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Adv Hold for release expected about 6 p.m. EDT

Hammarskjold Bjt 400

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LONDON (AP) Two men close to Kag Hammarskjold suggested Monday night a bungled kidnap bid by white mercenaries may have caused the death of the former United Nations secretary-general.

Hammarskjold and 15 companions died Sept. 17, 1961, when their airplane mysteriously crashed in the African bush. The Swedish statesman was heading for a peace parley with Moise Tshombe, then trying to lead the province of Katanga out of the Congolese union.

The theory of a bungled kidnap attempt was mentioned by Hammarskjold's nephew, Knut, who now heads the Hammarskjold family, and by George Ivan Smith, director of the British U.N. office. Both were speaking in recorded interviews with the British Broadcasting Corp. program "24 hours," in a feature marking the 10th anniversary of the crash.

Knut Hammarskjold left interviewer James Hogg in no doubt that he is well aware of the theory of a bungled kidnap bid by white mercenaries. The crash itself, he said, was an accident, but what kind of accident remains open.

He was asked if he ruled out foul play. "I don't rule out anything," he replied. "Much speculation could have been avoided if, at the time of the inquiries, the whereabouts of certain very active people could have been defined in a very precise way."

Knut Hammarskjold was asked what sort of people he meant.

"Adventurers for money," he replied. "Some of them might not be completely strange to that sort of operation" (meaning kidnaping).

The younger Hammarskjold, who is secretary-general of the International Air Transport Association, and Smith both suggested the aim of the would-be kidnapers may have been to prevent the United Nations and Tshombe from coming to terms.

Smith put it thus: "It was felt by the mercenaries that we were moving toward a reconciliation with Tshombe and that meant they were going to lose their bread and butter. . . . If the United Nations and Tshombe got together and brought about unification of the Congo there was no reason for their presence any longer."

The U.N. official himself was the target of a kidnap bid by Katangan troops led by white mercenaries six weeks after Hammarskjold crashed.

As Smith described the theory, the would-be kidnapers may have got to know the radio frequency used by Hammarskjold's plane.

Then, equipped with the proper transmitting gear, they could have made contact with the pilot and, in the name of the regular aviation control authorities, talked or lured it down and away from its true destination. This was to have been Ndola, then managed by the Rhodesian federal government of Sir Roy Welensky. Ndola is now in Zambia.

Answering other questions, Smith said:

"Mercenaries are not academics or clerics. . . . Enough evidence has come to my notice to make me believe further investigation may well show the reasons of the flying accident were not the ones that many people suppose, that it was not pilot fatigue. . . . but that there was some other reason, prompted by some other actions by people like mercenaries—certainly not governments or authorities of any kind—that caused the flying accident."

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Tshombe
died of
heart
failure,
29 Jun 69.

See note, this file, 3 Feb 69.