

The Ndola Disaster

Final version

- The Ndola disaster? Wasn't that the accident in which Dag Hammarskjöld lost his life?

- Yes, but it is not altogether certain that it was an accident. And not only Hammarskjöld died but 15 people with him, eight of them Swedes.

- And Ndola was the place where it happened?

- Yes, and did not happen.

- What do you mean?

- The Ndola crash has been the object of several investigations, of a very careful scrutiny indeed.¹ A number of possible causes for the crash have been examined. Most of them have been eliminated, but a few remain: Shooting down by another aircraft, a mock attack by another aircraft which caused the pilot to make a sudden dive, and pilot error. All the investigations have proceeded in the same manner, beginning with the departure from Léopoldville and ending with the crash. However, the most peculiar part of the entire chain of events is what happened after the crash: The lack of timely and efficient search and rescue.

- But what happened after the crash cannot by definition possibly have caused it, could it?

- Correct. But certain people who have studied the incident have been reminded of the Conan Doyle story about the dog that didn't bark: A murder had been committed and the police concluded that the assassin had come through the garden. That was, however, unlikely because in that case the dog would have barked. "Yes," said Sherlock Holmes, "that is precisely the point: Why didn't the dog bark?" It didn't bark because the murderer was the dog's owner. "When its master approaches, a dog doesn't bark - it wags its tail".

- So what happened and didn't happen?

- Mr Hammarskjöld travelled to Ndola in the Copperbelt region of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia, then one of the three components in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland) in a Swedish DC-6B, registered as SE-BDY, named "Albertina" by its crew. The plane belonged to the Swedish company Transair and was chartered by the United Nations. It departed from Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) in the late afternoon of 17 September, 1961. Because of the disturbances in

the Congo (now Zaire) and in particular the fighting between UN forces and local insurgents in the province of Katanga (now Shaba) the flight took place under radio silence.² However, at 20.02Z (Z = GMT; the local time in Ndola was then 22.02B; B = Ndola time) above Lake Tanganyika SE-BDY opened radio traffic with the Flight Control at Salisbury (now Harare)³ which in due turn handed it over to the tower at Ndola. The pilot gave his expected time of arrival as 22.20Z and asked for permission to descend from 17,500 to 16,000 feet. At 22.10Z he reported: "Your lights in sight, overhead Ndola, descending." The plane was seen by many people on the ground and the tower asked the pilot whether he was going to spend the night at Ndola and whether he needed fuel. The pilot said he would need fuel and that he would not stay the night. He would, he said, give further details on the ground. He asked for and received the barometric pressure for altimeter setting, 1021 millibar, and was asked to report when he reached 6,000 feet. The captain answered "Roger, 1021." That was the last signal heard from the plane which, to judge from the victims' watches, crashed around 00.13B (local time), just three minutes after last radio contact. The wreckage was discovered 15 hours later, 8 nautical miles (just over 9 statute miles, less than 15 km) from the airport.

- So the plane just went silent?
- The Ndola tower repeatedly called it but received no reply.
- What reason can there be for a plane to not send or receive signals?
- There are three possible causes: The radio communication system can have broken down, which in this case appears unlikely and which would anyway be cause for concern. Another possibility is that the crew could have been incapacitated - not just the captain, but also the co-pilot, first officer and radio operator who would have been able to receive and send signals. Or, thirdly, the plane could have crashed. However, the airport did not - as it should under ICAO recommendations - start looking for the wreck of SE-BDY because it had not received any signals, and the plane could not send out signals because it had already crashed. The last exchange of signals was at 00.10B (local time) and the next call from the tower was made at 00.15B, two minutes after the crash.
- Was no alarm sounded?
- A so-called Incerfa signal, meaning Uncertainty phase, was originated at 01.42B but was not transmitted until 02.16B. An

Incerfa signal is sent out if an aircraft fails to arrive within 30 minutes of its estimated time of arrival. There is also an Alerfa signal which is sent out if no news has been received following the Incerfa signal. However, the Alerfa signal should go out if an aircraft has been cleared to land but fails to land within five minutes of the estimated time of landing. An Alerfa signal should be followed by a distress signal, Detresfa, if circumstances point to the probability that the aircraft is in distress. The Ndola tower waited for two hours instead of the prescribed 30 minutes. However, since the plane had arrived and been seen overhead an Alerfa signal should have been sent, not an Incerfa. The excuse for sending only an Incerfa, and even that an hour and a half too late, was that no formal clearance to land had been given. A Detresfa signal was eventually issued by Salisbury at 06.53 local time, nearly seven hours after the estimated time of landing.

- Are formal clearances always given?

- Clearance to land is always requested just before final approach. As to "Top of descent" the Controller at Ndola admitted that it happens that pilots forget to report that.

- Was there any other traffic?

