

Rescuers probe wreckage of Dag's plane after mystery-shrouded crash.



HOW DID DAG HAMMARSKJOLD DIE?

A mystery, says the United Nations; not so, replies a European journalist who claims to have uncovered a sensational plot that led to world-shaking tragedy

By JOHN KENT

ON SEPT. 17, 1961, a DC-6B carrying United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold on a peace mission in the Congo crashed near Ndola, Northern Rhodesia.

There were no survivors.

A UN commission began a lengthy investigation, but its official report was inconclusive. The commission did not rule out the possibility that Hammarskjold's plane had been sabotaged or attacked by enemy forces—and it left some major questions unanswered.

For example, why did the Swedish pilot, after saying he would land at Ndola in a few minutes, suddenly veer away? Why did he fail to pick up altitude on his westward course when he knew he was dangerously low?

A Swedish journalist, Teddy Lindstrom, says he has uncovered sensational answers to these mysteries. How he got them is a cloak-and-dagger story in itself that begins with a tip from a French officer in the Katangese army.

"Hammarskjold's death was no accident," the Frenchman said. "He was the victim of a kidnap plot." And then he gave Lindstrom the name of a Belgian already implicated in the murder of Congo leader Patrice Lumumba.

"The Belgian is hiding in Europe," the informant said. "I doubt you will find him."

It took months of trailing, but Lindstrom found his man hiding in terror in a villa on Lake Geneva, Switzerland.

Here is the story the fugitive told Lindstrom:

A group of European businessmen wanted United Nations troops withdrawn from the war-torn Congo because they were preventing Katanga province from seceding from the new African nation. With the UN gone, Katanga could easily achieve independence—and the Europeans could win control of its vast natural resources.

The Europeans devised a plan to kidnap Hammarskjold. The ransom: withdrawal of UN troops. It was simple to hire a gunman—a former lieutenant in the Belgian army—and get him aboard. Hammarskjold's plane left Leopoldville just after 5 p.m. (Sept. 16). There was a great deal of confusion, and it was then the man slipped aboard.



But something went wrong with the plan. Nobody can be sure what, but the Belgian believes this happened:

The gunman slipped into the cockpit and leveled a pistol at the pilot. He ordered the crew to fly to Kolwezi, where the Europeans would seize Hammarskjold as a hostage. The crew seemingly complied, and about 10 p.m. the pilot told a control tower below that airport lights were in sight.

The hijacker assumed this was the Kolwezi tower, but he had been tricked. The pilot had followed a confusing course and was in contact with his original destination, Ndola.

According to the Belgian soldier of fortune interviewed by Lindstrom, something in the control tower's landing instructions must have tipped the hijacker to the pilot's deception. The plane soared low over the tower. Then radio contact was broken, and the plane turned west.

HOURS LATER, a search party came upon the wreckage. Hammarskjold had been thrown from the wreckage and had lived for a few hours. An American UN employee was still alive but died before telling what happened.

"Hammarskjold's death was an accident," the Belgian told Lindstrom. "It was never our intention to kill him. We think the pilot tried to throw our gunman off balance by making a sudden steep dive. But he was unexpectedly low and crashed into the jungle."

The official UN report says 16 bodies were found in the wreckage, all crew members or UN personnel. Original reports from the scene mentioned 17 bodies. Was there a 17th passenger, an unaccountable mystery passenger?

The UN report concedes that security precautions at Leopoldville were lax, and it calls the plane's dangerously low altitude an "abnormal fact." On no other pertinent points, however, does it agree with Lindstrom's story.

Yet both French and Swiss secret agents reportedly have confirmed that the DC-6B was hijacked, and Paris sources say the former French commander of the Katangese army, a Major Faulques, is writing a book which will substantiate this version of the tragedy.

How did Hammarskjold die? It's a question without a definite answer to this day—but a question that may shake the Western world in the near future.

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