



KX2, one of two Belgian Air Force Douglas DC-4s that took part in the operation, about to set off past a line of C-119G "Flying Boxcars"

Revolt in the Congo

The part played by the Belgian A.F. in July 1960

by André van Haute

WITH A NOISE like thunder the heavily laden C-119s climbed away from Melsbroek *en route* for the Congo Republic. This was obviously not a routine mission of the sort that had been going on for years; there were far too many aircraft taking off. The "unexpected" had happened in the former Belgian colony and No. 15 Transport and Communications Wing of the Belgian Air Force, which had been put in a state of alert on 5th July 1960, was reacting.

Congolese troops of the newly independent state had rebelled and in most cases their Belgian officers and N.C.O.s had lost control. In view of the threat to Europeans living in the Congo and the fact that the new government of the Republic was incapable of protecting them, the Belgian Government decided that it would have to act on its own, quickly.

The means available were not large. The Belgian A.F.'s sole transport wing had a strength of thirty-eight C-119G "Flying Boxcars", two DC-4s, four DC-

6Bs and several C-47 Dakotas. No. 15's Pembroke had too short a range for this operation, but the wing was assisted by civil machines from SABENA and several other airlines later on.

Six "Flying Boxcars" were in fact stationed in the Congo before the rebellion and their crews had become familiar with jungle flying. However, no night flying had been attempted because of the lack of navigational aids, but with the emergency this had to be done.

Furthermore, political complications arising from the revolt led to the closure of Tripoli Airport to Belgian A.F. aircraft from 9th July onwards, while Kano also imposed some restrictions. Only the French-speaking territories did not interfere, and the route for the C-119s then became Algiers, Aoulef, Douala, and then either Kitona to Kamina, or Bangui when the destination was Usumbura. An allowance of 50 flying hours was made for the round trip, plus 100 hours' flying in the Congo itself. Flying hours were therefore

precious and to avoid wastage, groundcrew and spares were flown over so that maintenance could be done in the field; No. 20 Squadron flew over all its available aircraft in 1½ days.

Meanwhile the DC-4s and DC-6s were bringing over paratroops, paracommandos and several battalions hurriedly drawn from army regiments. The rebellion was so unexpected that some of the reservists in the paratroop units received weapons instruction during their flight to the Congo. At the same time troops already at Kamina were flown to the vital aerodrome of Ndjili-Léopoldville, which remained in rebel hands for only a short while.

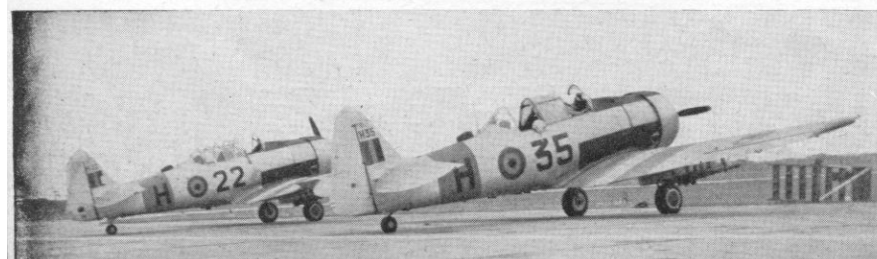
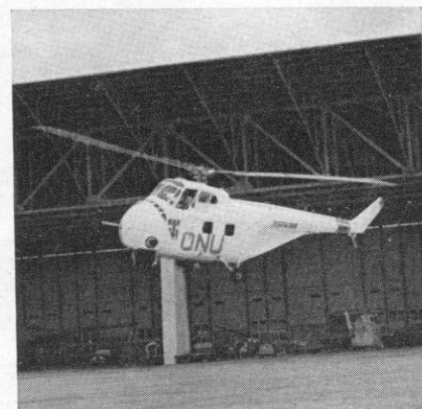
Aircraft of the flying training school at Kamina were armed, Harvards being fitted with rockets and machine guns, and MG-armed Magisters were also used in action. One of their main feats was the knocking out of gun positions held by the Matadi rebels, thus saving ships loaded with refugees on the River Congo.

