

## WH6411-26-6439\_scroller

**Date:** 1964-11-21

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Dean Rusk

**Participant:** Cyrus R. Vance

**Start Time:** 21:42

**Place:** LBJ Ranch

SCROLLER TITLE: "OK, Go Ahead"

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson received a briefing from Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. "Cy" Vance about a proposed operation in which American planes would drop Belgian paratroopers into the Congo to rescue hostages held by rebel forces in the city of Stanleyville. After asking specific questions about the plan and receiving assurance that his national security team supported it, the President authorized the mission.

**President Johnson:** Repeat that. How many Americans?

**Dean Rusk:** There'll be about 200 military air crews on those planes . . . but no combat troops.

**President Johnson:** Well, how are they going to—they're going to shoot the planes down, you mean, that's the danger?

**Rusk:** Well, we could lose some Americans if they shot the planes down. That's right.

**Cyrus R. "Cy" Vance:** That's right, sir.

**Rusk:** But these will be given cover with T-28s and B-26s that are already in the [Democratic Republic of the] Congo, and they would use these planes to go ahead of the drop and also to help them deliver suppressive fire, if anything comes out of the ground at them.

**President Johnson:** Do they have any antiaircraft?

**Rusk:** We're not absolutely certain what is at Stanleyville at this point. They had some. Some of the antiaircraft that they had at Stanleyville turned up in Bukavu, so we know that some of it was moved away. But we don't know what is there or who's there to man it. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] But these planes should—these T-28s and B-26s—should be able to find that out before the paratroop-carrying planes actually arrive on the scene.

**President Johnson:** Mmm. There are a thousand men in the paratroop group?

**Vance:** That's right, sir.

**President Johnson:** Mm-hmm.

**Rusk:** Now, this is a highly trained, elite group, and it's actually the palace guard in Belgium. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] This is the best outfit they've got. The Belgians are very confident that if they get down, and if they get there, that they will not run into serious problems. They've had a lot of experience in the Congo, and they feel certain that if it is necessary to commit these troops, that the troops themselves will take care of themselves.

**President Johnson:** Where is [W. Averell] Harriman?

**Rusk:** He's sitting right here.

**President Johnson:** Does he agree?

**Rusk:** [*speaking aside to Harriman*] Do you agree, [*unclear*]? [*Harriman responds faintly in the background.*] [*to President Johnson*] Yes, he agrees very much.

**President Johnson:** All right. I'd go on, then.

**Rusk:** All right, sir.

**President Johnson:** Good night.

**Rusk:** We'll call you tomorrow.

**President Johnson:** Yeah. [Robert S.] Bob McNamara agrees with this?

**Vance:** Yes, he does, sir.

**President Johnson:** OK, go ahead.

**Rusk:** Thank you, sir.

*End of excerpt.*

CITATION: Conversation WH6411-26-6439, 21 November 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Draft Transcript, Presidential Recordings Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.