In Hammarskjold's Native Sweden, Hint of State Secrets Linked to His 1961 Death

By Alan Cowell

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In the decades since the death of United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, his native Sweden has led the call for countries to disclose what they know about the air crash in central Africa that killed him — one of the most abiding mysteries in global diplomacy.

The Swedish authorities, however, have themselves refused a prominent researcher's request for access to official Hammarskjold-related documents on grounds that they are classified under national security laws.

The decision, handed down by Sweden's national archives on July 11 to a researcher, Hans Kristian Simensen, has raised questions about what the documents contain. It also seems to undermine Sweden's stance that nations like the United States, South Africa and Britain should stop stonewalling requests for information.

"How can Sweden expect other countries to declassify relevant documents if Sweden is not doing the same?" the descendants of some of the 16 people killed in the crash asked in a letter to Sweden's Foreign Ministry and a leading Swedish newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*.

Mr. Hammarskjold and his peacemaking mission were just minutes from their destination — an airfield in what was then the British protectorate of Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia — when their chartered plane crashed early on Sept. 18, 1961.

Initial investigations by the colonial authorities blamed the crash on pilot error, but suspicion of foul play has never been far below the surface.

A prominent jurist retained by the current secretary general, António Guterres, has been looking into the case for two years and is believed to be nearing the final stages of his inquiry. The judge, Mohamed Chande Othman of Tanzania, is supposed to produce a report by the end of the current United Nations General Assembly session in mid-September, though it may be delayed.

His findings could write the final chapter in the long-running mystery, one replete with theories of conspiracy and skulduggery.

Mr. Hammarskjold had planned to meet in the town of Ndola with the leader of neighbouring Katanga, a region that had broken away from Congo after it became independent of Belgium in 1960. The secession set off a civil war entangling United Nations troops, local soldiers, myriad intelligence agencies and foreign mercenaries.

The conflict highlighted the stakes as the Cold War began to divide Africa into rival ideological camps and Western businesses jostled for access to Congo's mineral riches, including uranium.

In recent months, versions of what might have happened to thwart his mission have proliferated, adding to the competing and often contradictory accounts of events.

Just this year, the film "Cold Case Hammarskjold," seemed to corroborate a theory that South African or Belgian mercenaries may have forced Mr. Hammarskjold's chartered DC-6 to crash. A book published in May — "They Killed Mr. H — Congo 1961" — blamed what it described as a plot by French mercenaries.

Several accounts have said that Mr. Hammarskjold's airplane was harassed or attacked by a Fouga Magister jet trainer deployed by the Katangese secessionists. A Belgian mercenary, Jan van Risseghem, has been widely identified as its suspected pilot.

In recent days, however, Mr. Simensen said, documentation had been released from the Hammarskjold family archives suggesting that the United Nations' own military investigators had concluded that the pilot was another mercenary who went by the name of Dubois.

The finding was contained in a report by the Military Information Branch of the United Nations marked "strictly confidential." It was initially circulated just weeks after the crash.

The name Paul Dubois may have been the nom de guerre of a British mercenary called John Dane who had figured earlier in Judge Othman's inquiry, although in a different context relating to claims that Mr. Hammarskjold's plane had been sabotaged by an incendiary device. Judge Othman concluded that the "probative value" of that version of events was "weak."

In a report in 2017, Judge Othman noted that "the name 'Paul Dubois' is apparently the same name as the French pilot said to have flown one of the first Fouga jets to arrive in Katanga in 1961 in a test flight to show its capabilities."

Mr. Simensen said he had submitted the latest findings to Judge Othman.

In the Swedish decision about his own case, Mr. Simensen said in an email that he had requested access to parts of a dossier called "Correspondence Regarding Dag Hammarskjold and Ndola 1992-1995," which are part of the country's diplomatic records.

Sweden provided some of the records but refused his request for other documents, citing laws governing "national security or its relationship to other states or permanent organizations."

It's unclear whether that same information has been passed along to Judge Othman.

Last year, Sweden's foreign minister, Margot Wallström, appointed a former ambassador, Mathias Mossberg, to assist Judge Othman's inquiry and ensure "that all relevant information in Swedish archives has reached the U.N. investigation into the death of Dag Hammarskjold."

Rick Gladstone contributed reporting.

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