

TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECHES

Tree-planting for Dag Hammarskjöld and West Papua, Ballarat, 18 September 2020

Speakers Dr Lance Collins, Belinda Coates (Deputy-Mayor, City of Ballarat), John Lawrance and Garry Cooper (Free West Papua, Ballarat), Doug Stewart (Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining & Energy Union), Brett Etherington, Trades Hall Secretary

John Lawrance, Free West Papua, Ballarat

Fifty-nine years ago on this day the 18th of September, Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in Zambia. On behalf of Free West Papua Ballarat Support Group, I would like to welcome everyone to this tree-planting in memory and in honour of Dag Hammarskjöld.

Dr Lance Collins will now give us an outline of Dag's life and work. Lance in a former career was Lieutenant-Colonel, Head of Military Intelligence, in Timor Leste, twenty years ago during the humanitarian intervention. Thank you Lance

Dr Lance Collins

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and congratulations to Ballarat people for coming out in weather like this. I want to make a few remarks about Dag Hammarskjöld, who he was as a man, some remarks about the Congo because that's unfortunately how he achieved such fame, and a few remarks about his legacy.

Dag Hammarskjöld was a Swedish economist and diplomat who served as the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. Hammarskjöld still remains the youngest person to have held the post, being only 47 years old when he was appointed in 1953. He loved painting, poetry and music. A talented athlete, he had skills in gymnastics, mountain climbing and skiing. At the age of 56, he died in an aircraft crash on 18 Sep 1961 in northern Rhodesia. At the time he was flying to negotiate a ceasefire between the government of the Congo and Katangese secessionists. He died unmarried without children. President John Kennedy called him 'the greatest statesman of our century.'

Hammarskjöld was a noted UN reformer who tried to ease tensions between Israel and Arab states, negotiated the release of US prisoners after the Korean War, and established the UN Emergency Force and peacekeepers after the Suez Crisis in 1956.

In 1960 Hammarskjöld was called upon to solve the Congo Crisis which sputtered on until 1965, costing some 100,000 lives. The term Congo Crisis, refers to the former colonial Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo, based at Kinshasa (pop 14 mil) on the south bank of the Congo River. By contrast, the current Republic of Congo, with its capital at Brazzaville (pop 2 mil) facing Kinshasa from the north bank of the Congo River, was part of the former French colony of French Equatorial Africa

The Congo crisis began almost immediately after the former Belgian colony won its decolonisation struggle against a regime noted for its brutality. The Congo was ill-prepared for independence. Violence soon broke out – between factions in the army, between various ethnic groups and between Africans and remaining whites, primarily Belgians. With foreign mining companies and mercenaries in the mix, the conflict rapidly became another of the Cold War's proxy conflicts. The Congo government based in Kinshasa (formally Léopoldville) faced

secession movements by Belgian backed Katangese and other rebels based in the south-east. The UN sent peacekeepers but refused to use them to support Leopoldville.

Some of the peacekeepers were Irish soldiers deployed in remote areas, including the mining hamlet of Jadotville. The US nuclear Manhattan Project identified the mine near Jadotville as a significant source of uranium. Product from the mine was used in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 2016 a rather good movie called *The Siege of Jadotville* was made about the stand (13- 17 Sep 1961) of 155 Irish UN troops against 3000-5000 Katangese rebels commanded and heavily supported by French, Belgian and other European mercenaries with heavier armament and a ground attack aircraft. The Irish inflicted disproportionate casualties on the attackers but were forced to surrender after five days when ammunition, rations and water were exhausted. The film gives a pretty good account of the politics behind the event. It also includes a segment dramatizing the death of Dag Hammarskjöld.