- None, except another UN plane, a DC-4 with registration OO-RIC and carrying Lord Lansdowne, British Joint Parliamentary Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, which had arrived at 22.35B and had been waiting for Mr Hammarskjöld's plane. Lord Lansdowne was to leave Ndola before Mr Hammarskjöld arrived, and when he saw what he assumed to be Mr Hammarskjöld's plane, he decided to leave. His pilot, Captain Deppe, asked for clearance to take off for Salisbury and was instructed by the tower to hold position as SE-BDY was coming in to land. Captain Deppe tried to get in contact with SE-BDY but with no success and was allowed to take off at his own discretion at 00.35B.

- How did the traffic controller explain that he was expecting the plane to land but refrained from sending out a distress signal when it did not?

- The controller, Mr Martin,⁴ was in regular contact with the airport manager, Mr Williams, who reached the conclusion that Mr Hammarskjöld had decided to go elsewhere. He said that the pilot had not filed a proper flight plan and behaved in an evasive manner, refusing to answer questions.

- What is a flight plan?

- A flight plan is submitted at the airport of departure in order to

inform air traffic controls along the route that a plane is coming. At the time there was what must be described as a civil war going on in the Congo, particularly in Katanga province, and it was precisely in order to stop this bloodshed that Mr Hammarskjöld had decided to go to Ndola. The Katangese Air Force had one small jet plane, a French-built Fouga Magister, which successfully strafed and bombed UN units. The previous day SE-BDY had been shot at and damaged by ground fire in Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi), the capital of Katanga. In order to minimize the risk of attack, SE-BDY therefore flew under radio silence and filed a fictitious flight plan, indicating Luluabourg as its destination.⁵ However, since Mr Hammarskjöld's flight was of international importance, Lord Lansdowne offered to fly personally to Ndola to ensure that all necessary preparations for Mr Hammarskjöld's arrival had been made. This was done: The president of Katanga, Mr Moise Tshombe, had already arrived, as well as the British High Commissioner Lord Alport, the British Consul at Elisabethville, Mr Dunnett, and a considerable number of newsmen, who had earlier in the day reported that Mr Hammarskjöld was expected.⁶ There was a strong security force at the airport, "a cloak and dagger atmosphere". The Royal Rhodesian Air Force had taken over the crews' briefing room and Lord Alport the airport manager's office.⁷ The Commonwealth Relations Office in London had, at the request of the British Embassy at Léopoldville, sent a signal to Salisbury to make all necessary arrangements.⁸

- But the airport manager thought that Mr Hammarskjöld had decided to return to Léopoldville?

- He said: "I was overhearing and involved in conversations at a very high diplomatic level, some of which I have forgotten entirely, which is my habit on these occasions, and some of which I would prefer not to refer to in this court, if that is permissible, but I had access to information that would not normally have been available to me."

- Who were the diplomats engaged in conversation at the airport?

- Lord Alport was there and possibly Mr Dunnett, but the identities of the others have never been revealed. There were apparently senior civil servants present as well as military, air force and police officers but there is no mention of any diplomats in the records. Mr Tshombe had arrived earlier in the afternoon and been

accommodated in the Provincial Commissioner's house where a security force was deployed. After having met Lord Lansdowne he returned to the house where Lord Alport called him to get ready to come to the airport. However, as far as can be seen from the records, he never got there. When the plane failed to arrive, Lord Alport assumed that Mr Hammarskjöld had decided to go back to Léopoldville.

- So when SE-BDY had a few minutes left to complete the landing it had begun, Lord Alport figured that Mr Hammarskjöld had chosen to go all the way back to Léopoldville, a six-hour flight, after the pilot had said that he would need fuel?

- Lord Alport said that he thought the plane was to continue in the air in order to finish a telephone conversation or perhaps that Mr Hammarskjöld had heard from one of the United States planes at the airport that Lord Lansdowne had just left and that he wanted some time to pass until he himself landed. However, he did not check this with the pilots of the two U.S. planes, Col. Matlick and Col. Gaylor.⁹ He also argued that Mr Hammarskjöld might have received a message that the cease-fire had been broken and that he therefore no longer wanted to meet with Mr Tshombe.

- Had he heard that from Lord Lansdowne?

- No. Lord Lansdowne testified that "I knew perfectly well that he (Mr Hammarskjöld) was determined to go to Ndola" and repeated that "I am absolutely convinced in my own mind from the conversations I had with the late Secretary-General that he was determined to go to Ndola."

- Did Lord Alport offer any other comment?

- He said he thought that "the reluctance of the pilot to disclose either the purpose or the time of his landing or indeed anybody on board his plane seemed to be very unusual."¹⁰

- Was it?

- If London decided to send a member of Government to Ndola to arrange for Mr Hammarskjöld's visit, of course it was unusual. The Director of Civil Aviation in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Wing Commander Maurice Barber (later Chairman of the Board of Investigation), had at 15.27Z given orders that Ndola airport should remain open until the last of the two planes had arrived. Col. Barber had also given orders that Mr Hammarskjöld's flight should be kept as secret as possible. Lord Alport, however, said that the pilot had been very evasive and when asked to clarify what he meant he said that the pilot had refused to disclose where

he intended to land and who was on board.

