The Search for Truth

Why the United Nations is considering to reopen the investigation into the 1961 death of Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld.

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The film starts up. We find ourselves in the city of Ndola in Zambia in December 2011, at a worn wooden table by a stream, not far from the place where U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld lost his life the night before September 18, 1961.

Former Swedish archbishop, His Grace K.G. Hammar, sits on one side. On the other sits the aging Zambian charcoal worker, Johnny Ngongo, who on that fateful September night was tending the coal in the bush nearby.

There is a microphone between them.

- It is God's will that I have lived this long, that the time has now come for me to testify truthfully about the plane crash, says Johnny Ngongo, interpreted from his tribal language Bemba into English.

- Late in the evening I saw a plane coming. When it began to descend it tipped over to one side and it was already on fire. We were not far away. Then it crashed into a tree. It exploded and we fled.

K.G. Hammar is wearing a burgundy clergy's shirt and on his chest hangs a wooden cross, Johnny Ngongo is wearing sunglasses and it looks as if he is holding a rolled-up map in his hand. The wind tears at the microphone. Johnny Ngongo describes how they made their way to the wreck at dawn and found the bodies.

- Did you see if Dag Hammarskjöld was dead or unconscious? K.G. Hammar asks in English.

Ducks waddle about in circles around the odd company.

- I am certain he was dead. We went as close to Dag Hammarskjöld as we could. He was lying against a tree, but there was no sign of life.

- And the fire was still burning?

- Yes, the fire were still burning.

Hans Kristian Simensen closes his computer.

- Well, K.G. it's lucky you brought your own photographer to Zambia!

We are sitting in a bare office that belongs to the diocese of Lund. There are a few photographs from the trip to Zambia in 2011 on the table, the trip that would change things, not only for a former archbishop and his "photographer," the Norwegian Hans Kristian Simensen, who for several years has looked into aspects of the Dag Hammarskjöld case.

They were hardly the first people to interview these new eyewitnesses. They actually did not learn any new facts about the fateful plane crash that has left the world wondering for more than fifty years. But something happened that day in Ndola – call it an injection, a renewed sense of commitment – that came to critically influence the course of events.

The result is historic. After more than fifty years of silence, the United Nations General Assembly now faces something extraordinary, a discussion on reopening the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding Dag Hammarskjöld's death.

Was the mysterious plane crash an accident, pilot error, or was it, in fact, an assassination?

K.G. Hammar holds up one of the photographs. It was taken in the home of another eyewitness, Mama Kankasa in Lusaka. They are standing, facing each other, and praying. Her husband, Timothy Kankasa, who was one of the few black people testifying in 1961, had challenged white minority rule in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, during the era of British colonialism.

Kankasa was sure that he had seen two planes in the air, but witness reports from the local black population were ignored in the investigation.

– I am no detective but if you have met those eyes, met their longing for truth, then you feel a certain responsibility to pursue it. In Zambia it is almost public knowledge that Dag Hammarskjöld was murdered. They are surprised that the world has not wanted to know, and more than anything, they're surprised that Sweden hasn't wanted to, K.G. Hammar says.

Back then, in 1961-1962, three investigations were done – two by the British colonial power of the Rhodesia Federation, and one by the United Nations. None of them was conclusive. The Rhodesians saw pilot error as the most likely cause of the crash, the United Nations delivered an open verdict. But in resolution passed in 1962 the UN General Assembly called for the secretary general to reopen the inquiry if new evidence came to light.

That is exactly what Ban Ki-Moon did in February 2014.

However, it took a great deal more than an archbishops dramatic trip to Zambia for this conclusion to be reached. It also took a truth-seeking historian, who grew up in Rhodesia, an English lord and a world famous crime writer from Sweden. It took tenacious research and a motley crew of private investigators.

It did, of course, take a legendary main character and an unsolved mystery.

Late in the afternoon of September 17, 1961, U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld sat down at the back of the DC-6 Albertina, which was to bring him and his colleagues from Léopoldville (Kinshasa) in Congo to Ndola in Northern Rhodesia.

He was nervous. His foot kept bobbing up and down noted the man in the chair next to his, Sture Linnér, the head of the United Nations in Congo.

Finally, he exlaimed:

- Maybe it's not a great idea for both of us to leave Léopoldville, Hammarskjöld said.

Linnér took off his safety belt and the steps to the aircraft were rolled out again. He got off.

