

Searching for answers in US government records*

Susan Williams

Justice Othman has identified the United States as one of the three UN Member States – along with the UK and South Africa – most likely to hold records relating to the crash of Hammarskjöld’s plane in its intelligence, security and defence archives. He asked the US to appoint an independent and high-ranking appointee to search and review these records. This was done: three Appointees have been designated in turn, though none of them was independent of government.

In any case, the process thus far has been fruitless. In 2022 the Justice reported that ‘other than one document in 2019 and two documents in 2021, which were publicly available and contained known information, nothing additional as material was provided by the United States between mid-2017 and 2022, and my outstanding queries have not been responded to.’

This failure to cooperate can be seen as consistent with the decision of the US not to co-sponsor the recent General Assembly Resolution authorising the continuation of Justice Othman’s investigation. This made the US (like the UK) a global outlier: for the Resolution was co-sponsored by 142 Member States (out of 193).

The lack of support by the US for Justice Othman’s investigation is disturbing because four Americans – *one quarter of the 16 victims* – perished as a result of the crash. This has seldom been noted. As a mark of respect, I say their names: Vladimir Fabry, Legal Adviser to the UN Operation in the Congo, Sergeant Harold M Julien, Acting Chief Security

* For a more in-depth and detailed study, please see this essay in *The Yale Review* (Winter 2023): <https://yalereview.org/article/susan-williams-dag-hammarskjold-crash->

Officer, William Ranallo, bodyguard and personal aide to Hammarskjöld, and Heinrich A Wieschhoff, a key advisor to Hammarskjöld.

And one of these four Americans was the *only* person still breathing when the rescue team finally arrived. This was Harry Julien, a former Marine now in his 30s, who had served in Korea. You will see Julien in this photo [CLICK](#) taken just days before the crash, at the airport of Leopoldville (now Kinshasa). Hammarskjöld, second from right, has just arrived. Julien is at the far left of the group, carrying a bag.

One can only imagine the intensity of Julien's suffering. No help of any sort was sent to the site between the crash, shortly after midnight, and about 3.10 pm local time. Julien lay in agony for about 15 hours, with 50 per cent burns, a partial fracture of the skull, and a dislocated right ankle. After dawn he was at the mercy of the blazing sun, at a time of year when the heat reaches 91 degrees F.

These long hours of pain are all the more shocking, since a mass of evidence has emerged to show that various people *knew* the plane had crashed – and where – many hours before 3.10 pm. These include a number of British colonial officials. Local charcoal burners discovered the wreckage in the early hours and rushed to tell Timothy Kankasa, then board secretary of the nearby township, who went on to become a Minister of State after Zambia's independence from Britain in 1964. Kankasa contacted the colonial authorities. But no assistance or ambulances were sent. 'There were no police at all, no police, no one from the army, nobody at all until the afternoon,' explained Kankasa. He was appalled: 'We could not understand why they did not respond.'

Julien's wife Maria reached Julien's bedside in Ndola on 22 September, after the long journey from her home in Miami. She was in deep shock and distress. She too had served in the UN, which is how she and Julien met; it is to be hoped she was not exposed to the hatred

of the UN that was displayed by many white Rhodesians. A UN charter plane sent to Ndola to collect the remains of the crash victims was tampered with, and pistol flares were strewn about the aircraft.

Maria Julien found herself in the British colonial territory of Northern Rhodesia, which was strictly organised on the basis of racial inequality and segregation, not unlike apartheid South Africa. Her husband was in a hospital for so-called 'Europeans' (the so-called 'African hospital' was a converted horse stable and barn, with rudimentary conditions).

Julien was expected to survive, but he died after five days – on the day after Maria's arrival. In the last hour of his life, according to a nurse who was present, he pleaded with Maria: 'Honey, take me home. We must get out of here quickly. You will take me home?' Mrs Julien tried to reassure him. But Julien never made it back to Miami.

Julien's son Richard told me that after his mother returned to the US, she told her sister that Julien said there were three explosions on the plane in the last minutes of the flight. This fits with Julien's statements to a Northern Rhodesian police inspector: that the plane 'blew up.... There was great speed. Great speed... Then there was the crash.'

One of Julien's nurses heard him refer to 'Sparks, sparks in the sky'.

