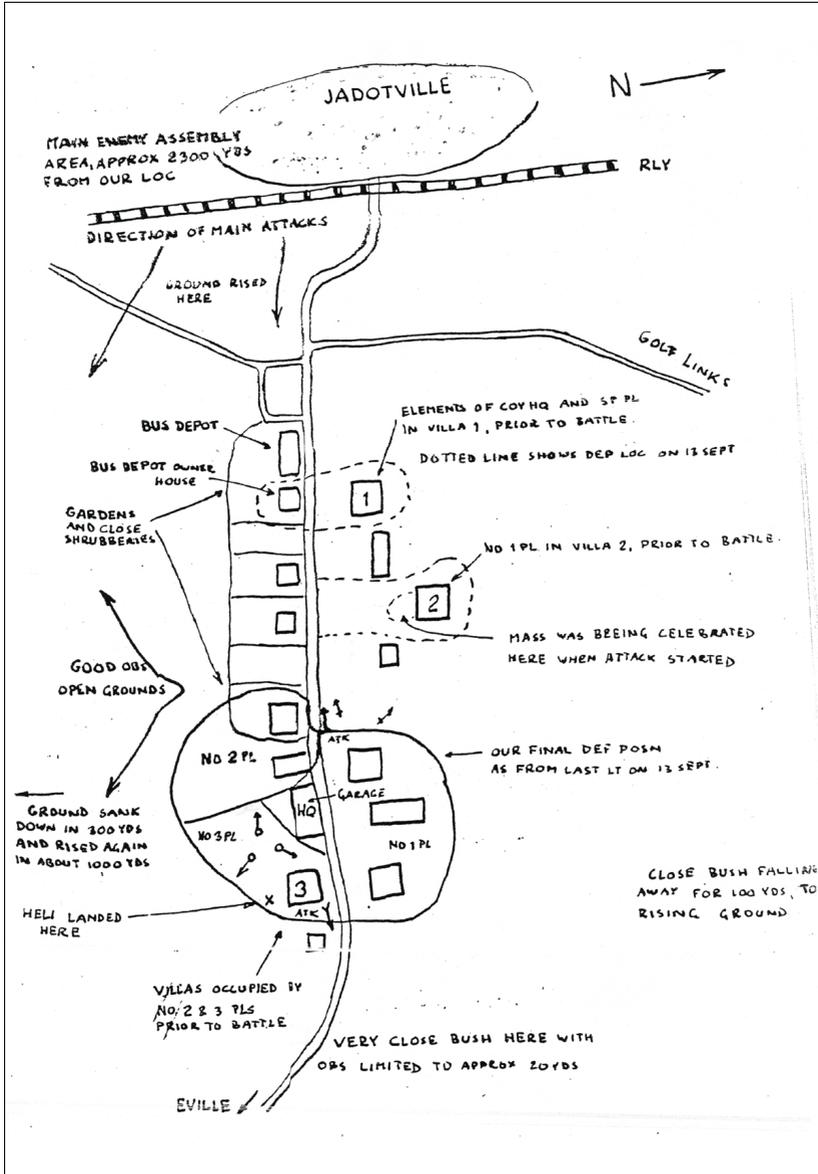
Commandant Quinlan was very suspicious that the gendarmerie was planning another attack. His men were tired and running very short of food and water. Quinlan contacted Battalion Headquarters with details of the situation and the terms of the cease-fire and asking for the update on the reinforcements. In the meantime the Jadotville contingent intercepted messages that the relief column had returned to base. If they were attacked again it would turn into a massacre. He insisted on a written cease-fire signed by the Burgomaster as he had instituted the negotiations but he could not be located. The Irish officer summoned a meeting with his senior men.

*'We realised that there was no hope of reinforcements for at least another couple of days and even without fighting we could not hold out another day without water. If we were attacked at this stage it would turn into a massacre. There was no doubt that our surrender would be demanded at any time and we all agreed that if we could get acceptable guarantees of our safety we would have no choice but to accept. We also knew of the 'high level' cease-fire talks in progress and took the view that further fighting would result in heavy loss of life that would be unjustified. If we could not get the guarantees we wanted from a responsible person that we trusted we would fight to the last.'*<sup>62</sup>

In fact Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations Secretary-General had been en-route to meet with Tshombe in an effort to stop the fighting when he was killed in a plane crash.

At 5.00pm the Irish officer and his aides attended a meeting in a hotel room in the town. The opposing side paid tribute to the Irish for doing their duty as soldiers and then demanded their surrender. Commandant Quinlan protested that there was a cease-fire and that the demand was outrageous. They were told there was no alternative, that their safety would be guaranteed and that the Irish soldiers could keep the weapons but store them in the hotel. These conditions were written into an agreement but this and many of the others were broken. The Irish decided at this stage that they had no choice but to accept the cease-fire as further action would have resulted in the complete annihilation of

# The Battle of Jadotville



Map of troop movements and positions at Jadotville, drawn by an Irish Soldier. Artist unknown. (35th Battalion Unit History)

Courtesy of Defence Forces Library, Curragh Military Camp.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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their men. The enemy later reneged on the cease-fire, proclaiming that the Irish had to surrender. They also reneged on the conditions of the agreement.

“A” Company went into captivity, which lasted over a month. While they were captives, they were used as bargaining chips. At the end of the ordeal Commandant Quinlan wrote:

*‘I have refrained from mentioning names of men who deserve recognition for the part they played in the battle and during our period of imprisonment. This will be the subject of special recommendation for meritorious service. ... I would like to mention the part played by our Chaplain, Father Fagan, in maintaining the morale of the men during the battle and even more important the part played by our medical officer, Captain Clune in his treatment of the wounded who were kept with us all the time and whom he refused to have admitted to hospital in Jadotville and in his care for the health of every man throughout our imprisonment. All I wish to state here is that I never once saw any man waver. All the officers have the same report. Every man gave his very best and tried to do more. Their steadfastness and coolness under heavy fire was extraordinary...my lasting impressions are of complete loyalty and devotion to duty on the part of every officer and man.’*<sup>63</sup>

This was also a defining moment of the first phase of this United Nations mission. When the troops were taken prisoner, the United Nations was held to ransom for almost a month until the captives had been freed, since follow-up operations could not be conducted for fear of reprisals. The Jadoville troops were used as bargaining chips.<sup>64</sup>

### **Enemy Strength and Casualties**

The opposing force’s strength was approximately 2-3,000 soldiers including many white mercenaries. Some of the whites were in uniform and some in civilian attire. It was reported later that many white people from the town took up arms and attacked the Irish position.