- Is that true?

- Not really. Lord Lansdowne had just said that Mr Hammarskjöld was on board - in fact, this was the very plane they had been notified about from Whitehall and which they were waiting for. And the pilot had just said that he was, of course, descending.

- Did anybody else testify to any conversation with people whom Mr Williams and Mr Martin referred to as "dignitaries"?

- Yes, for instance James Laurie, a reporter from Northern News. He had heard the plane come in, so noisily that he had held the telephone receiver against the window and said to the assistant sub-editor on the other end: "This is Mr Hammarskjöld's plane." He testified that the plane "had passed over the airport and had been in touch with the control tower and it was believed he was coming in when there was some light." - "Where did you get that belief from?"

- "I am afraid I cannot say where I got it from but from sources which were quite reliable." - "Authentic sources? Authentic, official sources?" - "Extremely."¹¹

- This would indicate that officials at the airport thought the pilot would circle until daylight?

- Possibly. However, had the pilot wished to avoid a night landing, it is more likely that he would have left Léopoldville later instead of circling above Ndola for nearly six hours, especially as he had said he needed fuel.

- When these discussions took place at the airport, had the plane already crashed?

- Yes.

- Had anybody seen or heard it crash?

- Seven people saw a glow¹², two of them policemen, three security guards. Two were civilians. Mr D.E.Peover was an architect who saw the plane very clearly from his balcony and shortly thereafter a glow. He took it to be slag dumping from the mines but reported it the next day when he heard on the radio that the plane was missing. The second was the refuelling superintendent, Mr R.A.Phillips, who saw flashes and mentioned it to people standing nearby. Police officer D.J.F Buchanan, security guards D.A.C. Clarke and L.H. Cock also said they had seen a flash or a glow. Police officer M.U. Van Wyk saw what he described as a red flash in the sky: "The light was of a deep red glow and it spread upwards from the ground; it stretched over an arc of 45 degrees northwestwards of the place

where I was standing." Before being relieved by another policeman, Mr Pennock, at 02.00B he told the officer in charge at the police station, Inspector Begg, about the glow. The BOAC manager Mr D.D.Lowe, who was a member of the police reserve, was on security duty outside the Provincial Commissioner's house and heard the engine of Lord Lansdowne's plane start up. "I saw a glow in the sky some little time afterwards, in a westerly direction. It was a pinkish glow. It lasted a few seconds. My immediate reaction was that it was a reflection of a bush fire."¹³

- A bush fire lasting a few seconds?

- That's what he said.

- What did Inspector Begg do about Van Wyk's report?

- He and Mr Pennock went to the control tower where Mr Goodbrand referred him to Mr Williams. They tried to call Mr Williams at the Rhodes Hotel but could not get through so they went there themselves. They reported the flash to Mr Williams who said that nothing could be done until first light and then went back to bed.¹⁴

- When is first light?

- At 05.38B on 18 September, sunrise 20 minutes later. Mr Williams came to his office around 09.00B.

- Why did he stay at the Rhodes Hotel?

- It is not clear from the records whether he had a house or a family. He was due back on Monday 18 September - the day after the crash - after leave in England but went back on duty earlier than planned since he was called by the Provincial Commissioner to prepare for Mr Hammarskjöld's visit.¹⁵ It is not known what he did during his vacation or whom he met. According to an unconfirmed report, Rhodes Hotel was run by people close to mercenaries. There was a mercenary recruiting office in the nearby city of Kitwe.¹⁶

- Did anybody else initiate a search at dawn?

- No. The sequence of events is as follows: At 01.15B, one hour after radio contact with SE-BDY was broken, Ndola called Salisbury, Lusaka and the police. 01.20B the Salisbury airport manager Mr Murphy called Col. Barber, Director of Civil Aviation and later chairman of the Investigation Board, and told him that the plane had been seen overhead Ndola but "pushed off again". 01.50B Ndola sent a priority signal to Salisbury requesting news, and at 02.16B the Incerfa signal was sent. At 03.10B Ndola closed the airport and opened again at 05.50B when another traffic controller, Mr

Budrewicz, came on duty. He learnt about the "flash in the sky" and informed Salisbury about that at 06.45B. At 06.53B Salisbury sent out a Detresfa. However, this was not communicated to Col. Barber until he came to the airport which was said to have been between 9 and 10. Before that, at 07.00B, the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, Air Commodore Hawkins had called Col. Barber about the disappearance of the plane. Barber answered that there were various statements and it was assumed that it had gone off to another destination. At 07.08B Ndola inquired from Salisbury that "it may sound a little pedantic but would you check if police and various organizations are working on this aircraft?" At 07.44B Léopoldville informed Salisbury that Léo had no news about the aircraft and around 9 Salisbury Rescue Coordination Centre asked the RRAF to start searching, This was confirmed by a signal but not until 09.42B. According to regulations a Civil Air Search Officer should be appointed during the Incerfa stage but Col. Barber did not appoint anyone until 14.10B when he chose the Ndola airport manager Mr Williams.