There was indeed cause for concern. The Congo Crisis, the most difficult trial for the United Nations and Dag Hammarskjöld so far, had in the past few days escalated into a veritable war with U.N. soldiers in the line of fire. The DC-6, in which they sat, with its U.N. emblem painted on the tail fin, had that very morning been shot at from the ground and had gotten bullet holes in the engine.

The politics in the area was one big mess of strong interests and fierce attacks. Most were aimed at Dag Hammarskjöld personally – due to the United Nations' actions in the Congo after its liberation from Belgium in the summer of 1960.

The Congo Crisis had begun after just a few weeks. The southeastern province Katanga, the richest province of the country with its mines and minerals, had broken away with the support of Belgian military and declared itself independent. Congo's central government requested help from the United Nations to force the Belgians to leave and return Katanga to the Congo.

In September 1961 17,000 United Nations soldiers were stationed in Congo, but so far the operation had been fraught with difficulties and growing protests from the European colonial powers.

Belgium was one of them, it wanted to secure its financial interests in Katanga's copper and uranium deposits after the independence. Great Britain was another, it supported white interests in Katanga in order to protect its own colony in neighbouring Northern Rhodesia. And the major Belgian-Britain mining companies were yet another. Mercenaries, with unclear allegiances, poured into the area to replace the Belgian soldiers that had been forced to leave. The atmosphere was volatile.

When the Albertina took off from Léopoldville on September 17, Hammarskjöld had learned that the United States was also now against him. The reason was the sudden U.N. offensive in Katanga a few days earlier, Operation Morthor. In a desperate attempt to reach a solution, U.N. troops had tried to take Katanga with military force and arrest the government.

President John F. Kennedy was "extremely upset" about the United Nations' violent intervention and suspected a Communist conspiracy, according to a top secret emergency telegram to Hammarskjöld from the United Nations' office in New York. The Secretary General was now on his way to emergency negotiations about an armistice with the Katangese leader Moïse Tshombe. The meeting was to be held in neutral territory in the Rhodesian border city of Ndola.

But whether or not this was indeed neutral territory was another matter. Roy Walensky, the white Rhodesian prime minister, had shortly beforehand compared the U.N. troops' actions to those of the Nazis during World War II. And on the newly renovated airport in Ndola waited Great Britain's highest representative in Rhodesia, the British High Commissioner Lord Cuthbert Alport –who had just given orders to move troops to Ndola. Both despised Hammarskjöld.

These things might have mattered. Or not.

The weather was clear, hot and calm and Albertina was a modern executive aircraft that the United Nations had chartered from the Swedish airline Transair. The Swedish crew were young, but experienced. The thirty-five-year-old pilot, Per-Erik Hallonquist, had 8,000 flight hours behind him**.**

There were sixteen people on board. Some were playing cards during the long flight. Dag Hammarskjöld was struggling with a translation from German into Swedish of the philosopher Martin Buber's "Ich und Du" for the Swedish publisher Bonniers. Just after midnight the Albertina contacted othe control tower at Ndola airport:

- We see your lights in Ndola, we're approaching for landing, confirm…

The confirmation came but Albertina never landed at the airport. Great Britain's Lord Alport calmed the welcoming committee. At the very last moment, he said, Hammarskjöld had decided to fly into another city. A few hours later the airport shut down. The lights were turned off and everybody went home. No emergency alarm sounded. No rescue brigade was called out.

Two police officers had seen a strong light and tried to wake the head of the airport at three thirty a.m.. They were told that nothing could be done until dawn. Not until ten the following morning did the search begin, and the wreck and the bodies were not found until three in the afternoon, fifteen kilometers from the airport. Hammarskjöld's wristwatch was still working. The only survivor, a severely burnt security guard, told the hospital staff before he died that Hammarskjöld had called out "Go back!" and that there had been an explosion.

Two days later former American president Harry S. Truman talked to journalists.

- Dag Hammarskjöld was on the point of getting something done when they killed him. Notice that I said "When they killed him."

The reporters wanted an explanation.

- That's all I've got to say on the matter. Draw your own conclusions.

But the following year, the generally accepted truth was a different one**:** Even if an assassination was not entirely out of the question, the most likely conclusion was that the pilot had misjudged the altitude. The Swedish government accepted this explanation as well.

As years went by new information would come up now and again, causing bold headlines, then disappear. Nothing has been taken seriously, until now.