During the cease-fire, Commandant Quinlan was informed by a white

## The Battle of Jadotville

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advisor to the gendarmerie that the enemy had lost over 150 combatants including 7 whites. This was later denied but the estimated figure was later put at 250-300 dead with many more injured. The Irish casualties numbered 5 injured.<sup>65</sup>

### **Main Relief Attempts and Action at the Lufira Bridge**

The area around Lufira Bridge consisted of open ground on both sides of the road for 2,000 metres. On the south side of the river and on the right of the road there was high grass, which afforded ample cover for defence. To the north of the main road and bridge the ground rose slightly. The river flowed into *Lac de Retenue de la Lufira* to the north-east. It was deep at the point where it passed under the road and railway bridges. At long ranges, radio communication with Jadotville was difficult. At no time during the battle was communication possible between the relief elements and the Jadotville and Elizabethville force.<sup>66</sup>

Two main relief attempts were mounted to try and reach the surrounded "A" Company at Jadotville. The first attempt occurred on the 13th and 14th September and the second on 16th September 1961. During the fighting in Elizabethville a decision was taken to send a force to relieve the Company. A hastily organised force was put together and withdrawn from action in the city. It contained a mixture of Irish and Swedish troops with armoured personnel carriers. At 4.15pm this force set out for Jadotville.<sup>67</sup> At 6.15pm the force reached Lufira Bridge, ninety-six kilometers from Elizabethville. The bridge was heavily defended. The force immediately attempted to cross the bridge, negotiating most of the obstacles and was actually on the bridge when they were confronted with heavy road construction machinery and large tree trunks. These obstacles were too formidable for the small force.

At this stage the column came under fire from the front, from the right and from the left. The enemy fire included mounted machine-guns, light arms, and grenades. The Irish returned fire and realising that the bridge could not be taken, retired.<sup>68</sup> Another attempt was mounted and some of the obstacles were destroyed with an 84mm recoilless anti-tank rifle. At 7.15pm they tried a reconnaissance with a searchlight, and found

## The Battle of Jadotville

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that they would not be able to get across as there were still formidable obstacles on the bridge. All the while the reconnaissance party was under fire from the enemy. At 8.30am the following morning, another attempt was made but with the same results. The decision was taken to return to Elizabethville. They set off at 10.30am but before departing they brought all their weapons to bear on the enemy positions near the bridge. The enemy sustained many casualties in the vicinity of the bridge during this period.<sup>69</sup>

The second main attempt to relieve the Jadotville troops, codenamed *Force Kane* after its commander, Commandant J.P. Kane, was made on 16th September.<sup>70</sup> It consisted of much the same as the earlier force. This force included Irish, Swedish and Ghurkha troops with engineer, signals and medical elements.<sup>71</sup>

At 10.00am the force arrived at a position south of the bridge. While there the force was attacked for the first time by a Fouga jet with machine-guns and bombs. It was attacked again some time later and the first casualty occurred when an Irish soldier was injured.

Later they were to find out through local intelligence that the bridge had been fortified and that troops from Kolwezi had been brought forward. All the while the jet was harassing the column. A reconnaissance party was sent out and soon came under fire from the east of the road, next from the west and then from the front. A firefight erupted and the armoured cars put the enemy positions under heavy fire. The enemy fire slackened and the reconnaissance party withdrew safely.

While the relief force was regrouping the jet attacked again and this time killed three Ghurkha peacekeepers and injured another five. The small force realised that forcing the bridge during daylight would be impossible without serious air support and a battalion of soldiers. They now considered a right flanking move to the east of *Lac Retenu* but the reconnaissance party had reported that those routes had been demolished. The only option now was to return to Elizabethville. This they did at 4.30pm and while approaching a position about 12

The Battle of Jadotville

general order  
FM : OC SECTOR B  
TO : OC KAT COMD  
15/9 at 0830 hrs  
C  
Annex 4

REQUEST PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT THE FOLLOWING OPERATION IN CONNECTION WITH RELIEF OF IRISH COY AT JADOTVILLE. TASK. ALPHA. SENDING OF HELICOPTERS AFTER FIRST LT CMA JADOT COY PREPARED TO RECEIVE TWO HELICOPTERS AND/OR AC C47. BRAVO. DESTROY ENEMY COY AT BRIDGE BY FLANKING MOVE CMA REMOVE BARRIER FROM BRIDGE. CHARLIE. ADVANCE TO JADOTVILLE AND ASSIST BREAK-OUT OF JADOT COY. DELTA. TROOPS REQUIRED CMA ONE IRISH COY NOW IN FARM CMA 3F ARMS IRISH HE NOW IN FARM CMA ONE GURKHA COY TO BE DECIDED. FOUR IRISH ARMED CAR, ENGINEER PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT. ALMOST ALL TRUCKS IN SECTOR B. SHORT APPRECIATION AS FOLLOWS. GENDARMERIE ARE CAPABLE OF FITTING MORE TROOPS AGAINST COY IN JADOTVILLE THAN AGAINST ALL UN FORCES IN EVILLE. RESUPPLY OF COY BY MEANS AVAILABLE IS NOT GUARANTEED. IF THEY ARE NOT RESUPPLIED OR RELIEVED THEY MAY BE WIPED OUT. THIS RISK MUST BE CONSIDERED AGAINST POSSIBLE LOSSES IN EVILLE WITH REDUCED STRENGTH. POSSIBLE REINFORCEMENTS TO EVILLE COULD OFFSET DEPLETION IN STRENGTH. SUCCESS OF THIS OPERATION WOULD BE A GREAT BOOST TO UN OPS. FAILURE TO RETRIEVE THIS COY WOULD BE A CRIPPLING BLOW TO UN. REINFORCEMENTS MORE AMMN SUPPLIES TPT ARMED CS FROM OUTSIDE SECTOR B ARE A MUST IF WE ARE TO SUCCEED.

JONAS WALREN / S ROSEN

15/9 080100 - [Handwritten notes in German, including 'Anfrage', 'Befehl', 'Lage', 'Zustand', 'Anzahl', 'Waffen', 'Munition', 'Personnel', 'Fahrzeuge', 'Verhalten', 'Anforderungen', 'Anmerkungen']

Request to mount a relief operation to Jadotville, September 1961 (35th Battalion Unit History) Courtesy of Defence Forces Library, Curragh Military Camp.