- Was any explanation given for the delay in sending out a Distress Signal?

- It was said to be necessary to wait for a reply from Léopoldville to the Incerfa signal which had been sent there inquiring whether the plane had returned.

- But no answer was received?

- No. In fact, the traffic control at Léopoldville had, as witnesses testified, collapsed at independence. The staff was being trained by ICAO personnel but the communicators were Congolese who did not understand English. It could take several hours for a message to reach ICAO staff from Traffic Control even though they were only a flight of stairs up in the same building.

- Was this known to the Rhodesians responsible for search and rescue?

- Colonel Barber said after his visit to Léopoldville during the inquiry that he had the impression that very little functioned there. This was, of course, after the crash. However, the political discussions in Rhodesia at this time revolved around the question whether the Congolese could run the country. The feelings were that they could not, whereas Katanga, with a certain measure of Belgian control, was still considered working pretty well. The signals from Ndola to Léopoldville were sent by teleprinter via Johannesburg even though HF (high frequency) radio had on previous occasions been

successfully used. HF radio was monitored all through the night by ICAO in Léopoldville and it was on HF that contact - relayed via Luluabourg - was finally established the next morning.¹⁷

- Were aircraft available for search?

- Yes, 18 RRAF aircraft. There were in fact so many that it was due to lack of parking space that Mr Martin asked SE-BDY whether it would stay the night.¹⁸ However, the Ndola authorities considered inviting the United States Air Force to send large aircraft from Wheelus, Libya and Kano, Nigeria to help, due to the extensive area that was to be searched.¹⁹

- But hadn't the plane crashed while making the routine final approach to Ndola airport?

- Yes. However, at Ndola it was felt that an "area of probability" had to be defined before one could waste flying hours on a search. A Canberra on routine patrol, as well as a commercial airliner en route to Ndola, had been told to keep a lookout. Inspector Begg had during the night sent out road patrols but nothing had been found.

- When were the first planes sent out by the Royal Rhodesian Air Force?

- At 10.02B.

- Where were they ordered to search?

- North and south of the airport.

- Where was the wreck found?

- To the West, beneath the prescribed approach lane, 9 miles from the airport.

- When was it found?

- At 15.10B, by flying officer Craxford in a Provost, 25 minutes after he had been allowed to start searching in that direction. His plane had been available since dawn, in fact ever since the crash.

- Had anyone then found it on the ground?

- Yes, a charcoal burner, Mazibisa, had "some time after 14.30" come into the Forest Office and said he had seen the wreck. The Forest Office called the Police. Craxford got his order at 14.45B. The first police patrol is reported to have arrived at the site shortly after 15.00B, and the ambulance at 16.07B. Mr Hammarskjöld was identified at 16.17B.

- Was the wreck directly under the flight path?

- Reconstruction flights were made on 9 October. These flights were undertaken in order to try to figure out how the pilot had

navigated. One of these flights came right over the crash site, the four other ones close to it. The U.S. Air Attaché Col. Matlick also made a reconstruction flight in his DC-3, flying at DC-6 speeds and using the Jeppesen manual. Also he came right on it. On 19 September, when Mr Hammarskjöld's nephew Knut and several others were flown from Salisbury to Ndola in an RRAF Dakota, the Rhodesian pilot said that it would be impossible to see the wreck since it was so difficult to locate. Transair's Chief of Air operations, Captain Persson, who was on board, took out the Jeppesen manual and asked the pilot to make the prescribed approach and they found the wreck without any difficulty.²⁰

- So the RRAF's argument was that there was no point searching from the air until the wreck had been found by people searching on the ground?

- Yes, and in fact the wreck was located simultaneously from the air and on the ground, by police who had received the report from African charcoal burners. That procedure seems a bit odd: Ordinarily, planes are used to survey a large area from the air and then direct ground rescue staff to the crash site, rather than have the ground search locate the site first and then have aircraft just come and look at it. It is because of their wider vision that aircraft are used for reconnaissance, traffic control, to search for ships at sea etc.

- If the plane had crashed, it was of course on fire. Would it not have been possible for a search plane to see the burning wreck at night?

- It was said that there are so many bush fires at that time of year so that one would not have been able to distinguish a burning wreck from a bush fire.

- Did Lord Lansdowne notice any bush fires from his plane?

- No, he did not. He said that he fell asleep on his flight from Ndola to Salisbury but that he was awake for a while after he left Ndola and he did not see any bush fires. His pilot, Captain Deppe, also testified that he had not seen any bush fires. Neither did he see the burning wreck, but he was of course taking off in the opposite direction, against the wind.

