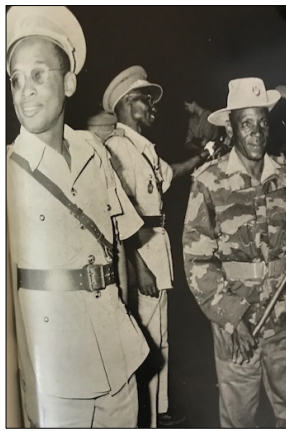




right—Colonel Michel Kiembe, Chief of Staff, Congolese Army (Clovis’ father-in-law); with Colonel Mobutu (Head of State after the coup d’etat). Leopoldville, 30 June 1961.



left—Okapi (forest giraffe) a symbol of peace in the Congo



“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”
(Clovis Mwamba)

CLOVIS MWAMBA The ill-fated voyage of Secretary-General Hammarskjöld’s voyage to The Congo in 1961

Adolf Mora I am sorry we are not meeting in our beautiful five-star-energy office in Docklands. And I’m very sad that we have missed a lovely Papua lunch. But to tell you the truth, home isolation is normal in West Papua, not because of Covid-19, but because of the Indonesian military.

Our first speaker **Mr Clovis Mwamba** from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Mr Hammarskjöld was killed, in suspicious circumstances, just before his West Papua motion was scheduled to be raised in the General Assembly.

Clovis was born in the Congo, in the mineral-rich province of Katanga. In 1960 he was fourteen when the Congo was thrown into chaos by mercenaries, western mining companies, and foreign governments. They were manipulating and supporting Katanga to secede. The Congo’s first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, was executed in Katanga. Clovis’ father-in-law was the Minister of Justice, and was with Lumumba when Mobutu’s troops kidnapped him. A few months later Secretary-General Hammarskjöld was killed as he was flying to Katanga.

Forty years after independence, there was still violence and oppression in the Congo. By then Clovis was an activist, poet, psychologist, and a member of parliament. He was jailed for criticizing the government. “150 lashes in the morning and another 150 in the afternoon”. Eventually he fled, in disguise, along the Congo River, and arrived in Melbourne in 2007.





CLOVIS MWAMBA
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

THE ILL-FATED VOYAGE OF SECRETARY-GENERAL HAMMARSKJÖLD'S VOYAGE TO THE CONGO IN 1961

Much has been said about the 'ill fated voyage' of the nicknamed "Mr H". Many conspiracy theories have been created and the cause of the crash is still an 'ongoing matter'. As a Congolese Elder and an African Muntu living in Melbourne, I tried different ways of thinking and rethinking those sad facts that have occupied my mind since we were shaken by that tragedy back home in 1961.

The airplane crash happened 200 kms from Elisabethville, now known as Lubumbashi, where I lived, in the Katanga region. As far as I can remember, at that time we had Swedish and Irish 'blue helmets' in Katanga because they were of 'white skin'. Among them was Conor Cruise-O'Brien, a Special Representative of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld.

On the day of that 'ill fated arrival' of Dag Hammarskjöld in Leopoldville, O'Brien launched his Operation Rum Punch against the mercenaries. He had got the green light to do so, and a warrant to arrest five of the main Katangese secessionists leaders. He therefore begged the UN Secretary-General to call off his scheduled meeting with Moïse Tshombe, the President of Katanga Province.

We, as "bantu", have a culture of numbers; we live and breathe numbers, they are in our DNA, they have their own character and they speak to us. For instance, I am number 3 as a male, and my wife is number 4 as a female; and together as a married couple we share the number 7 (3+4).

When digging up facts about Congo, particularly during the hectic days following independence, I gained much insight, including from fruitful encounters with key politicians and high ranking officers of the army that I rubbed shoulders with, as well as the intelligence service officers and Western diplomats in my country.

My father-in-law was Deputy Chief of Staff of the Congolese Army at that time and then Chief of Staff when Mobutu staged his coup d'état. Later he became Chief of Staff of the Katangese secession army, so he kept dealing with the UN as he used to in Leopoldville. I therefore came across a string of 'numbers', especially a few worn by Congolese secret agents who were deeply involved in the heated events that turned my country into a 'boiling casserole' of the Cold War. These "Congolese local agents" were living and breathing their codes like cows grazing on the land of their owners' farms. Those brain-washed or successfully colonised by Belgians became informers against their compatriots and, after 30 June 1960, the local agents of the CIA.

For example, the 'liberal and far right' Joseph Mobutu and the 'communist' Antoine Gizenga played a critical role as close collaborators with Patrice Lumumba, the independence leader. But then they stabbed him in the back, igniting the so-called Congolese Political Crisis of 1960 that caused havoc in the world and claimed the deaths—within the same year, 1961—of Prime Minister Lumumba and the UN Secretary-General.



CLOVIS MWAMBA
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Dates, like numbers, also matter in my culture, and equate to facts; although, except for two dates, they have little to say about the Secretary-General's fatal aeroplane crash. These two dates, the 13th and 17th September 1961, are like twin brothers and could unveil facts about the fatal journey of the UN Sec-General in Congo.

There are four days between 13th and 17th SEPTEMBER 1961, between when Dag Hammarskjöld landed in Leopoldville (on the 13th) and the day of the plane crash (on the 17th). This parallels the four days between 13th and 17th JANUARY 1961, between when Prime Minister Lumumba was kidnapped (on the 13th) and when he was executed (on the 17th). Furthermore, most of those pictured in photos of Hammarskjöld's arrival in Leopoldville are the same as those who had visited Lumumba in the military barracks in Katanga after he was kidnapped.

I don't like to raise my finger in accusation against anyone in Congo, in Belgium, or anywhere else, who might have been involved in that ill-fated airplane crash in which the UN Secretary-General lost his life. But with this talk I wanted to point out that his death has much in common with the assassination of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo.

Many Congolese from other parts of Congo who lived in Katanga in 1960 as internally displaced persons, and who were protected by the UN blue helmets owe their lives to Dag Hammarskjöld and the memories of him are still in their hearts. Being one of them, I remember how deeply we felt his death as our own. But we were prevented from mourning in public and expressing our grief. It is very sad that in Congo there have never been any commemorations, no ceremonies, no memorial site celebrating his life and contributions to the people of the Congo. The only official memory of him is a memorial at the site of the plane crash, 10 km from the town of Ndola on the border of Congo and Zambia.

I thank the organisers of this webinar for this opportunity to talk about Dag Hammarskjöld, one of my heroes, as he meant so much for many Congolese, particularly of my generation.

Being asked to speak of Dag at this event inspired me to initiate some form of memorial for him in Congo. This would fulfil the wishes of our first Prime Minister, Lumumba, who always said the Congolese must write their own history. And when we do, Dag Hammarskjöld will be recognised as a true hero of the Congolese liberation from neo-colonialism.

I wish the West Papuans success in their struggle for what was Dag Hammarskjöld's vision – an independent West Papua, free of neo-colonial interference