## **The Battle of Jadotville**

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kilometers from Elizabethville the column was heavily ambushed with severe mounted machine-gun fire and grenades from all sides. They also encountered anti-tank mines. The troops put their anti-ambush drills into effect and managed to return fire and get through to Elizabethville. Five Irish and five Indian troops were injured in the ambush and some time later two Ghurkhas were killed and ten injured when a number of vehicles collided, exploding some shells.<sup>72</sup>

The Battle of Jadotville was a defining moment for the United Nations in the Congo as up to then no large weapons of attack had been used by the O.N.U.C. troops. They had been on the receiving end of aircraft and other attacks. Piloted by a Belgian mercenary, the Katangese strafed and bombed the United Nations positions at will with a Fouga Magister jet, unopposed by any other aircraft or effective ground fire.<sup>73</sup> The troops at Jadotville and the relief columns were particularly harassed by this aircraft. Many Irish veterans of this event claimed to have hit this aircraft with small arms fire and it is interesting to note that in the following years some have been visitors to Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnell and always examined the Irish Air Corps' Fouga aircraft on display, dating from the period, for battle damage. (see p.68) Somehow a story has developed that one of the Katangan Fouga jets ended up in Ireland as a spoil of war.

## Chapter V

### Captivity and the Aftermath

**‘Ireland supporting O.N.U.C. helped reduce international friction. This was no minor achievement for the outbreak of Soviet-American hostilities anywhere during the Cold War even in the Congo could have set off a nuclear exchange everywhere’**

*Conor Cruise O’Brien, Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Katanga* <sup>74</sup>

#### **Captivity of “A” Company (19th September - 25th October 1961)**

After the surrender, “A” Company prisoners were held in the *Hotel d’Eli Europe* in Jadotville for the first three and a half weeks of their captivity. During the early period they witnessed the removal of hundreds of enemy bodies from the battlefield area by the gendarmes who threatened the Irish that they would cut off their genitals and sow them into their mouths.<sup>75</sup> They also threatened to kill them and eat their bodies. Parts of the Congo were still known for cannibalism at the time. For the first few weeks they were guarded by paratroopers and treated well. However gendarmerie soon took over and their treatment began to deteriorate. On 23rd September more prisoners captured at Elizabethville arrived and these expressed amazement that the men from “A” Company were still alive as it was believed that most had been killed.<sup>76</sup>

The media had reported in the early days of the battle that fifty-seven Irish soldiers had been killed in the fighting and this was reported in Ireland causing anxiety for families and for the government.<sup>77</sup> The Taoiseach Seán Lemass, requested the Minister for External Affairs, Frank Aiken to proceed to the Congo on a fact-finding mission.<sup>78</sup>

## The Battle of Jadotville

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On 7th October all of "A" Company's radios were taken from the prisoners and on the 11th they were transported to Kolwezi. This was a seven-hour journey, during which they were brought through various gendarmerie camps and subjected to abuse and threats from hundreds of their women and children. At Kolwezi their kit was searched and a couple of men found to have mislaid bullets in their belongings were severely beaten by a gendarmerie lieutenant. On 16th October they were told they were being released in Elizabethville later that day, in exchange for their own people held by the United Nations. They left Kolwezi at 10.00am but by 4.00pm they had only reached Jadotville. They were told there was a hitch in the talks and this was as far as they were going. At 3.00am on 17th October all prisoners were loaded onto buses and headed for Elizabethville. They finally reached that location at 8.00am. They were again abused by the gendarmes. They were kept on the buses until midday with no water and no toilet facilities. The prisoners were visited by Mr Khiary, Head of the United Nations Civil Operations in the Congo, and by some members of the Irish press. Eventually at 4.30pm they left Elizabethville for Jadotville and Kolwezi.

On Wednesday 25th October after almost five weeks in captivity all prisoners were again moved from Kolwezi to Elizabethville and released at 17:00hrs. They marched back into Irish Battalion Headquarters located at Prince Leopold Farm. Had this handover not taken place the Company members had planned to breakout as by this stage they had enough of the constant movement and disappointment.<sup>79</sup>



Tshombe (4th from right) visits his trophy Irish Troops during their captivity. Courtesy of John Gorman.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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From the details of the battle one can see that Commandant Quinlan conducted his actions in a defensive manner. He did not use force until provoked to do so and only in defence of his men and their position. Although heavily outnumbered he was able to hold out in anticipation of orders from higher authority. These orders were not forthcoming.<sup>80</sup> As a result of better training and supervision the Irish were able to use their weapons in a more effective fashion than the Katangese. They inflicted very heavy casualties but refrained from inflicting maximum damage on numerous occasions with a view to preserving lives. Commandant Quinlan's first priority was his men and their safety as his mission was obscure to say the least. He always acted in an honourable manner as did his men. He tried to limit the capability of the enemy to wage war, to influence what was happening at the bridge by firing on their reinforcements but this was also a defensive action as he knew the enemy reinforcements would hamper the relief efforts.

For more than forty years, the men involved in Jadotville have been castigated for their actions and have been labelled as cowards.<sup>81</sup> Commandant Quinlan was even accused of betraying his men. Their story has been forgotten while the brave actions of earlier and of subsequent battalions are remembered. Until recently, many members of the Defence Forces knew nothing of the events portrayed unless they had a personal or family involvement or had an opportunity to talk to veterans.

Ireland had tried on numerous occasions to gain entry to the United Nations.<sup>82</sup> On its eventual entry it had prepared legislation to allow its soldiers to take part in the first United Nations peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Emergency Force. This United Nations Emergency Force in the Suez Canal was the first major mission to be mounted by the United Nations before O.N.U.C. and was used as an early template in the Congo.<sup>83</sup> Ireland did not commit troops to this mission but the fact that Irish soldiers prepared for it demonstrated Ireland's willingness to take part in United Nations affairs.<sup>84</sup> Ireland's participation in world affairs through representation and a leading rôle at the United Nations was a source of pride to the Irish people and to the Irish Government. It led to a feeling of national confidence and a belief in the work of the Government.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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It also enhanced Ireland's image and standing abroad. The outpouring of pride was very obvious and almost overwhelming at the mobilization and departure of Irish national troops for overseas peacekeeping service in the Congo.

Ireland was taking its place among the countries of the world. Emmet had noted that when Ireland takes its place among the nations of the earth, then and only then would Ireland be free. This sentiment was also reflected by the signatories of the 1916 proclamation.

The outpouring of pride soon turned to grief at the repatriation of the remains of the Niamba Ambush victims in December 1960. This did not interrupt the government's mission to support the United Nations and its commitment to its own foreign policy. The accepted creed was that Ireland was a pathfinder in the crusade for peace and in the pursuit of constructive international relations. The United Nations became a major instrument in Ireland's dealings in international affairs. Previously, Ireland as a nation had been relatively insignificant among the nations. In addition the Irish people were stirred up by the nationalistic rhetoric in support of its soldiers. Ireland's rôle in the Congo as seen from the government's viewpoint was to end the secession of Katanga and to support the transition to democracy through the application of the United Nations impartial philosophy.