- What was Lord Lansdowne's reaction when he received no reply from SE-BDY?

- He testified that he became very apprehensive. Captain Deppe tried to contact SE-BDY and his failure to do so "quite clearly worried

Captain Deppe." Since he was a "very experienced pilot" and was "clearly perturbed" by this absence of contact, Lord Lansdowne said that he and his assistant, Mr Wilford, also became "extremely apprehensive." When they landed in Salisbury Lord Lansdowne was, he said later, "in a state of very considerable disquiet."

- Did he do anything about it in Salisbury?

- He made inquiries but felt that little could be done since it was three in the morning.²¹ He was met by the Deputy High Commissioner, Mr Scott.

- Did Mr Scott have any comment?

- The controller in the Salisbury tower, Mr Thorogood, testified that Mr Scott had come to see him to inquire about the expected time of arrival of Lord Lansdowne's plane. According to Mr Thorogood, Mr Scott had said "that it was quite likely that SE-BDY had decided to go back to Léopoldville." Mr Scott's version, when he testified, was slightly more detailed: "Mr Thorogood asked me whether there were any possible political reasons why, in my view, Mr Hammarskjöld might have been diverted and I said: 'Yes, I thought there were such reasons. It was quite possible that he had taken a decision to go elsewhere' ".²²

- So whereas the Under-Secretary who came from London via Léopoldville felt absolutely certain that Mr Hammarskjöld was coming to Ndola, both the High Commissioner Lord Alport and his deputy Mr Scott expressed their opinion that he might have gone elsewhere?

- Yes.

- Where could elsewhere have been?

- Considering it was night, the plane could have gone to Salisbury or Lusaka. Elisabethville had closed down and did not even have a normally operating radio; that had been mentioned in Northern News on 15 September. Besides, considering that Katanga was what could be called hostile territory, that would be extremely unlikely. That leaves Kamina and Léopoldville. Kamina was a large former Belgian air force base in Katanga, and fighting was going on in the vicinity. As for Léopoldville, the fuel may just about have lasted but it appears odd that anybody would expect a DC-6B to make a non-stop flight for 13 hours, without normal navigation facilities and in need of fuel. The SE-BDY captain had twice said that he wanted to avoid Congolese territory.

- In case SE-BDY had decided not to land, would it not have informed Ndola, signalling "Landing cancelled" or something like that?

- Naturally. That is prescribed procedure. In fact, every airman questioned in the matter has testified that a pilot in that case must request clearance to divert and receive a safety altitude instruction for another route and destination.

- Are the signals recorded on tape?

- No. As far as is known, Ndola airport had no tape recorder.²³

- So how could the conversations with SE-BDY be recorded?

- Those with Salisbury are on Salisbury's tape, those with Ndola are recorded only in the log kept by Mr Martin. He made notes during the evening but combined them into a log only the following morning.

- 18 September?²⁴

- No, 19 September. He went off duty only at 03.30B on 18 September, so to him the "next day" meant 19 September, some 33 hours after the exchange of signals actually took place.

- Does this mean that all we really know about what SE-BDY and the tower said or did not say to each other is what Mr Martin tells us?

- Yes. In fact, the only point on which you can fault SE-BDY's captain is that he did not report reaching 6.000 feet or ask for landing clearance. This is, however, so natural to a pilot that it appears very strange indeed that he had not done so. Mr Martin could, had he so wished, have denied this and also denied hearing any Mayday signal. The fact that he did not write out the log for a plane disappearing during landing constitutes a very serious negligence. Mr Martin has thereby diminished his own credibility and we can therefore not be really sure about what SE-BDY said or did not say.²⁵

- There was no black box, no tape recording in the plane?

- No. And no radar in the tower, and pretty poor communication facilities altogether compared with those which are routine 31 years later.

- Could anybody else listen to radio traffic between the ground and SE-BDY?

- That would be no problem for a reasonably experienced radio operator in the Copperbelt or Katanga. Belgian staff who had left Elisabethville airport at the outbreak of shooting on 13 September had taken sophisticated radio equipment with them. There were quite a few radio hams in the Copperbelt where the postal and telephone networks were not yet very developed.

- Was there any hostility in Rhodesia against Mr Hammarskjöld and

the United Nations?

- Certainly, and on the highest level. The Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Sir Roy Welensky, expressed in the most explicit terms his support for an independent Katanga and had made it clear that he was prepared to intervene to protect Tshombe from the UN. However, London, being responsible for the foreign affairs of the Federation, prevented it. The press in the Federation wrote routinely about "the UN aggression". Sir Roy has even been quoted as saying about the UN operation in Katanga - although it was based on a Security Council resolution - that "the world has never seen a more aggressive act since Hitler walked into the Low Countries of Europe."

- Meaning that he compared Mr Hammarskjöld to Hitler?