Historian Susan Williams finds herself in the middle of the turmoil following Ban Ki-moon's initiative when I reach her on the phone at the University of London. She has done research on British colonial history for a long time, but never before experienced the hoopla that started after the publication of her book, "Who Killed Hammarskjöld?" (Hurst, 2011).

- I wasn't even going to write about Hammarskjöld to begin with, Susan Williams says.

She explains that the book she had actually started writing had the working title "The White War On Africa." Susan Williams grew up in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) under colonial rule. She set out to write a book about how white nationalism in southern Africa was pushing north while the black liberation movement was moving down the continent. Strong forces wanted to put a stop to decolonization somewhere around the Congo. According to Williams many whites were certain that they would win.

- In the archives I kept coming across references to Hammarskjöld's death, suggestions he had been murdered. This is ridiculous, I thought, people are just making things up, all these conspiracy theories, unbelievable! Then I started seeing documents in archives that convinced me as well…

She had one such revelation at the University of Oxford library. Susan Williams had arranged for the archivists to declassify certain central files in the private archives of Roy Welensky, the last white Rhodesian prime minister. She was astounded. Not only did she find large parts of the accident investigation report with its appendices. In the archive boxes were also six photos of Dag Hammarskjöld's dead body, three taken of him on a stretcher at the accident site, three in the morgue.

- There were photos of other victims as well, all of them severely burnt. Dag Hammarskjöld, on the other hand, did not have any burn injuries at all. The contrast was enormous. The photographs revealed a lot more than the autopsy report, which barely mentioned Hammarskjöld at all, Susan William says.

- The fact that he had those in his own archive reveals that he knew more than he wanted to admit publicly.

More finds followed. Susan Williams tracked down old and new witnesses and found her way into archives that nobody had thought of. Toward the end she made contact with Hans Kristian Simensen, whose father had been a U.N. soldier in Congo in 1961. He gave her access to the archive of a U.N. intelligence agent in Congo, Norwegian Björn Egge. Williams read, among other things, that right before the crash Egge had been threatened at a diplomatic banquet in Katanga. A mercenary had shoved something hard into his back and hissed: "You're betraying the last bastion of the white man in Central Africa. You will get a knife in your back one of these days."

To Susan Williams the book about Hammarskjöld ended up being as much about **"**the white war on Africa" as the one she had originally intended to write.

"Who Killed Hammarskjöld?" is the most important piece of evidence in the new U.N. investigation. It has still not been translated into Swedish.

Sweden's former archbishop K.G. Hammar was never particularly interested in Dag Hammarskjöld's death. To him Hammarskjöld is primarily a spiritual soulmate. K.G. Hammar describes how the secretary general's mystical interpretation of Christianity in his book "Markings" became his salvation during a spiritual crisis.

But at a Swedish book fair in 2011 he was approached by a stubborn Norwegian living in Gothenburg. Hans Kristian Simensen talked about a new book about Hammarskjöld that Hammar absolutely had to read. He did. Then he sought out this Simensen again, a former aerospace engineer who, among many other things, is setting up a Dag Hammarskjöld archive at the library of Alexandria. By chance K.G. Hammar was invited to Zambia two months later. He was to give a talk about "Markings" as part of the fifty year anniversary of the Secretary General's death.

- Then I'll accompany you to Ndola as your photographer, said Hans Kristian Simensen, and that is what happened.

During their trip they were interviewed by Zambian television.

- There needs to be a new investigation, said His Grace K.G. Hammar, both to television reporters in Ndola and, after he returned home, to the Secretary General's closest relative, his nephew Knut Hammarskjöld. He also wrote an opinion piece on the topic.

Knut Hammarskjöld was pleased with these developments. He had identified his uncle's body at the morgue in Ndola in 1961. Since then he never once doubted that Dag Hammarskjöld was murdered. Susan Williams' research had given him new energy.

- I now think I know who did it, and who gave the assignment. I will tell you more when I see you next, said the 89-year-old Knut Hammarskjöld to K.G. Hammar.

But shortly afterwards, Dag Hammarskjöld's nephew died.

In England, Susan Williams' book generated both fear ("you are betraying British civilization") and enthusiasm. Lord Lea of Crondall, Labour party representative in the House of Lords, was one of the enthusiasts and he contacted Williams. "We have to get an inquiry started," he told Williams. In the spring of 2012 they met in the late Gothic style lobby of the British House of Lords - K.G. Hammar, Lord Lea of Crondall and Susan Williams. At that time, former Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoko was also on board.