In reality, Ireland, in association with the United Nations, had adopted a liberal interpretation of Article 2.7 of the United Nations Charter which precluded United Nations interference in the domestic affairs of member states so as to undermine any future, although unlikely, move to introduce partition. The Charter reads:

*'Nothing contained in the charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.'*

# The Battle of Jadotville

## 9. APPRECIATION

The following is one letter of appreciation - there are other - written by Brig RAJA, OC KATANGA Comd on the departure of 35 Bn from the Congo.

No 1004/7/GS  
HQ Katanga Command  
Elisabethville.

CONFIDENTIAL

To:

2 December, 1961.

The Force Commander,  
ONUC  
LEOPOLDVILLE

Subject: APPRECIATION OF SERVICE - 35th IRISH BATTALION

On the departure of 35th IRISH Battalion from KATANGA Command I feel I would be failing in my duty if I did not express my appreciation as well as that of my staff and troops in KATANGA, of the fine work done by this very fine battalion.

2 The 35th IRISH Battalion has shown remarkable steadfastness and fortitude during the very difficult times that they have had to pass through during their stay in SOUTH KATANGA. They have been a fine example of restraint coupled with soldierly qualities in keeping with the highest traditions of the United Nations.

3 I feel that the fine example given by this battalion was in a very large measure due to the personal example, drive and soldierly qualities of Lieut Colonel McNAMEE, their commanding officer. Colonel McNAMEE has impressed me as being a fine gentleman with high soldierly qualities and possessing strong convictions and belief in the cause of the United Nations, which he has done his very best to uphold. This I feel contributed in no small way to the performance of this battalion during their six-months stay here.

4 I should like to make particular mention of Comdt QUINLAN, who was in command of the company that had the misfortune to suffer so much at JADOTVILLE. This officer needs little commendation as his performance in maintaining the discipline and high morale of his men during a particularly difficult stage of KATANGA Operations speaks for itself. I have great personal admiration for the initiative, courage, drive and restraint of this officer and I believe that he could be held as an example for all soldiers.

5. I am sorry to lose the 35th IRISH Battalion from my command, but I can draw satisfaction from the knowledge that they shall be replaced by another IRISH Battalion, which I am convinced will in every way live up to the standard created by their predecessors.

6 I trust that my feelings expressed in this letter will be conveyed to the appropriate authorities.

BRIG RAJA - BRIGADIER

KATANGA COMMAND.

Letter of appreciation from United Nations Commander at Katanga to Commander O.N.U.C. with reference to the 35th Battalion.  
(35th Battalion Unit History.)

Courtesy of Defence Forces Library, Curragh Military Camp.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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However, the rôle of the United Nations in the Congo became clouded. The United Nations was seen as losing its way and choosing sides. Ireland, as a result was seen in the same light. Its soldiers were fighting and dying for something other than the idealistic view of the government. It had become deeply involved in the affair and attracted criticism from all corners.<sup>85</sup>

The Irish government had at the time a relatively high profile at the United Nations General Assembly through its work to mitigate Cold War tensions, through promoting decolonisation throughout Africa and Asia and through defending human rights. It had also spearheaded initiatives on the withdrawal of troops from Central Europe and a peace plan for the Middle East. During these high profile actions Ireland's contribution was rewarded by the appointment of some of its diplomats to important positions. Frederick Henry Boland was elected President of the General Assembly in 1960 and Conor Cruise O'Brien was chosen to represent the Secretary-General in Katanga.<sup>86</sup> During the Congo crisis a senior Irish officer, General Seán McKeown, was appointed as military commander of United Nations forces in that country. Ireland was also elected to the Security Council, to the Committee on South West Africa and to the Congo Advisory Committee. Ireland's foreign policy embraced The United Nations and the Congo.

Ireland remained true to the vital principles of United Nations policy even though Seán Lemass' government had a slight wavering to the west on Cold War issues.<sup>87</sup> Ireland's peacekeeping rôle during the period is evidence of its support for these principles. O.N.U.C.'s aim was to aid the transition of the Congo to self rule. Frank Aiken wanted Ireland to lead the way in calming international tensions by preventing the transformation of Central Africa into a Cold War battlefield.<sup>88</sup> Ireland's peacekeeping rôle was the area where Irish foreign policy was especially effective and efficient in pursuing limited tangible aims in international relations.

When Irish men died at Niemba and at Elizabethville they were heroes for Ireland and for the United Nations in its fight for peace. The action at Jadotville was embarrassing for Ireland and for the United Nations on

## The Battle of Jadotville

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account of the casualties and damage inflicted by Irish soldiers, soldiers from a state which was held to be impartial and neutral. Their surrender worsened the situation because of the hostage scenario that developed.<sup>89</sup>

As a result Ireland's prominence in the United Nations was diminished and the events in Katanga had a sobering effect on the Irish presence in the assembly.<sup>90</sup> As was already mentioned, Frank Aiken was despatched to the Congo after the inaccurate media reports of the deaths of fifty-seven Irish soldiers in Jadotville and of others in the fighting in Katanga.<sup>91</sup> He concluded that Ireland had taken on too much responsibility and should therefore reduce its workload in New York. He decided that Irish diplomats would no longer accept any committee chairmanships at the assembly.<sup>92</sup> One must remember that the Irish government's original reasons for joining O.N.U.C. was to aid the transition of the Congo to self-rule and it had promised not to permit its troops to become embroiled in the internal affairs of the Congo.<sup>93</sup>

Following the operation, a blame game erupted in the United Nations camp as to who was responsible for the fiasco, which had left the United Nations in an embarrassing hostage predicament. The various governments on the Cold War bench were in uproar and blamed the Secretary-General. Some veterans hold the opinion that the Jadotville incident was made the scapegoat for problems at the higher echelons of command both in the United Nations and in the Defence Forces.<sup>94</sup>

Operations *Rumpunch* and *Mortbor* had achieved little in terms of their strategic aims to remove the mercenary elements and bring about an end to the secession of Katanga but in military terms they were quite successful. Although using inferior equipment and lacking in air support, United Nations forces succeeded in taking their objectives during the fighting in Elizabethville and at other sites held by the gendarmerie in Albertville and elsewhere in Katanga.

