

**A. Susan Williams.** *Who Killed Hammarskjöld?: The UN, the Cold War, and White Supremacy in Africa.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. xxv + 306 pp. \$37.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-80090-7.

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During a thirty-five-month period from January 1961 to November 1963 the politics and foreign relations of southern Africa were drastically altered by the deaths of Patrice Lumumba, Dag Hammarskjöld, and John F. Kennedy. Aside from Kwame Nkrumah, these three men were at the time arguably the most polarizing figures in Africa, adored by African nationalists and despised by the racist white settlers who dominated the politics of the southern half of the continent. Each of these three men, from separate continents yet all champions for the idea of self-determination in Africa, died violent deaths, the details of which remain shrouded in mystery to this day.

Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish United Nations secretary-general, died in a plane crash near Ndola, Northern Rhodesia (renamed Zambia after independence), shortly after midnight on September 18, 1961. Hammarskjöld's death, although suspicious, has never been officially categorized as a political assassination. Two investigations by the Rhodesian government determined in November 1961 and February 1962 that the crash was an accident caused by pilot error. An inquiry into the matter by the United Nations released in April 1962 resulted in an "open verdict" which stated that the possibility of sabotage "cannot be excluded" but implied that pilot error was the most likely cause of the crash (p. 108).

However, in the course of these and other inquiries a substantial amount of evidence which casts doubt on the crash being an accident was dismissed, suppressed, or was unavailable to past investigators. In *Who Killed Hammarskjöld: The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*, Susan Williams, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, takes a fresh look at the evidence surrounding the crash of the *Albertaina* which carried the UN secretary-general on his fateful flight from Leopoldville to Ndola.

Hammarskjöld's death occurred in the context of the Congo Crisis (1960-66), in which United Nations troops were sent in July 1960 to end a mutiny amongst the troops of newly independent Congo and to expel Belgian forces which had reentered the former colony ostensibly to protect the lives of Belgian citizens amongst the chaos. In the weeks that followed the mineral rich provinces of Katanga and South Kasai (backed by western European governments and mining interests) seceded from the central government and declared their independence. The Congolese government then turned to the United Nations for assistance in quelling the disorder. However, with UN aid slow-moving and ineffectual, Prime Minister Lumumba turned directly to the superpowers, first being rejected by Washington, then aided by

Moscow. This precipitated the onset of the Cold War in Africa as Washington became gravely concerned by the unprecedented nature of the Soviet Union attempting to project its influence far from its own borders. Over the next six months the government politically disintegrated when President Joseph Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba dismissed each other and Lumumba was assassinated at the hands of the Katangan secessionists (with tacit support from the Belgian and United States governments). The Congo thus became the nexus of white African attempts to stem the tide of both the “wind of change” and communism as well as the intersection of decolonization and the Cold War.

In August-September 1961, UN troops launched Operations Rumpunch and Morthor, aimed at ending Katanga’s secession by disarming its troops and arresting both its government officials as well as the foreign mercenaries employed by the rogue state. At this juncture Hammarskjöld decided to personally intervene to attempt to negotiate a ceasefire with Moïse Tshombe, the leader of the break-away province. In mid-September 1961, the UN secretary-general was on his way to Ndola to meet Tshombe when the *Albertina* crashed, taking his life in the process.

Utilizing primary source documents from at least nine countries across three continents, numerous oral history interviews with eye witnesses, and enlisting the help of forensic, ballistic, and medical experts to reexamine the written reports and photographic evidence compiled by the original Rhodesian and UN inquiries into the crash, Williams has authored a fascinating study which is as academic as any international history scholarship and as entertaining as any mystery novel. Her conclusion is that “Hammarskjöld may have been assassinated; or he may have been killed in a failed hijacking. But whatever the details, his death was almost certainly the result of a sinister intervention. It is most unlikely that the *Albertina* crashed as a result of pilot error, as claimed by

the Rhodesian public inquiry of 1961-62 and by a private inquiry for the Swedish government in 1993” (p. 232).

Of particular value to Williams’s research was the unprecedented access she received to the papers of Sir Roy Welensky, held at Oxford University’s Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies (often referred to as Rhodes House Library). Welensky was prime minister of the Central African Federation (consisting of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland) from 1957 to 1963. In his position as prime minister, Welensky received copies of the Rhodesian inquiries into Hammarskjöld’s death. As the first scholar to view the previously classified Rhodesian materials related to the inquiry of the *Albertina*’s crash, Williams was able to note the enormous amount of suppressed evidence that ran contrary to the inquiry’s conclusion that the crash was due to pilot error, along with other anomalies in the evidence that went unnoted in the published report of the Rhodesian government.