The goal was to get the United Nations to act, but they realized that they themselves might be perceived as too biased. In order to succeed they would need independent legal experts. And they would need money.

Four of the world's most prominent jurists were contacted. They all agreed to form an independent international commission – the Hammarskjöld Commission – and to spend a year examining the new evidence. But who would pay? Even if the jurists would work *pro bono*, the costs would be considerable. Potential sponsors hesitated because of the political implications. At one point it looked as if everything would come to nothing.

But K.G. Hammar had an idea. He has a rich acquaintance with his heart in Africa. At an open air meeting in Stockholm he cornered mystery writer Henning Mankell. Mankell needed no time to think and two days later their main funding question was solved. News that a jurist commission was to look into Hammarskjöld's death could now be shared with the world.

The architects behind it knew that Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt had given a memorial speech in Ndola in September 2011, on the 50th anniversary of Dag Hammarskjöld's death. Now they were hoping for official support. But they got no response from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs**.** Just a slightly scornful blog post. "Several of the pieces of information that have now been brought up have been known before…" wrote a Foreign Ministry employee. He discussed how easily rumors turn into "truths" and referred to the Foreign Ministry's own investigation in 1993**,** which concluded that the plane crash was caused by pilot error.

In one way, the Foreign Ministry blogger was right. A surprising number of the new question marks were already known in the 1960s, even in the weeks following the crash. Sweden had quickly sent three experts from the Swedish Civil Aviation Authority (Luftfartsstyrelsen) to observe the Rhodesian crash investigation. The Swedish Security Service's legendary Otto Danielsson was among them.

The reports sent home by those who were there were overwhelmingly critical. Not everything was wrong, but a lot was. Shocked, they reported that the Rhodesians had allowed the head of the Rhodesian aviation authority, Maurice Barber, to lead the crash commission. This was an obvious conflict of interest - Barber had been fully informed during the night of the accident and was personally

responsible for the fact that the search did not begin until ten hours later. The Swedes revealed that Barber had already, that very first day, determined that the accident was caused by pilot error and had opposed any attempts to prove otherwise. “The Swedish group declines to speculate whether this was based on a personal opinion or if it was dictated by political considerations,” wrote the aviation authority.

Otto Danielsson had many objections: the witness reports about two planes, or two lights in the sky, were never investigated, not all the African charcoal workers who had witnessed the scene were heard and the few that were actually interviewed were not taken seriously. The wreckage was never systematically examined for bullet holes or shrapnel and the rudder lines were not well examined. “As the situation is now, one cannot eliminate the suspicion that SE-BDY (the Albertina) might have been the target of a firing or a bombing,” Danielsson wrote in his report. He would continue to argue with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs about this.

The Swedish consul in Léopoldville, Bengt Rösiö, later described the atmosphere in Ndola the day after the accident as “cheerful, because fortunately, things were about to go to hell for the United Nations.” And Sture Linnér, who stepped off the plane at the very last second, talked about Belgian families in Léopoldville throwing parties to celebrate Hammarskjöld’s death.

But by the time the Swedish government’s working group presented its report the following year the mistrust and the serious criticism were all but absent. The investigation in Rhodesia was said to have been characterized by “objectivity, an earnest attempt at thoroughness and caution.”

The delayed rescue effort could be criticized but Sweden had no objections to the conclusion that most things pointed to pilot error.

Transair’s technical director Bo Virving was one of those who walked around the burnt wreckage in near Ndola during the days after the accident. He took pictures, collected pieces of metal and picked up some of the dirty playing cards that were cast around the site of the accident. He was frustrated. This was not something that the Transair pilot had caused.

Virving had found a piece of the plane’s nosecone and the frame of a cockpit window, both with suspicious holes in them. Was it totally out of the question that they were bullet holes or shrapnel? Too many witnesses had testified about two planes. That theory could not be dismissed as easily as it had been in the official investigations.

In the spring of 1962 he tried to pursue the question and find proof. He wrote to a Swedish trade union official in Ndola and asked for help with an “investigation whose nature I cannot reveal until I have learned whether you are willing to participate.” But when the Swedish consul in Rhodesia heard of this plan he notified the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. A private investigation like that would be “very unsuitable.” Bo Virving was asked not to dig further into this.

Instead, he gathered all the information in a pile. It ended up in a large white macaroni carton, which his son, Björn Virving, inherited. It now sits in his closet in his home in Västerhaninge just south of Stockholm and when Dagens Nyheter visits he brings it out on the dining room table.