These statements match many of the testimonies of people on the ground. However the Rhodesian Commission of Inquiry dismissed them as 'rambling'.

In 2019, new information was given to Justice Othman about Julien's stay in hospital. It was provided by the government of Zimbabwe, which – unlike the US, UK and South Africa – has worked strenuously to search for relevant documentation to assist the Justice. It reveals that the Rhodesian authorities proactively sought to prevent Julien's statements from being made public. A Rhodesian intelligence official warned one of Julien's doctors that 'no one of his hospital staff must talk about this', including Julien's statement that he had seen 'sparks in the sky'.

The Justice regards the evidence presented by Zimbabwe as significant. In his view, ‘a general undervaluing of the evidence of Harold Julien...may have affected the exhaustiveness of the earlier inquiries’ consideration of the possible hypotheses.’

It also suggests that Julien may have said more about the last moments of the crash than is yet available. One wonders if the US Independent Appointees searched for all the reports sent to Washington by the US Resident Consul in Lusaka, the capital of Northern Rhodesia, who rushed to Ndola after the crash. He visited Julien each day. In his view, the delay in finding the wreckage ‘may well have cost the life of Sergeant Julien.’

The Resident Consul assisted in transmissions to Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), Leopoldville, and Washington, and was in close communication with the US Consul General in Salisbury (now Harare), the capital of Southern Rhodesia – who was also communicating with Washington. All this paperwork needs to be made available to Justice Othman.

There were many missed opportunities to care successfully for Julien. Mark Lowenthal, a doctor on his medical team, could not understand why he was not taken to the US. ‘Julien was a strong young man and, with the best that modern care of the time could offer, would have survived,’ stated Lowenthal later. ‘I was inexperienced, four years out of medical school and not in charge of the case. A mature me would have unofficially told the Americans to send an aircraft to take him to the US quickly. The matter remains with me as a great regret.’

But the US did not *need* to send an aircraft. There were *already* three US transport planes – DC-3s – parked at Ndola airport. They arrived at Ndola during the period of September 15-18 1961 – and the crash took place on the night of 17-18 September.

Before I give an account of these US planes, I'd like briefly to draw a picture of the scene on the tarmac at Ndola airport. In September 1961 there were 18 Royal Rhodesia Air Force planes parked there – vampire jets and Canberra bombers. A key reason was the campaign of the African majority of Northern Rhodesia to oppose minority rule. This campaign, the Cha Cha Cha, was ruthlessly repressed by the white settler government, which hoped to secure white supremacy for long into the future. In the words of a journalist from the UK Guardian who was on the scene, 'The place was humming.'

The three US DC-3s, therefore, landed in a highly charged environment.

One of the pilots was Commander Don L. Ely, the US naval attaché for air in Pretoria, South Africa. He and his crew reached Ndola on September 16 and left on the 18th. It is not possible to establish what Ely was doing there. He gave a brief testimony to the Rhodesian investigation, affirming that he had 'no knowledge of the plans' for Hammarskjöld's plane and that his aircraft was never in contact with it 'during its last flight'. It has not been possible to find out much about Ely, except that he was in naval intelligence and that he had previously been US naval attaché for air to Iran.

Another DC-3 was flown to Ndola by Colonel Benjamin Matlick, the U.S. air attaché in Leopoldville. He was in Elisabethville at the time of the crash and reached Ndola around noon next day. He sought to assist with the search for the wreckage.

And the third DC-3 at Ndola airport was commanded by Colonel Don G. Gaylor, the US Air Force – that is, USAF – air attaché, whose function was intelligence-gathering in sub-Saharan Africa. Like Ely, he was stationed in Pretoria. He was sent to Ndola by the Pentagon and arrived on September 15. He later said that his mission was "to meet Mr. Hammarskjöld and offer my assistance and transportation if he so desired." But this runs counter to UK

official records, which show that the arrangement for Hammarskjöld's meeting in Ndola was not even being discussed by the Secretary General on 15 September.

According to his memoir and a letter he wrote in 1994, Gaylor was in the control tower at Ndola airport on the night of September 17-18, waiting for Hammarskjöld's aircraft. After the plane failed to arrive, said Gaylor, he took to the air at first light to look for a possible crash site, using calculations he had prepared earlier. Gaylor wrote that he spotted the wreckage shortly after dawn and immediately contacted rescue services.

