

U Thant, 54, Reviews United Nations Roles

By RALPH TEATSBORTH
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United Nations, N.Y.—UPI—
U Thant of Burma, who pre-
sides over a vast earthly en-
terprise to build a Utopia,
will observe his 54th birth-
day anniversary Tuesday
(Jan. 22) in his usual quiet
way.

It was just another work-
ing day for the United Na-
tions Secretary-General. But
on this anniversary he reflected
with some satisfaction on
events of the last three
months that have left their
indelible mark on his career.

First was his peacemaker
role in the Cuban crisis last
October. His personal mission
to Havana helped ease what
he had called at the outset
the most dangerous confrontation
of major powers since World
War II.

At the time of his trip to
Cuba, Thant was acting Sec-
retary-General. He was called
to that job on Nov. 3, 1961,
because of his reputation as a
skilled diplomat and, incident-
ally, because he was the only
man the big powers could
agree upon to succeed the
late Dag Hammarskjold.

Wins Full Term
The Cuban affair establish-
ed, in any case, that Thant
is a trouble-shooter of inter-
national stature. He was un-
animously elected to a full term
as Secretary-General on Nov.
30.

In his acceptance speech to
the general assembly, he re-
called his own conditions for
taking the assignment: 1) that
an early settlement of the
Congo problem be reach-
ed; 2) that the United Na-
tions be stabilized as "a po-
tent force for peace"; 3) that
he play a "humble" part in
easing tensions and, 4) that
he prove himself able to
"bridge somewhat the gulf
between the two giants."

Significantly, he put the
Congo at the top of his pri-
orities list.
Thant has staked his own
prestige and that of the United
Nations on a determina-
tion to unify the Congo,
bring it stability and remove
from it the "crisis" label.

Thus, by his own standard,
Thant will measure his suc-
cess as secretary-general by
the kind of Congo solution
that is finally achieved.

When he took over the
helm of the UN secretariat,
Hammarskjold had just given
his life trying to clear up the
chaos in the Congo, the world
organization was teetering on
the edge of bankruptcy and
members were split on UN
policies in the Congo.

A less dynamic and dedi-
cated man might have been
swallowed up by the magni-
tude of the task. But that de-
veloped a plan based on the
inflexible minimum demand
that Katanga be forced to re-
main in the republic.

Problem Still Here
The Congo problem is far
from solved after two and
one-half years, but the pros-
pects are improving. For one
thing, it appears Moise Tschombe
will not realize his
dream of secession.

Thant is no carbon copy of
Hammarskjold. Yet their aims
and their concept of the job
of the secretary-general are
remarkably similar.

The moon-faced Burmese
believes, like Hammarskjold,
in the efficacy of quiet diplo-
macy.

Thant, perhaps more than
Hammarskjold, subscribes to
the Hegelian theory of syn-
thesis—the combination of

the parts (nations) into a
whole (a world united).
He sees a distinct possi-
bility of the United States and
Russia moving toward better
mutual understanding, per-
haps even a new alliance.

Some Grumble
While Thant enjoys wide-
spread support among UN
members, this does not go to
the point of unqualified en-
dorsement of his every act.
There has been grumbling
over several of his decisions,
particularly on Congo policy
to which each of the big pow-
ers has taken some excep-
tion.

The Soviet government is
dissatisfied with the number
of UN jobs held by Russians
and has kept pressure on
Thant to get more. The So-
viet acquiesced in the elec-
tion of a single UN executive
last November, but have not
given up their stand that a
troika would be better.

The day Thant was elected
secretary-general for a term
of five years from the date
he became acting secretary-
general, U. S. Ambassador
Adlai E. Stevenson said the
American delegation would
have preferred that the five
years date from April, 1963,
when Hammarskjold's term
would have expired. The
shorter term was in defer-
ence to Thant's own wish.

Currently, Thant has Pres-
ident Kennedy's substantial
backing. Nowhere is this more
apparent than in the U. S.
support of the secretary-gen-
eral's "tough" policy in the
Congo. Some of the United
States' chief allies are dis-
pleased by this.

But this does not deter
Thant from being frank with
Americans. He has said he is
convinced they fail to under-
stand the full significance of
Russia's change in political
climate under Khrushchev, or
to appreciate the latter's pro-
fessed desire for peace.

Descriptions of Thant of-
ten contain such adjectives as
"mild mannered," "so-spoken,"
"calm" and "gentle." These
certainly are applicable
but they tend to conceal the
iron will of the man.

A UN diplomat said, "when
you scrape the patina off this
Buddha, you find hard metal
underneath."

Is Buddhist
Thant is a confirmed Bud-
dhist and has said it is a very
practical religion for a diplo-
mat. "The teachings of
Buddhism are focused primar-
ily on the need to maintain
a mental and emotional equi-
librium," he explained.

"Buddhism calls for medi-
tation and concentration. It
purges passion and evil
thoughts. It is essentially a
religion of peace and love.
It teaches that one will be
more highly esteemed and re-
spected if one keeps calm
and has emotional equilibri-
um."