- He never said exactly that.

- Could you please give a brief refresher course about the UN operation in Katanga?

- The former Belgian Congo became independent on 30 June, 1960. Very shortly thereafter a mutiny occurred in the garrison town of Thysville and fighting broke out elsewhere also. Many Belgians fled, those in Katanga mainly to Rhodesia. Their tales of chaos and bloodshed in Katanga naturally had a considerable impact on the whites in Rhodesia. The province of Katanga in the south-east of the Congo belongs to the same geological area as the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia and - although speaking different languages - the whites in Katanga and those in Rhodesia held similar political views. Shortly after the disturbances began in the Congo, the United Nations launched a huge operation destined to prevent bloodshed, to help the Congo build up a functioning administration of its own to replace the Belgian, and to assist the country during the difficult transition period. Without its Belgian officers, the Congolese National Army had become a very disruptive element. The nationalist hero Patrice Lumumba was - rather incorrectly - labelled Communist, and Moscow - not so incorrectly - suspected of trying to bring the Congo under its sway. The Congo was, and is, a rich country, largely thanks to the huge mineral deposits in Katanga, mainly controlled by Belgian, British and to some extent also French and other interests, grouped around three large companies, Société Générale, Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK) and Tanganyika Concessions.²⁶ These interests encouraged a Katangese separatist movement, led by the President of the self-styled Republic of Katanga, Mr Moïse Tshombe

who was under strong influence of his Minister of the Interior, Mr Godefroid Munongo.²⁷ He had Belgian advisers and there were Belgian officers serving in the Katangese Gendarmerie. The conviction among whites in Katanga - and in Rhodesia - was that it was imperative to restore peace and production in Katanga so that this peace could later on hopefully spread to the rest of the Congo. The view held by the United Nations - whose members included practically all independent countries - was that existing boundaries should be respected and that a new form of colonialism should not be brought back into the newly independent Congo. The early 1960's was a period when a great many African countries became independent, and the failure of the largest among them, the Congo, to achieve true independence would be likely to cause disturbances across the continent. In order to reunify the Congo and end Katangan separatism, the UN Security Council decided - without, however, much enthusiasm displayed by Britain and France - that it was necessary to remove Belgian officers from the Gendarmerie and to encourage Mr Tshombe to enter into negotiations with the Léopoldville Government.²⁸ One first effort, code-named "Rumpunch", intended to remove mercenaries and European political advisers had taken place on 28 August and was to be followed by another one, "Morthor", beginning on 13 September. This operation failed insofar as fighting broke out between UN troops and the Gendarmerie. The UN representative in Elisabethville at the time was the Irishman Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien; the troops were Indian, Swedish and Irish. President Tshombe himself escaped from his palace and went to stay with the British Consul in Elisabethville, Mr Dunnett. The UN action in Katanga was timed to coincide with the visit to the Congo by Mr Hammarskjöld, just prior to the opening of the General Assembly during which he was likely to be censured by the Soviet Union and possibly others for the continued division of the Congo. Mr Hammarskjöld wanted to stop the meaningless killing and had therefore decided to go to Ndola for talks with Mr Tshombe.

- Why Ndola?

- Mr Tshombe refused to come to Léopoldville and Mr Hammarskjöld could not go to Elisabethville as that would be construed as rather a Canossa trip, apart from being extremely unsafe. If a meeting were to take place, it would have to be in a neighbouring country, and Northern Rhodesia was the obvious choice. The British Government offered its good services as liaison to the Government of the

Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which had dominion status. The town of Bancroft was first proposed as a site for the meeting, but since it was not equipped to receive long-range aircraft, the site was moved to Ndola, a mining town only 7 miles from the Katanga border, some 100 miles from Elisabethville. Mr Tshombe put up certain conditions for a cease-fire whereas Mr Hammarskjöld was most emphatic that there had to be an immediate and unconditional cease-fire. As we know from the statements made by Lord Lansdowne, Mr Hammarskjöld assumed that Katanga would indeed observe an unconditional cease-fire, and so he set out on his mission.

- Who did the fighting on the Katangese side?

- Local troops, organized into a Gendarmerie and led partly by Belgian officers who had stayed behind, partly by newly recruited mercenaries.

- Belgian?

- Yes, and French, Rhodesian and others. There were not many of them, even though figures vary. They were originally around 500 but only some 170 remained after the first UN operation, Rumpunch, succeeded in having most of them repatriated.²⁹ Some mercenaries appeared rather racist in outlook even though they commanded local troops. Several of the French mercenaries were men without a country since many of them were unable to return to France due to their participation in the OAS in Algeria.

- And they took orders from whom? From Mr Tshombe? Or from Union Minière?

- They seem to have acted pretty much on their own.³⁰ They were a rather uncontrollable bunch and as long as they kept within reasonable limits, the mining interests were probably content to pay their wages but not be asked for instructions nor told in detail what was being or had been done.