Gaylor enclosed an aerial photograph of the crash site with his letter. "You will note my aircraft shadow," he wrote, "as the hour was not long after dawn and the sun was still low on the horizon." Dawn in Zambia in mid-September is just after 5:30 a.m.

However, there is a discrepancy between Gaylor's claim and other sources. Moreover an expert has recently analysed the photo and determined that the most likely time it was taken was around 2-3 p.m. Why did Gaylor state that he flew up at dawn? Is it possible that he flew up more than once: shortly after dawn; and then later?

Without further information, these questions cannot be resolved. The Justice needs to see the report that Gaylor said he sent to the Pentagon: "My report to my superiors in the Pentagon," he said, "was acknowledged with some accolades."

In 2016, Justice Othman asked the US for information on US aircraft at Ndola on the night of 17-18 September 1961. He was told that USAF did not have any records; presumably the US had not searched the records of the Pentagon, State Department, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, CIA, or any other relevant government department. The Justice asked for clarification and in 2017 was informed that three aircraft were there during that short period. However it said that two of them went to Ndola from Elisabethville on 18 September. This was not the case: we have documents showing that both Gaylor's and Ely's aircrafts arrived before the crash; only Matlick's aircraft arrived on the 18th.

After Hammarskjöld's plane failed to land, a team of Norwegian U.N. soldiers flew to Ndola to assist in the search. Because of white Rhodesians' hostility to UN personnel, they were not allowed to enter the airport terminal. So the crew of one of the DC-3s invited them on board to get some food. And to the surprise of the U.N. soldiers, they saw that the American plane was packed with highly sophisticated radio equipment.

It was presumably was one of these DC-3s with which the U.S. Embassy in Leopoldville was communicating with Ndola.

This may help to explain the fact that Edmund A. Gullion, the U.S. ambassador in Leopoldville, sent a cable to Washington on the morning of September 18 – just hours after the crash – that referred to the possibility that the plane was shot down. “Hammarskjöld's plane believed lost in vicinity Rhodesian border near Ndola,” the cable reads. “There is possibility he was shot down by single pilot who has harassed U.N. operations and who has been identified by one usually reliable source as Van Riesegehem, Belgian, who accepted training mission with so-called Katangan Air Force.”

That hypothesis is bolstered by the statements of Commander Charles Southall, an American naval pilot who was working at the National Security Agency listening station in Cyprus in 1961. Shortly after midnight on September 18, he said, he and some other officers heard a recording of intercepted radio communications. According to Southall, they heard the noise of an aircraft engine and the commentary of the pilot: “I see a transport plane coming low. All the lights are on. I'm going down to make a run on it. Yes, it is the Transair DC-6. It's the plane.”

The pilot's voice was "cool and professional," said Southall. Then they heard gun cannons firing—and the pilot saying, "I've hit it. There are flames! It's going down. It's crashing!"

Southall had the impression that the pilot was "expecting the plane." He suspected that the pilot was communicating with the CIA or with some other Katangan, Rhodesian, or British base that was cooperating with the CIA. 'If the CIA didn't order Hammarskjöld's death,' concluded Southall, 'at least they paid for the bullet.'

And separately from Southall's claim, a USAF Security Services Officer working at the NSA listening-post on Crete, claimed that he heard an intercept in real time of an attack on a plane in or near the Congo on the same night. The Justice asked the US for information on this officer, Paul Abram, but for two years was told by the US that it did not have information on him. This position was challenged by the Justice on the grounds that such information was publicly available. Finally, in 2017, the US sent information about Abram's service record, including his specialization as 'voice intercept protocol specialist'.

This pattern was similar in the case of Commander Southall: the US confirmed to the Justice that he was in the Navy in 1961, but not whether he was stationed in Cyprus or worked in support of the NSA.

The claims made by Southall and Abram are germane to the question of whether Hammarskjöld's plane may have been subjected to some kind of attack. They remain, therefore, an area of interest. Both men insisted that the NSA should hold a tape of the recording they heard. Both are now dead.

When Hammarskjöld was appointed secretary general in 1953, he was appalled to discover that the FBI had an office at UN headquarters in New York, and was screening American UN personnel.

Hammarskjöld swiftly ejected the FBI.

