

# C.I.A. SAID TO SEND REBELS IN ANGOLA WEAPONS VIA ZAIRE

By JAMES BROOKE  
Special to The New York Times

KAMINA, Zaire — In a highly secret operation, the Central Intelligence Agency has used an abandoned air base here to airlift arms to guerrillas in Angola, diplomatic and business sources say.

Landing largely at night, C-130 and Boeing 707 cargo jets with the markings "Santa Lucia Airways" arrived here with arms deliveries on three occasions last year, the sources said.

"The operation was directed by a black American everyone called Colonel," one diplomat said. "He was in charge of about 20 men. Very few Zairois were involved."

## Zaire Has Denied Accusations

President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire has repeatedly denied accusations by other African leaders that American aid to the Angolan rebels led by Jonas Savimba passes through Zaire. Largely supplied by South Africa, the guerrillas of the Union for the Total Independence of Angola, or Unita, are fighting to overthrow Angola's Marxist Government.

American aid to Unita, budgeted at \$15 million last year, started flowing in late 1985. United States officials have refused to disclose the supply route. Transfer through South Africa would violate an American embargo on arms shipments to South Africa.

Diplomats at the American Embassy in Kinshasa and at the American Consulate in Lubumbashi, 250 miles southeast of here, declined to discuss the military aid to Unita.

[In Washington, a spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency, Sharon Foster, said that the agency would not confirm or deny any allegation of covert activities, but that "any covert activity we might be conducting would be in support of U.S. policy and under appropriate authority."]

## Highly Sensitive Issue

The issue is highly sensitive in Zaire. Two years ago, Zaire and Angola signed a mutual nonaggression pact. Residents interviewed here refused to talk about air traffic at the base, which is 14 miles out of town.

But according to Western diplomats, aid workers and businessmen in Kin-

shasa and Lubumbashi, most of the aid has been funneled through here.

The Kamina air base was built in the 1950's by Belgium, which administered Zaire at the time as the Belgian Congo. The base, once the largest between the Sahara and South Africa, has since fallen into ruin. But the two runways, measuring about 7,000 feet each, are still in good repair, according to civilian pilots who have landed on them recently.

According to the sources, the light blue cargo planes of Santa Lucia Airways made arms deliveries here on three occasions: between March 20 and April 20, for two weeks between May 15 and 30, and during one night in mid-October.

Most of the landings were at night, but in May "it was day and night — quite some activity," one source said.

From the air, the two landing strips and the dozens of support buildings spread out across a table flat plain of wooded savannah. The base is closed to unauthorized visitors, whether by air or from Kamina, a railroad junction town of 100,000.

Last July, Defense Minister Francois-Xavier de Donnea of Belgium visited the base in the company of several Belgian newspaper reporters.

"To the left and right of the runway

there are small holes with lights on them — it's American material that can be immediately removed," one reporter wrote in De Standdaard, a Belgian newspaper, of the visit. "Among other places, it is from here that the Americans supply the Angola guerrilla units. The night flights of the American planes apparently stopped a few weeks ago. But the installations are still there so operations can be started up at any moment."

Roads from Kamina to Angola — 200 miles west of here — are largely impassable. There is a railroad line from here to Angola, but is not believed to have been used for shipping the arms. According to sources, the arms were flown from here to Jamba, Mr. Savimbi's bush headquarters in southeastern Angola.

Aid workers along the probable flight path have reported hearing cargo planes passing overhead at night.

Kamina is believed to be one of at least two supply points in Zaire for the rebels.

Last November, Angolan military officials reported that Unita had opened a new front in northeastern Angola, 100 miles south of Kinshasa.

## U.S. Cargo Planes

Pilots have reported frequent instances of American military C-130 and C-141 cargo planes landing at Kinshasa airport.

An American businessman said he

asked two American military pilots at Kinshasa airport in January whether they were heading "north or south."

"One said 'north,' the other said 'south,'" the businessman recalled.

American military officials say the military planes are either carrying American military aid to Chad or military aid for Zaire.