- There have been accusations that the mining interests wanted to have Mr Hammarskjöld killed?

- Rather unlikely. They certainly did not like the policies of the United Nations as they evolved in New York but they probably trusted Mr Hammarskjöld more than they trusted Africans or Russians. In Katanga there were many white "ultras" who wanted white rule reintroduced, but on a higher executive level it was widely, though reluctantly, realized that the independence process was irreversible.

- Could any mercenary have taken it upon himself to kill

Mr Hammarskjöld?

- Conceivably. There is reason to believe that some of them, such as the French "affreux", hated Mr Hammarskjöld for his support of independence in African states. A simpler reason lies in the very word "mercenary" - these men fought for wages, and if peace was achieved as a result of the Hammarskjöld-Tshombe meeting, they would find themselves without jobs.

- But the sympathies in Northern Rhodesia were mainly on the Katanga side?

- Yes. It was widely felt that black rule would mean an end to the fairly comfortable life the whites had led and also that it would drastically reduce efficiency and productivity in the economy and therefore be generally harmful.³¹ Even though Rhodesia had no legalized apartheid such as that which existed in South Africa, the whites rarely mixed with Africans. Decades before satellite television they were not too well informed about trends in Europe and elsewhere. What they saw was Belgians who had fled Katanga, making - justified and unjustified - accusations of pillage, murder and rape. They interpreted the Belgian-supported separatism of Katanga as a return to law and order, contrary to the chaos reigning in the rest of the Congo. They therefore regarded the UN action in Katanga as a threat to peace and stability not only in Katanga but in the whole of the Copperbelt and, for that matter, in the whole of English-speaking Africa.

- Is this dealt with in the reports on the Ndola crash?

- Hardly. The report of the UN commission investigating the crash is an excellent document, admirable in phrasing and perspicacity (Documents 1961: A/5609 and Add.1), but it naturally refrains from dealing with politically sensitive matters. The commission comprised five senior jurists, one from each of the four large continents (Nepal, Argentina, Sierra Leone and Yugoslavia) plus one from Sweden. Its report incorporates, as attached documents, the reports written by the Rhodesian Board of Investigation (headed by the Federal Director of Civil Aviation Col. Barber) and by the Rhodesian Commission of Inquiry (headed by the Chief Justice of the Federation). Actually, it should be recommended that anyone wishing to comment on the crash should first read and carefully study the UN document.

- But is it still not satisfactory?

- Both the Board of Inquiry and the UN Commission based their work

to a large extent on the findings of the Board of Investigation and if these had been incorrect, so would the conclusions be. The Rhodesians had the preconceived idea of pilot error, whereas the Transair company of course wanted it to be anything but that. The Federation had a very small white population and was short both on expertise and experience. There was also a certain tendency to regard some of the attached experts as there to represent vested interests.³² The IFALPA representative, Mr McAfee, tells in a letter to the Swedish Pilots' Association how the Rhodesian Board members thought his role was always to defend the pilots whereas his task of course was, like everybody else's, to try to establish the truth. There were certain interests claiming that UN pilots had flown more than allowed, Africans who wanted to blame the whites, and UN officials who were reluctant to admit the regrettably slipshod way in which its air and radio operations were sometimes run in the Congo. Moreover, the Rhodesian investigators naturally took as a starting point the wreck, examined it, studied all possible causes, found none, and thereby concluded that the crash was caused by pilot error. The UN Commission avoided the latter conclusion and thereby reached none at all. Newsmen then and ever since have started by looking for a criminal, regrettably often basing themselves on unsubstantiated rumours. Also, the inquiries were a sort of court without an accused. Had there indeed been an act of murder, the perpetrator would arguably have to be found among mercenaries and none of these was heard, except a rather sorry appearance by Major Delin, the Fouga pilot.³³

- Is there any way to look at the crash except from those two viewpoints, looking at the wreck and looking for murderers?

- It could conceivably be the way this question-and-answer paper tries to look at it, by noting the surprising inactivity at Ndola airport. Very little was done during the fifteen hours following SE-BDY's request at 21.57Z for descent clearance and its message at 22.10Z, a few minutes before the crash, "Your lights in sight, overhead Ndola, descending".

- Why has this whole matter been taken up again?

- Two former collaborators of Mr Hammarskjöld, Mr George Ivan Smith and Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien, published on 11 September, 1992, a letter to The Guardian regarding the shooting down of a UN plane over Sarajevo. They said this was another example about the dangers to which UN personnel can be exposed and made it known that they

possessed proof that Mr Hammarskjöld had been shot down. There were some misunderstandings regarding a reported confession on tape, of which a small part was reproduced by BBC in September 1992. What had happened was that a French diplomat, Ambassador Claude de Kémoullaria - who had been a collaborator of Hammarskjöld, head of the UN Information Office in Geneva and had careers in politics, banking and diplomacy, including the post as ambassador of France to the UN - had in 1967 met a Belgian pilot who claimed to have inadvertently shot down the plane. Ambassador de Kémoullaria had not revealed this publicly, only privately to UN officials and Swedish diplomats. It was, however, apparently felt that the alleged confession did not merit further study as it did not tally with known information about the range of available aircraft. The tape that BBC made partly public was not a recording of the pilot but a recording made by de Kémoullaria translating his notes into English.