Mr. Khiary replaced Mr. Hammarskjöld as the chief negotiator after the death of the Secretary-General in an aircraft crash on 17th September 1961, while on his way to meet Tshombe to discuss bringing an end to

## The Battle of Jadotville

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the fighting. Khiary later signed a cease-fire agreement with Tshombe on 13th October 1961.<sup>95</sup> The protocol included:

1. The exchange of all prisoners
2. The creation of a joint commission with full freedom of movement to verify compliance with the agreement.
3. The withdrawal of United Nations troops from positions in Elizabethville which were secured in *Operation Morthor* on condition that the provisional government would not engage in inflammatory propaganda against the United Nations.<sup>96</sup>

This meant that all the ground gained in the fighting was handed back. This in retrospect was wrong, because it signified weakness on the part of the United Nations. In addition these same locations had to be taken again in the fighting of the second phase, thus incurring further casualties.<sup>97</sup>

Tshombe however, treated this as a victory over the United Nations. He had placed the United Nations in a position in which they had to secure the release of the prisoners taken at Jadotville before they could continue operations in the province.

Tensions rose and Tshombe reneged on his side of the agreement. He revelled in his fame as the defeater of the United Nations forces. Some mercenaries were given jobs in the provincial government and many more were re-engaged with the gendarmerie.

The Katangese had used aircraft to bomb the United Nations positions. The latter learned from their experiences in Jadotville and Elizabethville in September and acquired ten fighter jets and five bombers to support troops on the ground.<sup>98</sup> The Katangese were witnessing a shift in air power.<sup>99</sup> Mercenaries continued to coordinate and lead attacks against the United Nations forces on the ground. On 24th November the United Nations Security Council authorised O.N.U.C., through a new resolution, to use requisite measures of force, if necessary, to apprehend and detain prohibited mercenaries and political advisors.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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Soldiers of "A" Company, 35th Infantry Battalion return to Irish Headquarters in Elizabethville, October 1961 after their release from captivity. Closest to the camera on the right is Company Sgt Jack Prendergast  
Courtesy of John Gorman.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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The Secretary-General was also authorised to take all measures necessary to prevent the return of such mercenaries as well as denying access to arms, equipment and any other material in support of their activities.<sup>100</sup> The United Nations had decided to end the Katangan problem and after the adoption of the resolution Tshombe again launched into inflammatory propaganda, which later evolved into violence and atrocities by the gendarmerie.

The United Nations discovered that the gendarmerie was planning a massive campaign against them, which was to take place around the time that the Irish and Swedish battalions were rotating and thus at their weakest on the ground. On 5th December Operation U.N.O.K.A.T. (United Nations Operation Katanga) was put into effect as it was deemed necessary to subdue the enemy in order to gain freedom of movement and to control Elizabethville.<sup>101</sup> This was the first time that a clear political directive backed the operation on the ground. On the same day as the directive was issued a patrol including elements of "A" Company of the 35th Battalion was ambushed on its way to clear a roadblock in the vicinity of Elizabethville airport. One Irish soldier was injured and the Katangese suffered many casualties. This incident marked the opening of hostilities in the second phase of fighting.

On the 7th December the 36th Irish Battalion arrived in Elizabethville from Ireland.<sup>102</sup> They had flown into their operational area in full knowledge of hostilities. One of the U.S.A.F Globemasters carrying the 36th Battalion came under fire from gendarmes on landing at Elizabethville airport. The aircraft sustained forty hits and damage to the engines and fuel tanks. The battalion reinforced the United Nations positions. Later, they attacked and held a tunnel leading to Elizabethville, suffering casualties. This was an important logistical route which was in the hands of the enemy.<sup>103</sup> This operation became known as the "Battle of the Tunnel" and has been a legend within the Irish Defence Forces ever since. The 35th Battalion rotated soon after and the 36th went on to fight in their own battles receiving well deserved recognition for their bravery and service. Some of those involved at Jadotville also returned to the Congo on later missions.

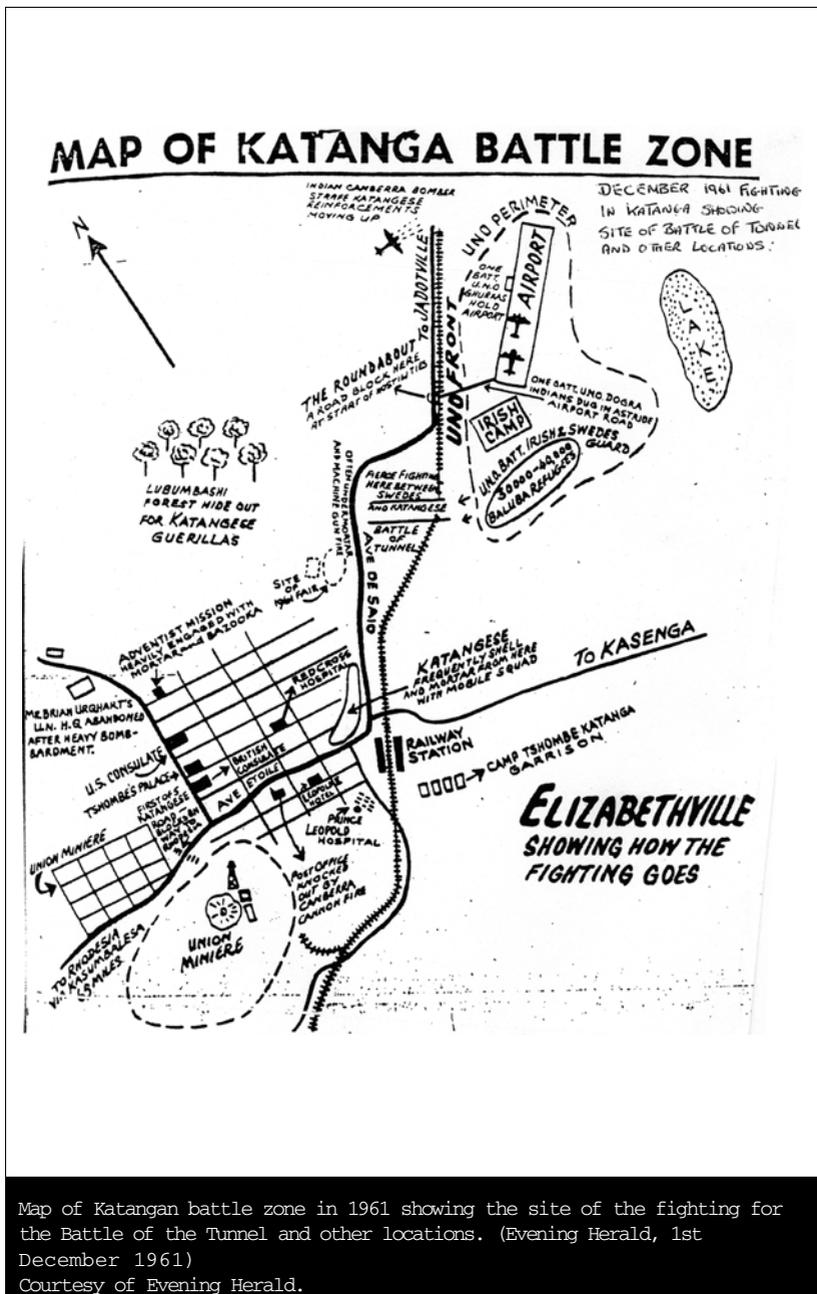
## The Battle of Jadotville

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Direct hit. The aftermath of an attack by a Fougas Magister jet at Elizabethville Airport.  
Courtesy of John Gorman.