Harvards also escorted helicopters on trips to rescue isolated Europeans. On one such mission, on 18th July, an Alouette II piloted by Kdt. Kervyn de Meerendré and its Harvard escort (serial H 210, piloted by Lt. de Changy) were shot down, both pilots and the Alouette's passenger, a district commissioner, being killed. Another Harvard was lost during the same period.

Once the Belgian paratroops had recaptured Ndjili, this airport became the focal point for aircraft movements in and out of the Congo. Armed Belgian Magisters, an Egyptian Il-14, U.S.A.F. C-130s and C-124s, Italian and Belgian C-119s, Russian Il-14s, R.A.F. Comets and Britannias, UNO C-47s, Beavers and Otters, Ethiopian C-47s and French Noratlas



ABOVE: CP-36, the C-119G that crashed at Rushengo. RIGHT: U.N. Sikorsky S-55, serial 75939. BELOW: Rocket-armed Harvards of the Belgian A.F.; H 210 was shot down the day after this picture was taken





Armed Belgian A.F. Magisters at Ndjili with (LEFT) a "Boxcar" going out and (RIGHT) a U.S.A.F. C-130 coming in

were among the aircraft to be seen there in the first few days.

Operations by No. 15 Wing went on round the clock. On 13th July C-119s dropped paratroops on Kabalo airfield and after the troops had gained control, the aircraft landed to pick up refugees; 14th July saw a similar operation at Kikwit, 16th July at Manono, and so on. One of the best-remembered operations was that on Luluaborg. Flying from Kamina, the aircraft dropped paratroops near the town to go to the rescue of some Europeans who, with few arms, had held out for several days in the Immokasai building.

Sometimes an "Op." was mounted with no clear idea of how many civilians there were to bring back. On 18th July, for example, in bad weather, there was a massive assault on the airfield of Bunia

which had to be captured in order to rescue refugees, of whom only seventeen were eventually found. Such operations placed a heavy strain on the Belgian forces, who had only about 7,000 men all told and the aircraft of one transport wing—particularly as distances in the Congo are vast, many flights being equivalent to, say, Rome-Copenhagen.

Until 19th July casualties had been relatively light, but on that day "Flying Boxcar" CP-36 (call-sign OT-CBP), with forty troops on board, crashed on a mountain top at Rushengo in the Kivu province and only four people survived. The same day an operation was mounted to liberate prisoners at Kindou.

Armed Harvards were in action again, at Kolwezi, on 25th July, but by that time United Nations forces were begin-

ning to take over from the Belgians in the Congo. No. 15 Wing's last big task was to ferry back Belgian A.F. Magisters from N'dola. Most of the remaining Harvards were scrapped, only a handful going to the Katangan Air Force. Doves and Herons of the *Force Publique*, which for a short while had operated under Belgian A.F. command, went the same way; Doves D-16 and D-21, however, were left unserviceable at Ndjili.

Now, nearly five years later, the wheel has turned full circle. Katangan Harvards and Doves are again Congolese, and Belgian paratroops reappeared, again to save lives, but this time with the full approval of the established Congolese Government—although on this second occasion they were not flown to their dropping zone by their faithful C-119s...

CONGO VISITORS—TOP: United Nations Otter "303" (LEFT) with French inscription under wing and Beavers "401" and "403"—ONU being the French initials for UNO. MIDDLE: Ethiopian Air Force C-47 "708", and (RIGHT) a United Nations C-47. BOTTOM: An Egyptian (U.A.R.) Ilyushin Il-14 with U.S.A.F. Globemaster behind, and (RIGHT) the Il-14 presented to Lumumba—one of several presented to the Congo but they disappeared when the situation changed