Björn Virving has continued doing research for several years, using his father’s material as a starting point. Now he has so much information that the macaroni carton isn’t big enough. Like his father Bo, Björn believes that Albertina was hit by some kind of bomb from another plane and he has self-published a book called “Termitstacken” (The Anthill) about his theory of the crash.

Soon, the entire dining room table is full of historical documentation. I think of Susan Williams, who had goose bumps when she first saw Virving's archive. Here are the dirty playing cards from the site of the accident. Here is the original report from the Rhodesian Investigation Board with all of the first eyewitness interviews. Björn Virving unfolds a map of the crash site. Pieces of the wreckage have been recorded on a grid, the position of the bodies marked with numbers.

What kind of investigation do you think your father wanted to do?

- He wanted to return. He wanted to go out into the bush to see if there were more eyewitnesses, says Björn Virving.

Fifty years is not that long ago. Many of the charcoal workers were young then and are still alive. Göran Björkdahl, an employee with Sida (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), realized this in the fall of 2007 when he visited the crash site in Zambia and was introduced to an older man who had seen what happened. "There must be many more," he thought.

He began collaborating with the guide at the memorial site, Jacob Phiri. Since then they have actively searched for witnesses who did not dare speak out in 1961, and travelled from village to village, sometimes on bicycles.

- The fall of 1961 was a time of extreme tension and repression against blacks in Ndola. It was not a time when you'd step up voluntarily, especially since most people thought that the white colonial regime was behind Hammarskjöld's death. Because it supported the separatist regime in Katanga, Göran Björkdahl says.

They identified and interviewed ten or more new eyewitnesses who had been close to the accident site, among them, Johnny Ngongo, whom K.G. Hammar later got to meet.

The Zambian witnesses were in surprising agreement. Eight of the eleven who had seen the plane gave testimony that there were two planes in the air and said that there was either an explosion or a strong light in the sky. Four witnesses who were near the crash site said that uniformed soldiers and police officers closed off the area early the following morning.

Officially, the wreck was not found until three in the afternoon.

Göran Björkdahl recently returned to Stockholm after working for Sida in Burkina Faso for five years. Dag Hammarskjöld's death has grown into a hobby that takes up much of his time and focus. He has ploughed through practically all archives with any kind of Hammarskjöld connection – in Zambia, Congo, Belgium, England, the United States, France… He emails a few things he found in Paul-Henri Spaak's private archives, NATO's secretary general until the spring of 1961, and after that Belgium's foreign minister.

The documents reveal that NATO apparently formed a secret committee about Africa in the spring of 1961, with Congo as its first agenda item. Belgium sought support from its allies to stop Hammarskjöld's "violation of the United Nations Charter." The existence of the committee "must be kept strictly confidential," I read in the meeting minutes.

The next email from Göran Björkdahl comes from Ndola in Zambia. In April he is back there again, for more interviews with witnesses.

- Some of the coal workers are still afraid, he says.

The Hammarskjöld Commission met its deadline. On Monday, September 9, 2013, it presented its final report at a press conference in the Peace Palace at The Hague. The group of retired high profiled international jurists was impressive: the South African Richard Goldstone, the Dutch Wilhelmina Thomassen, the Swedish Hans Corell and the British chairman, Sir Stephen Sedley.

- At first I hesitated to participate. Because there have been so many questionable speculations through the years, says Hans Corell.

- But these were well-regarded and serious persons. And what Swede would do this if not the one who had been the head of the legal division for the United Nations for ten years and, in addition, a marshal dressed in tuxedo and student cap at Hammarskjöld's funeral in Uppsala cathedral?

The jurists made it clear from the very beginning that they had not conducted a new investigation, and that they were not going to take a stand for or against the accident theory. Their assignment was limited to examining if the new evidence was enough to recommend that the United Nations reopen its inquiry into the death of Dag Hammarskjöld.

Yes, was their carefully weighed answer. The news drew much international attention. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon responded with a press release the same day.

- And what does the Swedish government do?

Hans Corell asks the question himself. Then he is quiet. His face muscles are tense and he seems to be exhibiting diplomatic self-control.

- Isn't the lack of a response an answer in itself? Where is the statesmanship? If Sweden does not take initiative in the General Assembly now, it will look very peculiar.

The new eyewitnesses were given a lot of attention in the report. Two of the jurists had travelled to Zambia and interviewed them in person. The conclusion of the commission was that the witness reports gave "enough primary evidence" that the plane was on fire when it crashed, which might strengthen the hypothesis that the plane was forced down.