# The Battle of Jadotville



Map of Katangan battle zone in 1961 showing the site of the fighting for the Battle of the Tunnel and other locations. (Evening Herald, 1st December 1961)

Courtesy of Evening Herald.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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Preparing defensive positions at Elizabethville. Note the use of domestic furniture. Facing camera L-R Joe Leech, Jimmy Redmond. Courtesy of John Gorman.





Irish Air Corps Focke-Wulf Fw 190 fighter jet at Casement Aerodrome Baldonnel. Visiting Congo Veterans checked these aircraft for bullet holes as a story had developed that one was a spoil of war. The aircraft pictured is now in the Austrian Air Force Museum.  
Courtesy of Kieran Swords.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

***'It is unbelievable that this glorious episode had been airbrushed out of Irish Military History. Unfortunately, many of these men have gone to their graves without their valour and bravery being recognised.'***

*Mr. Denis Naughten, speaking in the Dáil, 30th November 2004*

The deployment of group *Mide*, the initial U.N. deployment to Jadotville, was in response to a perceived danger to the white civilian population. The group reported that this population was not in any danger and was in fact quite hostile to the United Nations presence.<sup>104</sup> Group *Mide* returned to their Headquarters soon afterwards.<sup>105</sup> It would appear that some political pressure had been applied to the United Nations. This mission was not realistic when viewed in terms of the upcoming operation and the resources needed. This was borne out with the stationing of "A" Company to Jadotville in a subsequent move. This was a tactical error. In fact Commandant Quinlan had sent a messenger to Conor Cruise O'Brien, who was attending a function in Elizabethville, pointing out the flawed mission and his Company's predicament. The messenger was told he would receive reinforcements but this did not transpire.<sup>106</sup> Two other battalions were initially requested to commit troops to the area but the request was denied, as the soldiers were needed for the operation in Elizabethville.<sup>107</sup> The stationing of troops ninety miles from their Battalion Headquarters was also tactically misjudged.

The relief attempts did not maintain contact with the enemy at Lufira Bridge. This permitted the gendarmerie to establish stronger defensive positions on the Elizabethville side of the river after the first attempt. For this reason, there was no chance that the relief column would get through to Jadotville. The United Nations troops had revealed their intentions.

## The Battle of Jadotville

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As for the eventual decision to surrender by the commander of “A” Company, it is obvious that the Irish troops unquestionably won the confrontation and engagement up to the cease-fire and subsequent surrender. It is also obvious that the same troops would have been annihilated if hostilities had continued. As we know ammunition, food, water and supplies were almost depleted.<sup>108</sup> Whether Commandant Quinlan considered his actions as surrender or as a cease-fire is still in dispute in some circles.

Many promises made by the Katangese during the negotiations were subsequently broken. The United Nations had negotiated a general cease-fire in the province and Quinlan had agreed to the same in Jadotville with certain conditions. However when he realised that no relief was forthcoming, he knew he would have to surrender when the ultimatum came. The author believes that the Irish considered the action as a cease-fire until the agreement was broken and that the commander had no choice but to surrender. “A” Company inflicted very heavy casualties on a numerically superior force during the six-day battle and there were many acts of bravery by individual members of the Company. Yet no awards have ever been made in respect of this action despite the fact that this bravery of “A” Company soldiers was the subject of special recommendation for meritorious service by the Company commander. Quinlan went to great lengths to compliment his men on their actions and to obtain recognition for their bravery without results.<sup>109</sup> Brigadier Raja, K.A.S., United Nations Force Commander in Katanga wrote a glowing report on the conduct of “A” Company. (see page 59) These testimonials seem to have counted for nothing. It would appear that it was decided at a higher level to forget the whole affair surrounding the surrender at Jadotville despite the quality of “A” Company’s fighting and individual acts of bravery. The events may have been viewed in the Irish Defence Forces as cowardly, in part due to the lack of well-deserved recognition, yet no board of enquiry was ever convened on this event.<sup>110</sup>

The low casualty rate in the Irish Company resulted from their construction of good defensive positions and trenches. The enemy had none. In addition “A” Company’s heavy weapons fire from mortars and machine-guns was very accurate and repelled the enemy at long ranges.

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“A” Company was located in three villas, a garage and on both sides of the main Elizabethville road, which was about a half mile from the town of Jadotville. The villas were scattered over a distance of one mile along the road with civilian-occupied villas in between. When the Irish arrived in the area they immediately dug trenches and defensive positions as detailed in the Defence Forces’ operational procedures. The Irish commander was being cautious and was preparing for an expected attack.

The most immediate reason the situation deteriorated for the Irish and the most surprising for “A” Company was the sudden rise in tensions in the immediate area. A breakdown in radio communications between “A” Company and Battalion Headquarters was one factor in the events which subsequently led to the overall situation. Radio communication between “A” Company and Battalion Headquarters was fine but “A” Company was not informed of the impending *Operation Morthor*; a pre-planned operation, until 07:25hrs on the morning of Wednesday 13th September, the morning of the operation.<sup>111</sup> This is a mystery because the events in Elizabethville were sure to have repercussions in Jadotville. This was the catalyst that led to the sustained attacks on “A” Company and initiated the deterioration of an already poor situation. The outcome should have been envisioned, but was not. Further research needs to be carried out into how this omission occurred.

This book shows that the Irish Government and the Defence Forces desired to participate in peacekeeping operations. This is evident from the numerous applications to join the United Nations and the government’s early preparation of legislation in the hope of its participation. However when the troops arrived in the Congo they were unprepared in many ways. The mission was totally unexpected in the Defence Forces’ understanding of its rôle. However it is a credit to the Defence Forces and to these men that they were able improvise, adapt and overcome these obstacles to carry out their mission in the changing nature of O.N.U.C.’s mandate. For much of the time, the force had no clear mandate from the Security Council as to what was expected of them. The United Nations became a political football for the opposing sides in the Cold War. The United Nations seemed to lose its way when

## **The Battle of Jadotville**

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it came to understanding the rôle of a peacekeeping mission and a combat mission.

