

In February 1961 the French military authorities advised the ICRC of the disappearance of some soldiers probably captured during an engagement on the defence line near the Tunisian frontier. What the ICRC emissaries in Tunis had to do was to obtain confirmation of these captures. Up to the last days of 1961 no precise information had been given with the exception of some verbal assurances, but on December 30, the ICRC received the news that the GPRA had decided to make a gesture of clemency by releasing two French soldiers.

The Central Tracing Agency at the ICRC headquarters immediately communicated the names of the two men to their families and on the same evening of the 30th, Mr. Gaillard went to Tunis. On the next day he took charge of the two prisoners and handed them over to the French authorities.

The two men did not complain about the conditions of their capture or detention but they deplored the fact that, for almost a year, they had not been able to communicate either with their families or with the ICRC. The latter, which is delighted at this release, has nevertheless insisted that the three other prisoners, whose names were supplied by the two soldiers who had been released, be allowed by the GPRA to write to their families without delay, through the Central Tracing Agency.

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## **THE ICRC IN KATANGA**

### **THE ICRC AND THE EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS IN KATANGA**

Whilst the Swedish Government and the United Nations were making their representations, the International Committee of the Red Cross actively contributed to the release of the fifteen members of the UNO forces (eleven Swedes, two Norwegians and two Irish) prisoners of the Katangans, who were exchanged for thirty-three

Katanga troops. From the beginning of their detention, the ICRC, in accordance with its specific attributions, attempted to ensure that these prisoners benefited from its protection.

During the course of the visits which Mr. G. C. Senn, delegate of the ICRC, made to the prisoners of both sides, he was able to speak with them freely and without witnesses, and then intervened with the detaining authorities to have improvements made in their conditions of internment. Whilst taking these steps, he also negotiated for their release. He had several meetings with the United Nations representatives in Elisabethville as well as with the Katanga authorities on this subject. One fact which greatly facilitated these negotiations was the return to Elisabethville of the thirty-three Katanga prisoners which UNO had transferred to Leopoldville, whose return Mr. Senn had repeatedly requested.

Previously, the delegate of the ICRC had already succeeded in negotiating an exchange on a smaller scale by obtaining the release of two Swedish officers and two other ranks, as well as of the deputy to the Inspector-General of the Katanga Police, of a policeman and of two members of the Katanga Gendarmerie. All these arrests had been made by mistake on both sides.

From December 24, the Katanga Minister of the Interior had requested Mr. Senn to intervene on behalf of the four policemen held by UNO. The four Swedish prisoners, who had been arrested on the 27th, were only detained for 24 hours, the exchange having taken place on the 28th. On the following day, the delegate of the ICRC was called to the centre of Luano, near Elisabethville, to take charge of a certain number of other Katanga gendarmes which a Swedish company had arrested, also in error.

#### THANKS FROM SCANDINAVIA

Following on the exchange of prisoners in Katanga, the International Committee of the Red Cross received a telegram from Stockholm expressing the Government's gratitude and that of the families of the released Swedish prisoners. This message stated in particular : " The presence of mind and the efforts of the Red Cross, in maintaining contact with the prisoners and in negotiating for

their exchange in spite of every difficulty, have been greatly appreciated by all in Sweden. According to unanimous reports, Mr. Senn has worked with courage and with outstanding competence, and to him is largely due the credit for what has been done."

The Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs also expressed his Government's thanks to the ICRC "and especially to the representative of the Red Cross in Katanga for all aid and assistance given to UNOC personnel detained in Katanga, which comprised two Norwegian subjects, and for all the efforts made for their release."

The President of the Swedish Red Cross, for his part, also sent a telegram to the ICRC, expressing "most sincere appreciation for your effective and successful intervention on behalf of the Swedish UNO personnel held by the Katanga forces."