But he had no idea of an even more intrusive form of US spying on the UN. In 2020, the *Washington Post* revealed it had obtained a classified CIA history of an operation involving Crypto's CX-52 cipher machines, such that encrypted messages could be decoded with relative ease by American intelligence agencies. More than 120 countries used this equipment – and so did the UN. This meant that when Hammarskjöld and his mission went to the Congo, all their top-secret, encrypted cable traffic was available to the National Security Agency and the CIA.

There were two CX-52s on the plane that crashed near Ndola. Justice Othman has asked the US to comment on the allegation that transmissions from Hammarskjöld's cipher machines were intercepted by the US. But the response was unhelpful: that the US 'ha[s] no comments on this item'.

The Justice has also noted the existence of records referring to the interception of UN communications, which the Rhodesian and British authorities were apparently able to decode. These appear to have been shared with the US in at least some cases. The Justice has asked for information on this issue but, again, the US responded that it has no comment to make.

Knut Hammarskjöld, Dag Hammarskjöld's nephew, went to Ndola after the crash to represent his family in their grief. While there he became suspicious of what he saw going on. He told me that he spoke about this in later years with Senator Frank Church – the US Senator who in 1975 chaired the Senate Committee investigating the abuses of US intelligence activities. Knut asked Senator Church if he knew anything about

Hammar skjöld's death and was disturbed by the Senator's answer: *'We have a lot on this but we can't make it public.'*

The records of the work of the Church Committee in 1975 are covered by the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, which has led to the release of a vast number of records. These include new information relating to the operations of the CIA in the Congo in the 1960s. But many of these files are heavily redacted. In some cases, files of nearly 200 pages have been redacted so extensively that almost all the pages are blank.

And many files were held back in the most recent release in December 2022 under the JFK Act of 1992. These may include some references to the Hammar skjöld crash – it's impossible to know unless we see them. The federal judge handling a case seeking to enforce the Act has kept alive legal claims for an accounting of Church Committee documents. This case is currently being litigated in the US District Court for Northern California. There is hope that more information from the Church Committee will be released as a result of this litigation. Otherwise further releases will be in accordance with so-called "Transparency Plans" written by the CIA.

Among the files that *were* released is one revealing that the South Africa-based mercenary Mike Hoare worked for the CIA in central Africa from at least 1964. Hoare was most likely a CIA asset earlier than 1964, since he was already being referred to in this file by his CIA cryponym SECAROB-1 (and his wife Phyllis as SECAROB-2). A State Department cable from 1961 refers to Hoare as a trusted authority on events in Katanga. In August 1961, Hoare was scheming to offer the Katanga forces a unit of 'hand-picked men' to fight against the UN.

In another file of newly-released Church Committee records, there is a summary of an interview with Larry Devlin, CIA Chief of Station in the Congo from 1960, in which Devlin said he had ‘important contact’ with Hoare and his men.

These references to Hoare are intriguing because he and his new wife Phyllis were in Ndola on the night of the crash of Hammarskjold’s plane. (And just an aside here – there were a number of mercenaries in Ndola that night, including pilots in the airport lounge.) The information that Hoare was in Ndola emerged from a book by his son Chris, who records that Mike Hoare and Phyllis married in June 1961 and were in Katanga in July; they then returned to South Africa. In September he and Phyllis went back to Katanga by road; and on their way they were in a hotel in Ndola on the night of the crash. According to Chris Hoare’s book, his father ‘felt that the real cause of the crash had been covered up – and would never come out. He made it clear he personally knew nothing about the crash and had had nothing to do with the crash.’

It remains important, states Justice Othman, for records relating to Hoare to be disclosed by the US government. It is possible, too, that South Africa holds records of interest.

Nothing in the reports submitted by Justice Othman to the UN Secretary General has ever suggested that the US or any UN Member State was responsible for – or even involved in – the crash of Hammarskjold’s plane. Rather, the past and ongoing efforts have been directed to obtain the disclosure of information in light of the assessment the Justice has made: that it is almost certain that a few key Member States, including the US, hold relevant undisclosed information. And without this information, the investigation cannot be properly concluded.

Searching for this information is a responsibility owed by the US government not only to the UN, but also to the families of those four Americans – Vladimir Fabry, Harold Julien, Bill Ranallo, and Heinrich Wieschhoff – whose lives were tragically cut short in the course of their heroic service to the UN and to peace.