A 1962 inquiry by the Rhodesian government (now Zimbabwe) concluded pilot error was the cause of the crash.¹ An initial UN investigation was inconclusive. Other reports suggested the plane was shot down with the CIA blaming the Russians.² In 1998 South African government documents – pointing to the US and UK, along with Belgian mining interests having a hand in the affair – were dismissed with the hint of disinformation.³ A 2015 investigation ordered by the Secretary General of the UN gave ‘moderate’ value to then recently emerged sources indicated the presence of other aircraft and intelligence assets in the area of the crash. Research for a 2019 documentary film indicated a Belgian pilot, Jan van Risseghem – with mercenary associations who flew with the RAF during WWII and married a British wife – had been named as shooting down Hammarskjöld’s plane.⁴ As recently as May 2020 the UK, in contrast to many other states, reiterated its refusal to release intelligence documents relating to the case.⁵

These represent merely a sliver of the widespread and growing commitment to establishing the facts of the crash. Be that as it may, the following bloody decades of decolonisation might have been different if Dag Hammarskjöld had lived to lead the United Nations Organisation to its highest ideals. In that event, and closer to home, the sham 1963 UN sponsored plebiscite that delivered half of New Guinea and its people to occupying Indonesian troops, might have been conducted differently. Sixteen people lost their lives in that plane crash in northern Rhodesia in September 1961. Many more people lost their lives from that crash. In the end, Dag Hammarskjöld wrote his own legacy.

‘We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put into it is ours. He who wills adventure will experience it – according to the measure of his courage. He who wills sacrifice will be sacrificed – according to the measure of his purity of heart.’

Dag Hammarskjöld should be remembered.

¹ Borger, Julian (17 August 2011). "[Dag Hammarskjöld: evidence suggests UN chief's plane was shot down](#)". The Guardian. Retrieved 2 August 2014.

² Jamie Doward, "[Spy messages could finally solve mystery of UN chief's death crash](#)", *The Guardian* 13 Dec 2014.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dag_Hammarskjöld

⁴ [Emma Graham-Harrison](#), Andreas Rocksen and Mads Brügger, RAF veteran ‘admitted 1961 killing of UN secretary general’, *The Guardian*, 13 Jan 19, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/12/raf-veteran-admitted-killing-un-secretary-general-dag-hammarskjöld-in-1961>. Refers to 2019 documentary film, [Cold Case Hammarskjöld](#),

⁵ UNA, Westminster Branch, UK, 28 May 20, <http://www.unawestminster.org.uk/news.html>, retrieved 17 Sep 20.

Brett Etherington, Secretary, Trades Hall, Ballarat and Western Regions

Thank you brothers and sisters. I just reiterate pretty much what Lance has summed up but that for a moment in time, but for a different decision, the world today could be a very different place for the people of Congo, for the people of West Papua, for the people of other nations like Western Sahara. Had the decolonization program been allowed to continue, had Dag not died in the plane crash on that day, we may live in a very different world.

So today, we pause to remember his untimely death, but also to reiterate the very strong need in our world to reinvigorate and re-imagine his ideals and his vision for a world and for peoples of formerly colonized nations to have their democratic freedoms and rights in self-determining the futures of their country.

Belinda Coates, Deputy-Mayor, City of Ballarat

Thanks everyone for attending today, it's so nice to see you all here. I'll acknowledge that we are gathering on Wathaurong land, and pay respects to their traditional custodians, and acknowledge their ongoing connection to the land and waterways. And also acknowledge that Australia is a colonized country as well.

So thank you to John Lawrance and Free West Papua Ballarat for organizing the day. Thank you to Ballarat Trades Hall for the support. And thank you to Dr Lance Collins for those incredible words to fill us in on the background and the story of the significance today.

It really is dear to my heart the movements associated with peace, be it democracy, diplomacy, and decolonization.

I'd also like to thank our City of Ballarat staff for supporting this day today and providing the tree, so we have a beautiful white cedar that also grows in West Papua apparently, and we have some staff with us to assist with the planting in honour of Dag Hammarskjöld. Hopefully we'll get some rain over the weekend to help it grow and flourish and we can come back here and acknowledge this as a very significant event and moment.