But it was the information about documented radio traffic on the night of the accident that became the determining factor in the recommendations to the United Nations. In the fall of 1961 the American National Security Agency (NSA) had a listening post on Cyprus for Asia and Africa. The Hammarskjöld Commission turned to the NSA and requested recordings or transcripts of radio traffic from the night of the accident. The request specifically asked for anything concerning a plane firing at another plane or any plane approaching Ndola around midnight.

The NSA reported that the agency has two documents that fit that description**, which** are classified. The Commission felt that this was unreasonable after all these years and urged the United Nations to pursue the issue.

In February the US State Department released a telegram from the United States Congo ambassador, which was sent to Washington the morning after the crash. It definitely made you want more. In it, the ambassador mentions the name of a Belgian mercenary, whom he suspected had shot down Hammarskjöld's plane.

When the telegram was sent the official British story was that the Secretary General had probably just changed his destination.

In the fall of 1961 naval officer Charles Southall worked with radio surveillance for the NSA in Cyprus. He is the person behind the hot tip about NSA and the radio communication. Though his testimony is not news either. It became known at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for the first time in 1967, but was dismissed as fabrication. “Why would the American government want to keep quiet about an intercepted radio message?” the Foreign Ministry reasoned.

I track Charles Southall to the city of Portland in the United States. He is about to turn eighty, but has just returned from a business trip to Jordan. Over Skype he once again tells his story – for how many times now? – about how in the evening of September 17, 1961, he was suddenly called in by the chief of communications because something “interesting” was going on, and how a seven-minute-old recording was played shortly after midnight. A pilot identified as a Belgian mercenary was heard describing a transport plane coming in low: “I am going to make a run on it, that’s the plane.”

- Then shots were heard and the pilot yelled, “I’ve hit it. There are flames. It’s crashing,” Charles Southall says.

- I have often wondered how the chief communications watch supervisor could know that something was about to happen and I still don’t understand why he wanted me to hear it.

In the beginning of the 1990s a French diplomat said that a Belgian mercenary had confessed to shooting the plane down. This became world news and prompted the Swedish Foreign Ministry for Foreign Affairs to start an investigation. Investigator Bengt Rösiö dug up Southall’s testimony from 1967 and the American State Department was asked to find him.

- I then received a letter from the State Department that the Swedish government was interested in information concerning Hammarskjöld’s crash. I replied immediately that I had been waiting for this for thirty years, Charles Southall says.

He offered to find the recording of the radio transmission that he had heard. There should at least be a transcript in the archives. But the U.S. State Department broke contact and Bengt Rösiö was told that it had been unable to find Southall. Instead, the State Department forwarded some pages from a biography of Hammarskjöld in which the crash was described as an accident.

The following year, the Swedish evening paper Expressen found the naval officer and investigator Rösiö got the information he needed. Southall’s theory was that the pilot had communicated with the CIA. Rösiö doubted this, since “the general belief is that the United States supported Hammarskjöld.” Southall was eventually dismissed as a compulsive liar and the official Swedish position stayed firm; that the plane crash in which Hammarskjöld died was caused by pilot error.

Human memory is unreliable, but the Hammarskjöld Commission says that even if “Southall’s recollection is wholly mistaken” there are enough eyewitnesses to justify declassifying what was recorded during surveillance in the radio traffic that the American or other security services “undoubtedly maintained” on the night of the accident.

Things are heating up. Ban Ki-moon’s initiative is, of course, of monumental historical significance for the Swedish government. What is the official Swedish position today? But the chambers of government are silent. Could it really be possible that Carl Bildt has nothing to say?

I make an effort, I make two, I make three. I suggest a meeting, telephone, email or twitter? Five weeks go by. First, he has no time. Later Bildt, according to his press secretary, is “not the best person to comment.”

Lucky that he still has time to tweet about the weather.

From the Prime Minister's chambers comes a short message: "We are unfortunately unable to do an interview right now and decline to participate."

There is a burning Ukrainian crisis and the vice secretary general of the United Nations Jan Eliasson is also very busy. I email his secretary and get twenty minutes on the phone with him three days later, despite the fact that Eliasson, in the absence of Ban Ki-moon, is in charge in New York.

Jan Eliasson emphasizes that the legal department of the United Nations has been examining the jurist commission's report for two months, and has carefully scrutinized and weighed the new evidence. Ban Ki-moon's conclusion was based on that deep analysis.