Building from her findings within the Welensky papers as well as other newly uncovered evidence not available to investigators at the time of the accident, Williams notes numerous pieces of unexplained evidence that complicate the official version of events. Clear evidence from pictures of the accident scene or eyewitness accounts, which is not mentioned in the official inquiry reports, include the fact that while 80 percent of the plane’s fuselage was incinerated from the fire from the crash and the bodies of all other passengers were so badly burnt that many were unidentifiable, Hammarskjöld’s body, his briefcase, and his cipher machine were not even singed, let alone burnt. Furthermore, eyewitness reports, including that of Major General Bjorn Egge, a Norwegian national who was the UN’s head of military information in the Congo at the time and saw Hammarskjöld’s body the day after the crash, indicate that there was a round hole in the secretary-gen-

eral's forehead, consistent with the look of a bullet hole. Williams had a forensic photography expert view two pictures of Hammarskjöld's body from the autopsy (which were included in the Welensky papers), who conclusively determined that both pictures had been airbrushed to cover something on the Swedish diplomat's forehead. No wound to Hammarskjöld's forehead is mentioned in the summary autopsy report released publicly by Rhodesian authorities. But the autopsy summary does note that bullets were found in the bodies of two of Hammarskjöld's bodyguards, but improbably dismisses the curious finding by concluding that the heat from the fire of the crash caused munitions on the plane to explode into their corpses. Additionally, while there are photographs showing where every other passenger's body was found at the crash site, there is no such photograph of Hammarskjöld's body (only later pictures taken with his body already on a stretcher and in the morgue). Why would investigators take pictures of every body except the plane's VIP? Other eyewitness accounts note that there was an ace of spades playing card, "the death card," protruding from Hammarskjöld's shirt collar. Although this cannot be determined conclusively by the surviving photographic evidence, Williams notes that there is something sticking out of his shirt collar and it appears to indeed be a playing card. Finally, one is left asking why no full autopsy report was released at the time of the accident or is included in the Welensky papers (only a summary of the autopsy findings was released).

Additional evidence from local residents (most of whom were black Africans) was completely dismissed by all white Rhodesian investigators as erroneous. Several witnesses reported having seen a second, smaller aircraft approach the *Albertina*, followed by a flash of light and a ball of fire prior to the UN secretary-general's plane crashing into the Northern Rhodesian countryside. This was seemingly confirmed by one of Hammarskjöld's bodyguards, Harold Julien, who was the sole initial survivor of the crash (he died

from his injuries a few days later), who testified from his hospital bed that there was an explosion onboard the plane before it crashed. But Julien's account was dismissed as "the ramblings of a sick man" by Rhodesian investigators, despite his doctor later remembering that he was in fact "lucid and coherent" at the time (p. 230). In the course of her research Williams also encountered an American intelligence officer stationed in Cyprus and a Swedish flying instructor living in Addis Ababa who corroborate the attack thesis by claiming to have heard short-wave radio correspondence between the attacking plane and collaborators on the ground, and between the air traffic controller at Ndola and another airport, respectively.

Equally troublesome is the reaction of both local British and Rhodesian authorities to the disappearance of Hammarskjöld's plane. Ndola air traffic control saw the plane flying overhead and granted it permission to land, yet when it failed to do so and radio communication with it was lost, Lord Alport, the British high commissioner to the Central African Federation in Salisbury, who had come to the airport to greet the UN secretary-general, concluded that Hammarskjöld must have decided at the last minute to fly "elsewhere" and ordered for the airport to be closed. It seems against common sense that a plane just given permission to land shortly after midnight would decide to fly elsewhere without notifying air traffic control of that decision, and it is shocking that Lord Alport and others at the airport voiced no concern that radio communication with the plane carrying such a high-profile VIP had been lost. A further suspicious fact is that no audio recording from the flight tower's air traffic controller on the night of the crash exists. Apparently the audio recording equipment was not working so the air traffic controller instead took notes by hand.

So unconcerned were local officials over Hammarskjöld's whereabouts that a search effort was not launched until four hours after daybreak, despite the fact that local residents and soldiers

reported seeing a great flash of light in the sky at approximately the same time that radio contact with the *Albertina* was lost. Furthermore, it took fifteen hours for the crash site to be discovered, despite the fact that it lay only eight miles from Ndola airport, along its scheduled flight path. Given that one witness reported seeing paramilitary units near the scene of the crash almost immediately, yet a formal search did not commence until eight to nine hours later, it is plausible that the crash site was staged by those involved in the conspiracy prior to the beginning of the formal search efforts.

Another piece of intriguing evidence was unearthed during the investigations of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which discovered documents from the South African Institute of Maritime Research—which Williams discovered was a front for clandestine activities (including perhaps the 1993 assassination of Chris Hani, the leader of the South African Communist Party and chief of staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe)—which discuss a plot to blow up Hammar skjöld's plane, code-named "Operation Celeste." According to these documents (the authentication of which is impossible to determine since they are copies—some argue that they are Soviet forgeries) both the CIA and MI5 had knowledge of and approved of this operation.

If Hammar skjöld was indeed assassinated the obvious next questions are, by whom and why? Williams identifies several governments, companies, and individuals with both the opportunity and motive to assassinate the UN secretary-general. Included in the list of potential culprits are the governments of Rhodesia, Katanga, the United Kingdom, and South Africa; western European business interests (mostly Belgian and French mining companies) that operated in Katanga; foreign mercenaries active in Katanga; and rogue elements of the CIA or MI5. It is quite possible, even likely, that the plot was implemented by some combination of these individuals.

Typically, I am highly skeptical of such "conspiracy theory" history, but Susan Williams has convinced this reviewer that the *Albertina* exploded before crashing into the ground and that the death of the second secretary-general of the United Nations, Dag Hammar skjöld, was not accidental, but rather an orchestrated political assassination by supporters of continued white domination of southern Africa who were opposed to his vocal support of the "wind of change" that had begun blowing through the African continent. I second Williams's call for a "further, transparent, public inquiry" into Hammar skjöld's death so that the full truth may be revealed (p. 236). This book should be on the summer reading list of all historians.

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