

# J. King Gordon

## ONUC—And What It Did for the Congo

J. King Gordon's years with the United Nations began in 1945, when he was managing editor of *The Nation*, which covered the San Francisco conference; for more than two years, he also covered United Nations affairs for the CBC. He joined the UN Secretariat in 1950 to work in the Human Rights Division, in which John Humphrey was director. He was an obvious choice in 1954 for chief of information for the United Nations Korea Reconstruction Agency, a \$140 million operation to help rehabilitate that war-devastated country. After nearly two years in Korea, he moved to Cairo to take over the United Nations Information Centre for the Middle East—and arrived just before the nationalization of the Suez Canal. He was in Cairo when British aircraft bombed the airport and, after the cease-fire and establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), he worked alongside General "Tommy" Burns in the Sinai as the link to the world's press.

He was therefore already a veteran of UN front-line operations long before the Belgian Congo became independent in July 1960, and, almost immediately, tumbled into disorder. The mutiny of the armed forces, the secession of mineral-rich Katanga province and the flight of most Belgian professionals and technicians all happened within a month. The UN peacekeeping force—mainly of African troops, but comprising also Scandinavians, Irish, Indians, Indonesians and Canadians—faced problems much more serious than those encountered by UNEF in the Middle East. The country, almost as big as Western Europe, was torn by political faction and tribal violence, and the interference of outside powers added to the strife. At the same time, all the civilian services—health and hospitals, communications, transport, education, banking and commerce—were threatened with collapse after the departure *en masse* of the Belgians.

J. King Gordon has written: "Faced with the responsibility of maintaining order and meeting civilian needs in a country without an effective government, the United Nations did remarkably well." His judgement was based on first-hand experience, for he was posted to the Congo as a senior UN information officer and travelled widely (and dangerously) to write reports on the work of ONUC (Opération des Nations Unies au Congo). The following are extracts from two of those reports, the first about Coquilhatville in the north-central part of the country and the second about Kasai province which bordered on Katanga to the south.

"Coquilhatville on the Congo River is a city of 40 000. Before the trouble in July, there were about 70 doctors in Equateur Province, an area as large as France. After the troubles, only 11 doctors remained; of these, 2 were left in Coquilhatville. The religious sisters stayed on—about 15 of them. And so, of course, did the Congolese male nurses and medical assistants.

"To this meagre staff was added the experience of two Canadian physicians, Dr. Jonathan Sinclair of Toronto and Dr. Phil Edwards of Montreal, and two nurses, Marguerite Tetrault of Ste. Anne de Bellevue and Johanna Korlu of Toronto. Somehow these Canadians, Belgian doctors, nursing sisters and Congolese medical staff have managed to keep the health services going.

"Yesterday, the day I arrived, I went with Phil Edwards to the 800-bed leprosarium at Iyonda, about 10 miles out of Coquilhatville. In his younger