-This whole tragic event has been fraught with speculations over the years, but until now, there has not been strong enough evidence to take it any further. We deemed this sufficiently important that it should be further investigated. It is now up to the member countries.

He does not have a theory himself, but believes that the search for truth will be made easier by the fact that fifty years have passed. Ban Ki-moon has now strongly encouraged U.N. member countries to release all documentation that might shed any light on the event.

Eliasson has not yet registered any reaction from the Swedish government on this historical initiative.

- Dag Hammarskjöld is a legend in the United Nations, an important role model. I assume that the Swedish government and the Swedish people feel a certain obligation to learn the truth about his death.

Sweden's U.N. ambassador to New York, Mårten Grunditz, is now the one who will be in charge of the question and act as Sweden's spokesperson. But he does not want to make a statement about Sweden's position in Dagens Nyheter either.

Instead, his office refers me to the Foreign Ministry's press office in Stockholm.

Finally, it arrives, a written reply from Carl Bildt, via his press secretary. I have asked if the official Swedish position from 1993 is still valid, that Hammarskjöld died in an accident.

"Just like before, Sweden welcomes anything that can be done to shed further light on the plane crash," I read in the statement by the foreign minister. "But we consider this primarily a matter for the United Nations."

"Items found in D.H.'s briefcase after the crash **at** Ndola**,"** the English text reads on one of the archive boxes in the Swedish Royal Public Library's Dag Hammarskjöld collection. We carefully pull them out, photographer Fredrik Funck and I. We catch our breath. There is the luggage tag with his name and U.N. logo. There is his plain white business card, the New Testament and a letter from Great Britain's foreign minister, dated Léopoldville, September 17, 1961.

There are a few tightly written yellow sheets of paper, bearing the translation Hammarskjöld was working on during the flight. The last words he wrote: **"**The self distinguishes itself."

The briefcase was next to Hammarskjöld's dead body. We examine the items. No signs of dirt. No burns. It's incredible.

Dag Hammarskjöld was also surprisingly well preserved, his clothes almost intact. This has led to speculations that he survived the crash, but was killed at the site. A witness noted a suspicious bullet

hole in his forehead, and in one of the photographs a playing card was tucked into his neck, the ace of spades, “the card of death”, according to witnesses.

The Hammarskjöld Commission also claims that there is “considerable evidence” that somebody tampered with his body before the wreck was found in the afternoon. It’s just not clear how.

The Commission’s forensic experts have been confused by the contrast between the rather unmarked appearance of Hammarskjöld in the pictures and the very severe injuries described in the strangely cursory Rhodesian autopsy reports. If the injuries reported are correct he must have lost consciousness and died in the crash, or shortly thereafter. But without concrete evidence, nothing can be eliminated.

- It’s rather curious that there are x-rays of the other victims, but not of Dag Hammarskjöld, note Lennart Rammer and Christer Busch, two Swedish experts.

The pathologists have a suggestion. Today it is entirely possible to open the grave and examine the skeleton with modern x-ray computed tomography without violating the integrity of the remains, they write. Then we would have the answers to our questions.

- Knut was the one who raised that question a few years ago. He got the idea when they opened Yasser Arafat’s grave, says Inga-Lill Hammarskjöld, Knut Hammarskjöld’s widow.

- Knut always wanted the investigation reopened. From the day he saw his uncle dead in Ndola, he was convinced it was murder.

Dense clouds cover the sky over the old cemetery, Uppsala Gamla Kyrkogård, even though the forecast promised sun. It is April 2014 and the cemetery staff are in the middle of spring cleaning. A crow floats majestically above the chapel, caws now and then, as in a desperate attempt to be heard above the din of the increasingly saucy song birds.

Isn’t anybody going to clear the moss from Dag Hammarskjöld’s headstone?

This is where he was brought in a coffin draped in a Swedish flag. Three hundred and fifty Swedish and international dignitaries walked in the funeral procession behind the catafalque wagon, among them the vice president of the United States at the time, Lyndon B. Johnson.

Students in white caps lined the procession. The family’s funeral wreath held just a word of reproach:

Why?

Ingrid Carlberg

Ingrid Carlberg is a Swedish author and journalist. Her book “There is a room here waiting for you… The story of Raoul Wallenberg” (Norstedts, 2012) won the Swedish August Prize for best nonfiction in 2012 and will be published in UK and United States in 2015.

