



Who Killed Hammarskjöld?: The UN, the Cold War, and White Supremacy in Africa (Columbia/Hurst)

Susan Williams

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One of the outstanding mysteries of the twentieth century is the death of Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish Secretary-General of the United Nations. On September 18, 1961, Hammarskjöld's aircraft plunged into a dense forest in the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), abruptly ending his mission to bring peace to the Congo. Many suspected sabotage, accusing multinational powers and the governments of Britain, Belgium, South Africa, and the United States of plotting to murder the peace-seeking leader. British High Commissioner Lord Alport, who had been stationed at a nearby airport when the aircraft crashed, fueled further speculation by claiming Hammarskjöld had flown elsewhere -- even as his aircraft passed overhead. Also at the airport were white mercenaries known to stop at nothing to maintain white rule.

Though the Rhodesian government blamed pilot error, Susan Williams shows their investigation suppressed and dismissed critical evidence. Though a subsequent United Nations inquiry could not rule out foul play, it had no access to the evidence to prove it. For the first time, Williams conducts a tense and often dangerous investigation into the Secretary-General's death, consulting sensitive materials in Zambia, South Africa, Sweden, Norway, Britain, France, Belgium, and the United States, including a secret trove of damning documents and photographs. At the heart of her exposé is Hammarskjöld himself, a courageous and complex idealist who sought to protect newly independent nations from the predatory impulses of the Great Powers. Williams reveals how conflict in the Congo was driven less by internal divisions than by the determination of western forces to keep real power out of the hands of postcolonial governments. She also demonstrates the extent to which Rhodesia's British settlers would go to secure white minority rule.

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