The book has shown that what happened at Jadotville was to a certain extent embarrassing for Ireland, for its government and for some in its Defence Forces because they were originally trying to support the United Nations in its endeavours to help the Congo's transition to central, democratic government and were seen to be doing something different. We must also remember that the Irish Government wished to see a united Ireland and an end to Irish partition. As part of its foreign policy and leading rôle in world affairs, it also wanted to end Katanga's cessation. In reality it was sometimes seen to be doing the opposite by taking sides. The fact that Irish soldiers were fighting and dying in Katanga, that they had killed up to 300 Katangese at Jadotville and then surrendered themselves and the United Nations into a hostage situation made Ireland's position a cause for concern. This was evident by Aiken's swift despatch to the Congo.

These soldiers were indeed extensions of Ireland's foreign policy. To the United Nations and the Katangan Government, war was an extension of politics. The Irish soldiers at Jadotville and other places were sacrificing themselves for the honourable and just cause of peacekeeping in a conflict that could have triggered a Third World War. The Irish Defence Forces' rôle has been and is remembered for its contribution, but the soldiers at Jadotville were effectively dishonoured because at the time they were never properly recognised for their bravery and professionalism.

## Chapter VII

### Epilogue

#### **Soldiers say Congo campaign not recognised**

**Liam Sherlock**

*Irish Times 4th October 2001*

Four former soldiers from Westmeath are to make representations to the Minister for Defence, Mr Smith, for formal recognition of the sacrifices made by those who survived a six-day siege and imprisonment while on UN duty in the Congo.

The men are aggrieved that on the 40th anniversary of the infamous battle of Jadotville, they have not received a medal or even a certificate in recognition of their efforts.

The four are Sgt Bill Ready (60), Gunner Tom Cunningham (62) and gunner John Flynn (58) from Mullingar, and Sgt Bobby Allen (73), from Collinstown. During the 1961 battle, they survived aerial bombardment and heavy artillery fire for six days and nights. They were forced to surrender after their water, food and ammunition ran out.

The four described the lack of official recognition as "disgraceful". Sgt Ready, who was shot in the attack, said: "We have been forgotten about by the Army, the Minister and the system."

They are particularly aggrieved that their company commander, the late Lieut Col Pat Quinlan, had not been recognised either. "He saved our lives, but he was treated very badly. Even at this late stage, even though he has passed away, he should still be acknowledged," Sgt Ready said.....

Mr Robinson said it was disgraceful that the veterans were being honoured locally but not by the Department of Defence. "They put their lives on the line and didn't get any recognition, not a medal, not even a certificate."

## **The Battle of Jadotville**

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He also said the contribution by Lieut Col Quinlan was not properly rewarded by the Army. "He finished up as a lieutenant colonel, but he should have been promoted to a higher rank in recognition of his actions and gallantry. He saved the whole company. He was never above anybody. He was a great man.

### **Military board will study Congo case**

#### **Michael O'Regan**

*Irish Times 12th May 2004*

A board of military officers is to examine a submission from a retired Army officer who served in the Congo in 1961, the Minister for Defence told the Dáil.

Mr Smith said that the chief of staff had received the submission seeking a review of the role played by members of the Western Command during the battle of Jadotville.

"The chief of staff has asked the board to make recommendations as to any further action that may be open. Pending the outcome of the examination, it would not be appropriate for me to comment. I will carefully consider any recommendations that the Chief of Staff may make in respect of the issue." .....

### **Bravery in Congo to be commemorated**

#### **Marie O'Halloran**

*Irish Times 27th Jan 2005*

The Government is to commemorate the bravery and heroism of Irish soldiers in a battle in the Congo in 1961 after a report formally exonerated the troops, who were accused of cowardice when they surrendered to rebels.

The Minister for Defence, Mr O'Dea, told the Dáil that the report by a board of army officers, which he received late last year, "fully exonerates the actions of B (sic) company" at Jadotville in the Congo. "At the time they surrendered, nothing would have been served by fighting on,

## **The Battle of Jadotville**

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except further and unnecessary bloodshed. It is clear from the report that the company and its commanding officer acted appropriately given all the circumstances," he said.

"We are considering some way of commemorating their bravery and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on that within the next couple of weeks".

A retired army officer who served at Jadotville made a submission to the Defence Forces seeking a review of the events of September 1961, when the troops were under attack from Katanganese soldiers and were apparently outnumbered by 20 to one. They withstood a land and air bombardment, killed 300 soldiers while seven of their own men were injured and surrendered when ammunition, food and water ran out.

"There is certainly a sense among the members of B (sic) company that, while there as no official action against any of them nor any official criticism of their actions, their stand in Jadotville was not appropriately recognized by the Defence Forces and there is a definite sense of grievance on the part of those involved, because of that," Mr O'Dea said.

### **Soldiers' bravery finally honoured**

#### **Liam Horan in Athlone**

*Irish Times 20th November 2005*

Over 150 Irish soldiers who were once described as cowards have finally been officially recognised, and as heroes - 44 years after their famous battle.

Many of the survivors of the battle of Jadotville in the Congo did not live long enough to have their bravery recognised by Minister for Defence Willie O'Dea.

But 27 of the men who fought in Jadotville were in the Custume Barracks, Athlone, yesterday to hear Mr O'Dea call them "ordinary soldiers doing extraordinary things".

In 1960, soldiers from A Company 35th Battalion - mainly from Athlone - were sent to a hostile area in the Katagan area of the Congo.

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They came under attack from thousands of Katagan soldiers. No Irish fatalities occurred despite the incessant siege, and they killed about 150 Katagan soldiers. They were released after a ceasefire, but their heroism was not recognised at home as military officials air-brushed the episode from history.

Survivors staged a diplomatic battle to have their bravery recognised and to counter the popular depiction of them as cowards.

Yesterday their efforts came to fruition when Mr. O'Dea unveiled a commemorative plaque to honour them.

One of the survivors, retired Commandant Liam Donnelly, received a standing ovation after a moving speech in which he said that "such an episode should never be allowed to happen again".

"We are here to honour the bravery, devotion to duty, and professionalism of the Jadotville soldiers, and commanding officer Pat Quinlan who is no longer with us."