Thant jolted the diplomatic
set a bit last year with his
diplomatic reference to Ka-
tanga chief Moise Tschombe
and his associates as "a bunch
of clowns." Even some who
agreed with that appraisal
felt he should have put it an-
other way.

Smokes Cheroots
Thant's affection for ter-
ribly black Burmese cheroots
is well known. When asked
the other day whether his cigar
consumption had gone up
since he became world public
servant No. 1, he replied,
"I'm afraid it has."

"How many do you smoke
per day?"

"Too many!"
Friends estimate he smokes
upward of 10 a day.
During his trip to Cuba,
Thant gave prime minister
Fidel Castro some of his cher-
oots. He was asked later if
Castro smoked them.

"Yes, he lit one and took
a few puffs," Thant replied.
"Then he put it down and
I didn't see him pick it up
again."

Arises Early
Thant's working day is not
much different from that he
followed as Burma's ambas-
sador to the United Nations.
He's a 6 a.m. riser. He reads,
breakfasts and is driven to
the office by a UN chauffeur,
usually arriving for work
about 9:30 a.m.

When he reaches his 38th
floor office and settles down
to the Scandinavian modern
desk selected by Hammars-
kjold, he first reads cables
from Leopoldville and other
sensitive spots. He goes over
a number of documents.

After this period of ori-
entation, he begins staff
meetings. The participants
vary with the business at
hand. More often than not,
they include Dr. Ralph J.
Bunche of the United States,
Chakravarti V. Narasimhan
of India, Eugny D. Kiselev of
the Soviet Union, Omar Loutfi
of the United Arab Repub-
lic, and his military advisor,
Brigadier Indarjit Rikhye of
India.

Works at Lunch
Lunch is a 90-minute af-
fair in his suite between mor-
ning and afternoon calls. Us-
ually it is a "working lunch"
with chief assistants. The
food is standard fare from
the UN dining room. Occa-
sionally, Thant accepts an in-
vitation to lunch in the fourth
floor delegates' dining room.

The "hour of decision" falls
in the late afternoon. The
mullied over; it's time for ac-
tion. The secretary-general
day's problems have been
frequently is called upon to
give the final word, to
approve a communique, or to
issue an order.

When things are wrapped
into a package as neat as
exigencies permit, he may
drop in at a diplomatic party,
especially if it's held at the
United Nations.

The secretary-general, ex-
cept in emergencies, will
leave headquarters between
8:30 and 9:30 p.m. He retires
at about 11 a.m.

He rarely accepts dinner
engagements because he
wants to be home in the evening
to preserve some kind of
family life.

His two-story, 14-room
house in the Riverdale sec-
tion of northern New York
City overlooks the Hudson
river. It is off the main road
and has a pleasant garden and
swimming pool.
The pool is not just for
looks. Thant is an enthusias-
tic swimmer. He dreams of
finding time to engage in the
sport again.
When Thant became acting
secretary-general, he was
living in an 11-room apart-
ment on Manhattan's East
72nd street. He moved out

after an unpleasant experi-
ence. New York rent control
authorities accused the land-
lord of overcharging Thant,
who was not a party to the
action.

The landlord, defending
himself against the state's
charges, said the secretary-
general's family and guests
had damaged the premises.
Specific mention was made
of damage allegedly inflicted
by cats.

Some time later, an assist-
ant found it necessary to men-

tion the painful cat episode
to Thant while the latter was
reading a thick document.

Thant put down the docu-
ment with some emphasis and
said, "from disarmament to
cats. What's next on the
agenda?"

Has Private Life
The secretary-general in-
sists on keeping his private
life just that. His wife is Daw
Thein Tin (Burmese women
do not change their names
when they marry). Their 22-
year-old daughter, Aye Aye,

a Hunter College graduate,
and her husband, Tyn Myint
U, live with them. The secre-
tary-general's only son, Tin
Maung, was killed in an acci-
dent in Burma last year.

As acting secretary-gen-
eral, Thant made official visits
to Sweden, Denmark, Britain,
Norway, Switzerland, Ireland,
France, Finland, Brazil, The
Soviet Union, Poland, Czech-
oslovakia, Austria and the
United States.

Associates report he "fares
very well under pressure"

and shows amazing stamina
in his travels despite satura-
tion scheduling.

At home he prefers Bur-
mese foods. As a traveler, he
is likely to eat a light break-
fast of two eggs and coffee.

He prefers beef at his prin-
cipal meal. He enjoys a glass
or two of wine with dinner,
or two of light beer other-
wise. His favorite alcoholic
beverages are daiquiri cock-
tail and Dubonnet on the
rocks.

Thant has only one name.

Hardly anyone would chal-
lenge the popular belief that
the secretary-general's job
is a "killer."

Thant's own brief comment
on his position speaks vol-
umes.
"It is a very lonely job,"
he said.

The "U" stands for "Uncle"
or "Respected One." But he
modestly signs his name
Maung Thant. "Maung"
means "brother" and connotes
a less important station than
"U."

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