#### RELIEF ACTION ON BEHALF OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

The civilian population has frequently been subjected to extremely painful experiences as a result of the hostilities in Katanga, from which in many cases it has not been able to recover properly, particularly in Elisabethville. This has prompted the delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. G. C. Senn, to undertake various relief actions, and particularly to organize the evacuation of civilians from areas threatened by fighting. However, for military reasons it has not always been possible to carry out the evacuations scheduled. Such was the case at Square Uvira, situated in the North-West of the European quarter of Elisabethville.

On December 15, the ICRC delegate was informed by the UNO Command that the evacuation of this area could not take place but that it would be possible to organize the supplying under Red Cross auspices, of some 200 people, European and Africans, who were in the area. This task was embarked upon by the Katanga Red Cross under the supervision of the ICRC delegate.

Electricity and water mains to Square Uvira had been cut off and a round-the-clock curfew had also been imposed on the

inhabitants. On December 16, the ICRC delegate informed them that relief supplies would shortly be arriving, but as there was continual firing in the area UNO troops launched a mopping up operation to allow the Red Cross vehicles to advance without undue risk. This delayed the arrival of supplies until the 17th, and even then snipers were still active.

On arrival in Square Uvira, Mr. Senn and members of the Katanga Red Cross found the Europeans in a state of great anxiety and some women in a state of hysteria. The sight of the Red Cross vehicles was a great comfort to them. A second relief convoy was organized on the afternoon of the same day, to bring urgently needed medicaments to the inhabitants of the square.

This operation had its counterpart in numerous other relief actions which the ICRC delegate organized on behalf of the civilian population during the events in Katanga.

Within the last few days, Mr. Senn has left via Stanleyville, for Kongolo, in Northern Katanga, where a number of missionaries were massacred during recent disorders. His intention is to carry out distributions of foodstuffs and medicaments to the civilian population.

#### TRACING MISSING PERSONS

Following the events in Katanga, a fairly large number of people have lost track of certain of their close relatives and have approached the Central Tracing Agency at ICRC headquarters in order to find them. These requests, numbering more than 500, have been forwarded by the Katanga Red Cross, the effectiveness of whose co-operation can be judged from the fact that to date it has been possible to give positive replies in nearly 70 per cent of the cases.

Since the beginning of the trouble in the Congo in the summer of 1960, the Central Tracing Agency has opened 1,150 enquiries. Although the majority of the requests concerned Belgian nationals, they sometimes referred to settlers of other nationalities as well as Congolese without news of their relatives cut off in other regions of this vast country.

## AN IMPORTANT EVACUATION OPERATION

The ICRC delegate has also played an active part in another operation which has made a notable contribution towards easing the situation in Katanga. This was the evacuation of a contingent of Katangan troops and their families who had been placed under the protection of United Nations forces in Albertville.

During the hostilities which broke out in this district of North Katanga between troops of the Congolese national army and Katanga police, a certain number of the latter found themselves cut off from their units. To avoid being captured by the Congolese troops they successfully sought the protection of the UNO forces who put quarters at their disposal. However, a rumour spread round Elisabethville that these Katanga policemen were being considered as prisoners of war, and General Muke, Chief of the Katanga forces saw the ICRC delegate Mr. Senn and asked him to intervene. The latter mediated between the Katanga General and UNO and the ensuing negotiations resulted in an arrangement under the terms of which a commission was to go to Albertville to offer the interned police the possibility of choosing freely between being transferred to Elisabethville or remaining in Albertville under UNO protection. This commission was composed of the ICRC delegate, a civilian representative of UNO, the President of the Katanga Red Cross and an interpreter.

The members of the commission consulted all the Katanga policemen interned in Albertville, everyone of whom expressed the desire to be repatriated to Elisabethville together with the members of their families. In all 317 persons were thus to be transferred, consisting of 123 men, their wives and children.

A four-engined DC 4 was used for the airlift operations, which took place in rainy weather and lasted a week. The distance between Albertville and Elisabethville is about 600 km.