***These articles are carried courtesy of the Irish Times***



Jadotville veteran and tireless campaigner John Gorman pictured in Custume Barracks, Athlone at the commemorative monument to the soldiers who fought at Jadotville. The monument was unveiled by Mr. Willie O'Dea, Minister for Defence on 19th November 2005. Courtesy of Paul

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- 3 Power, Declan *The Siege at Jadotville the Irish Army's Forgotten Battle* (Dublin, 2005)
- 4 Raeside, Archie *The Congo-1960: The First Irish United Nations Peacekeepers* (Co Laois, 2004), p. 7
- 5 Article 29 of the Irish Constitution states: '(1) Ireland affirms its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly cooperation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality; (2) Ireland affirms its adherence to the principal of the pacific settlement of international arbitration or judicial determination; (3) Ireland accepts the generally recognised principles of international law as its rule of conduct in relation with other states.'
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- 8 U.N.I.F.I.L. (United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon) mission ended for the Irish Defence Forces in 2001 after twenty-three years of a large commitment of troops. Less than a dozen Irish soldiers still work in the headquarters there. K.F.O.R (Kosovo Force) peace enforcement mission commenced in 1999 and is ongoing.
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Commemorative plaques of 'Niemba Ambush' and 'Battle of the Tunnel'  
Contemporary photograph of Irish soldiers preparing defensive positions in the Congo (Used by kind permission of veteran and held by author). Details of photographs are with the author.

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### Appendix

List of "A" Company 35th Battalion Personnel and Attached Personnel who served at Jadotville and endured captivity. This List is based on information supplied by John Gorman. The list may be incomplete.

#### Officers and Senior N.C.O.s

Comdt. Patrick Joseph Quinlan	Company Commander
Capt. Joseph Patrick Clune	Doctor
Capt. Dermot Byrne Second in Command	
Capt. William (known as 'Liam') Donnelly	Platoon Commander
Capt. Thomas McGuinn	Platoon Commander
Lt. William Noel Carey	Platoon Commander
Lt. Joseph Anthony Oliver Leech	Platoon Commander
Lt. Thomas Quinlan	Platoon Commander
Lt. Kevin Paschal Knightly	Armoured Car Detachment Commander
Fr. Thomas Fagan	Chaplain
C/S John Prendergast	Company Sergeant
CQMS Patrick Neville	Quartermaster Sergeant

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### N.C.O.s and Men

Corporal William (known as 'Bobby') Allen	Private Patrick Donnelly
Private Gerald Battles	Private John Joseph Dowler
Private Francis Leo Boland	Private Maurice Doyle
Private Joseph Daniel Bracken	Private Joseph Duff
Private Robert Laurence Bradley	Private Patrick Duffy
Corporal Colm Brannigan	Private William George Duffy
Private Michael Gerard Brennan	Private John Dreelin
Private John Broderick	Private Patrick Dunleavy
Private Michael Broderick	Private Anthony Dykes
Corporal Patrick Bourke	Private James William Feery
Private James Byrne	Private Simon James Finglas
Private Patrick Conlon	Private Dominic Flaherty
Private Desmond Connolly	Private John Flynn
Private John Conway	Private John William Flynn
Private Charles John Cooley	Private Thomas Flynn
Sergeant Geoffrey Patrick Cuffe	Corporal John Foley
Gunner Thomas Cunningham	Corporal John James Foster
Private Patrick Delaney	Private Michael Joseph Galvin
Private Albert Arthur Dell	Private Patrick Gildea
Corporal James Dempsey	Sergeant Francis Gilsenan
Corporal John Oliver Devine	Private John Gorman
Sergeant Henry Dixon	Private Edward James Gormley
Corporal John Donnelly	Private Noel Francis Graham
	Private Michael Greene
	Gunner Thomas Patrick Gunne

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Private William Francis Hannigan	Sergeant Martin McCabe
Private Dominic Harkins	Private James McCourt
Private James Harper	Private Michael McCormack
Gunner William Heffernan	Private Michael James McDermott
Private Daniel Hegarty	Corporal John McDonagh
Private Henry Hegarty	Private Thomas McDonagh
Private Joseph Gerard Hegarty	Corporal Thomas Francis McDonnell
Sergeant Walter Thomas Hegarty	Corporal John McEntee
Private Gerald Hennelly	Private Matthew James McGrath
Private Patrick Francis Hogan	Private Joseph McGuinness
Private Thomas Michael Hogan	Sergeant Kevin Christopher McLoughlin
Private William Henry Hughes	Private Terence McMahan
Sergeant Patrick Joseph Joyce	Private Francis McManus
Private James Kavanagh	Corporal John Francis McManus
Private William Francis Keene	Private Anthony McNerney
Sergeant Thomas Kelly	Private Edward Maher
Corporal Thomas Kerr	Private Francis Paul Malone
Corporal Brendan Leffere	Private Joseph Anthony Maloney
Private Robert Patrick Larkin	Private Donal Michael Manley
Private Thomas Michael Larkin	Private John Christopher Manning
Private Kieran Vincent Lynch	Private James Megley
Corporal Michael Lynch	
Corporal John McAnaney	
Corporal James McArdle	

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Private Daniel Molloy	Private Joseph Relihan
Sergeant John Gerard Monaghan	Private William (known as "Bill") Reidy (attached)
Private Patrick Joseph Monaghan	Private William Riggs
Private James Murray	Corporal Christopher John Roche
Private Myler	Private Anthony Roper
Private John James Nicell	Gunner James Joseph Scally
Corporal John O'Brien	Gunner Michael Joseph Seery
Corporal Peter Joseph O'Callaghan	Private John Vincent Shanagher
Corporal Michael John O'Connor	Corporal Michael Joseph Smith
Private Michael Seán O'Farrell	Private John Joseph Stanford
Private James Patrick O'Kane	Private Noel Stanley
Private Joseph Alphonsus O'Kane	Private Timothy Sullivan
Private Robert Orr	Private Bernard Sweeney
Private Michael O'Sullivan	Private Phillip James Sweeney
Gunner John Francis Peppard	Private James Joseph Tahaney
Private Christopher Powell	Sergeant George Francis Tiernan
Private John Donald Purtill	Corporal Seán Tiernan
Private Martin Quinlan	Private Michael John Tighe
Corporal Timothy Quinn	Private Charles Tomkins
Sergeant James Rea	Private Patrick Joseph Williams
Private James Redmond	
Corporal Patrick Rhatigan	
Private Daniel Regan	

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### **Attached Swedish Personnel**

2/Lt. R. Larse Fromberg      Swedish Liaison Officer

W/Officer Eric O.Thors      Helicopter Co-Pilot

### **Attached Norwegian Personnel**

Lt. Bjrne Hovde      Helicopter Pilot

### **Attached U.N. Civilian Personnel**

Mr. Michael Nolan      U.N. Civil Affairs Officer and Interpreter  
(Irish National)

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