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BELOW IS EXTRA INFORMATION LINKED TO THE ARTICLE WHEN PUBLISHED IN DAGENS NYHETER, MAY 11TH 2014.

Background

Who was Dag Hammarskjöld?

Dag Hammarskjöld *was elected in 1953, at the age of 47, as U.N. secretary general.*

He was a *Swedish economist and jurist, with a past in both the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He had been a part of the government since 1951, as a consultant for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.*

In 1954, he succeeded *his father, former prime minister Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, on chair number 17 at the Swedish Academy.*

Dag Hammarskjöld *kept a high profile as a secretary general and gave new authority to both the United Nations and the position, in a way that was sometimes challenging for the superpowers. The solving of The Suez Crisis in 1956 must be seen as one of his great successes.*

September 18, 1961 *he died in a plane crash in Ndola, Zambia, on his way to peace negotiations in the ongoing Congo Crisis. All 16 people on board were killed. "Was Hammarskjöld's plane shot down?" read the Swedish headlines the following day.*

December 1961, *Dag Hammarskjöld was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize posthumously.*

Facts

Persons in the text:

K.G. Hammar*, former Swedish archbishop, one of the initiators of the commission.*

Hans Kristian Simensen*, hobby researcher and expert in the Hammarskjöld Commission.*

Henning Mankell*, author, the Hammarskjöld Commission's most important sponsor.*

***Göran Björkdahl**, official with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and hobby researcher of the death of Hammarskjöld.*
***Lord Lea of Crondall**, member of the British House of Lords, one of the initiators of the Hammarskjöld Commission.*
***Susan Williams**, British historian and author of the book "Who Killed Hammarskjöld?"*
***Ban Ki-moon**, U.N. secretary general since 2011.*
***Sture Linnér,** head of the United Nations in Congo in 1961, died in 2010.*
***Bo Virving**, Swedish airline Transair's technical director in 1961, died in 1982.*
***Björn Virving**, engineer and Bo Virving's son, hobby researcher of the death of Hammarskjöld.*

The Congo Crisis:
***June 30, 1960,** Congo became independent from the colonial power Belgium.*
***The wealthy mining province** Katanga in the south broke away after a few weeks with the support of Belgian military. Congo's prime minister at that time, Patrice Lumumba, turned to the United Nations.*
***United Nations Secretary General** Dag Hammarskjöld sent peacekeeping forces to Congo. At the most there were around 20,000 U.N. soldiers in the country.*
***United Nations'** efforts increased after the murder of the overthrown prime minister Patrice Lumumba in January 1961.*
***In the fall of 1961**, U.N. troops found themselves warring against military groups tied to political and economic interests in the separatist state Katanga.*
***The separatist attempt** was halted in 1963 after the United Nations invaded Katanga. Disturbances continued until 1965, when Joseph Mobutu seized power and crushed all resistance.*

The new investigation:
** The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs had the crash investigated in 1992. The investigator, Bengt Rösiö, argued in his report that the accident was due to the pilot miscalculating the altitude.*
** The summer of 2012 The Hammarskjöld Commission was appointed on private initiatives. The so-called jurist commission established in its report (September 2013), that new evidence exists that motivate that the United Nations reopen the inquiry.*
** In the spring of 2014 U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon made official his conclusion that there was new evidence concerning Dag Hammarskjöld's death. He suggested that the General Assembly either appoint an expert panel in order to examine the evidence, reopen the inquiry from 1962 or start an entirely new investigation about the 1961 plane crash.*

The Hammarskjöld Commission
***Sir Stephen Sedley** (chairperson), Great Britain, former judge at the Royal Court of Justice in England and Wales.*
***Richard Goldstone**, South Africa, former chief prosecutor in the U.N. Yugoslavia- and Rwanda tribunals.*
***Wilhelmina Thomassen**, The Netherlands, former judge in the European Court of Human Rights.*
***Hans Corell**, Sweden, former head of the U.N. office of legal affairs.*

Read more:

Four books about Hammarskjöld

Susan Williams
"Who killed Hammarskjöld? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa" (Hurst, 2011)
Rolf Rembe and Anders Hellberg
"Midnatt i Kongo. Dag Hammarskjölds förlorade seger" (Atlantis, 2011)
Roger Lipsey
"Hammarskjöld. A Life" (University of Michigan Press, 2013)
Hans Landberg
"På väg. Dag Hammarskjöld som svensk ämbetsman" (Atlantis, 2012)