The Reagan Administration granted \$15 million in emergency aid to Chad in December. United States military aid to Zaire was \$6.9 million last year, and is expected to fall to \$4 million this year.

Reports that American military aid was secretly funneled through here coincide with larger American interests in this remote corner of Zaire. Known as the Shaba region, the area is a major copper exporter and produces 60 percent of the world's cobalt, a strategic mineral used in airplane manufacturing.

In 1977 and 1978, secessionist rebels based in Angola tried to seize control of the region, formerly known as Katanga.

## 200 Americans in Shaba

There are only 200 Americans living in Shaba, but the American consulate in Lubumbashi, the regional capital has 12 full-time staff members.

It is not considered a backwater post. The consul previously served as a State Department liaison in the planning of the invasion of Grenada in 1983.

The new political officer recently completed a tour as political officer in Chad, an important African post for the United States.

Shaba is one of two areas in Zaire the United States has targeted for its aid program, administered by the Agency for International Development.

A.I.D. is rebuilding 3,000 miles of dirt roads in Shaba. Last year, A.I.D. started rebuilding two roads, totaling 600 miles, that run roughly parallel to the Angola border about 50 miles inside Zaire.

In an interview, Dennis M. Chandler, A.I.D.'s director in Kinshasa, said these road projects were designed to restore agricultural production, which has dropped sharply with the collapse of Zaire's road system.

## Plan to Rebuild Base

"We are doing there what we are doing in the rest of the country," Mr. Chandler said of the road work near the Angolan border.

In a separate effort, American military officials in Kinshasa are known to be anxious to win American aid to rebuild Kamina base. If renovated, the base could provide rapid access to southern Africa.

In November 1985, Gen. Richard Lawson of the Air Force, at the time second in command of the European Command, landed at the base in a 707 to inspect its condition.

ILLEGIB J

Continued

Earlier that year, a team of American engineers visited the base and concluded that it would cost \$60 million to 100 million to repair the dilapidated installations.

In December, in a classified State Department briefing paper delivered to President Reagan on the eve of a visit to Washington by President Mobutu, diplomats argued for spending \$20 million to rebuild the base.

#### No Action on Proposal

According to one source, the proposal included spending \$2 million on runway lights, \$4 million on runway rehabilitation, \$6 million on building repairs. To the dismay of American officials in Kinshasa, the White House has not acted on the proposal.

"A lot of people go through Kamina but no one wants to invest in it," a Western military official complained.

Despite American military interest in Kamina, the secret airlift here appears to have been conducted by the C.I.A., independent of American military, diplomatic or aid personnel.

#### Belgians Stationed at Base

Three Belgian military officers are stationed at the base as part of an aid program, but they are not believed to have been involved.

Limited Zairian assistance was provided by elements of the Service of Military Action and Reconnaissance, a military intelligence unit, sources said.

Historically, President Mobutu, ha-

had close links to the C.I.A. In 1965, the year he took power, C.I.A. agents in Kinshasa used to give him daily briefings on world affairs. In the mid-1970's the C.I.A. sent arms through Zaire to guerrilla factions fighting in Angola.

During his weeklong visit to Washington in December, President Mobutu met with William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence. Mr. Casey reportedly visited Zaire last year.

President Mobutu's internal intelligence systems keep a tight control of activities here, and it is inconceivable that the arms supply operation could take place without his knowledge, analysts say.

On Jan. 24, police agents in Lubumbashi, Zaire, prevented the writer of the dispatch above from boarding a plane to Kinshasa. In a one-hour interrogation, the agents repeatedly asked if the correspondent, James Brooke, was investigating allegations that Zaire is a transfer point for arms to Unita.

On Jan. 26, the United States Ambassador to Zaire, Brandon H. Grove Jr., conveyed a message from the Zairian Government to Mr. Brooke that if he wrote about the Zaire-Unita relationship, the Zairian authorities would never again grant him an entry visa. The Ambassador stressed that he was merely passing along the message.



The New York Times/Feb. 1, 1987

Two landing strips are about 14 miles from Kamina.