- And what was the confession?

- The Belgian, Beukels, claimed that he and another pilot had, each in his own Fouga Magister and each with a radio operator on board, set out on a night mission from Kolwezi in order to intercept Mr Hammarskjöld's plane and induce him to divert to Kamina. He was acting on orders given by a colonel Lamoumine who in turn took orders from a mysterious Mr X, said to be a very influential European company executive. Beukels somehow located SE-BDY. ordered its pilot over the radio to divert and then, in order to show that he meant business - but without knowing that Mr Hammarskjöld himself was on board - fired and unintentionally hit a wire, causing the pilot to lose control of the plane which therefore crashed.³⁴ The Belgian had then returned to Kolwezi from where he was taken by helicopter to Kamina where a kind of court-martial was held.³⁵

- Does this make sense?

- No, not much. A Fouga Magister had only barely sufficient range of action to fly from Kolwezi to Ndola and back. The Rhodesian Board of Inquiry stated in its report that the range was only 135 nautical miles, meaning 250 kilometers, but the Swedish Board of Civil Aviation calculated in 1962 that the range was 420-450 kilometers which means that it could, provided winds and other circumstances were favourable, fly from Kolwezi to Ndola, stay overhead Ndola for a few minutes, and return.³⁶ This presupposes, of course, that Kolwezi airstrip was operational and lit, and that it had the

required length of runway, 1,500 meters, for a fully loaded Fouga with extra tanks to take off. The Fouga hardly ever operated at night, and the Katangese stated that Kolwezi could not be used for night flying since the runway lights had been removed; however, an electrician said they could fairly easily be installed again. At least on Delin's Fouga there were no flame traps, and a pilot firing the machine guns mounted in front of him would have been blinded by the flames. The pilot would have needed considerable luck in locating SE-BDY and quite extraordinary luck in hitting vital parts with machine-gun fire.

- What would have been the purpose of making Mr Hammarskjöld divert to Kamina?

- To enable the mercenaries to have a man-to-man talk with him. This does not seem very likely since Kamina was under UN control and a DC-6B could not have landed there, especially not at night, without the UN troops seeing it and traffic control guiding it in and down. To land at Kolwezi or Elisabethville - in order to continue to Kamina by small aircraft or helicopter - was physically impossible since neither airport was at the time equipped for night landings. Besides, it seems safe to assume that a hijacking may not be conducive to making the Secretary-General increase his faith in the rational behaviour and good judgment of the mercenaries. When the General Assembly convened in New York the next morning, it would have been told that its Secretary-General had been kidnapped and was held hostage at Kamina base. This would have created an international uproar against the mercenaries and if the mysterious Mr X had been such an important and well-informed person as Beukels claimed, he would of course have realized how counterproductive a hijack would have been.

- Were any Fougas available at all?

- Not to the investigators' knowledge. Katanga had originally had three, of which one had crashed and one was under UN control. The third one was the renegade Fouga which became internationally known when its pilot, the South Africa-born major José Delin, defied the UN by random strafing of its installations and troops.³⁷ The Commissions seem satisfied that this particular Fouga was inoperative the evening of 17 September. However, it appears that Katanga originally ordered nine Fougas and there is a report that five of them were still at Pointe-Noire (in ex-French Congo) in May of 1962. A check in December 1992 with the Fouga manufacturers

reveals that 54 Fougas were sold to Belgium and 33 to unspecified buyers. Arthur Gavshon states in his book that the Fougas were shipped to ex-French Congo in the belly of large transport planes on charter from an American company.

- Could they have been delivered and hidden?

- Not likely, but it cannot be ruled out. The Rhodesian Board of Investigation did indeed visit Kolwezi but Col. Barber let it be known that he would rather not have the Swedish observers accompany him (the Board of Investigation was, according to international law, established by the government of the country where the crash occurred). The Swedes did not insist on coming, mainly because they did not want to give the appearance of recognizing the Katanga Government by travelling there in an official capacity. After his visit, Col. Barber issued - contrary to promises given the Swedish observers - a press statement that SE-BDY could not have been shot down by the Fouga. But, of course, if there had by any odd chance been other Fougas available, they would by then have been carefully hidden elsewhere. It is regrettable that M de Kémoularia's meeting with Beukels and other mercenaries was not communicated to the police in 1967 or even later. It would then have been possible to reopen the case and question the mercenaries about the alleged Rhodesian smuggling of Fougas and about the complicity of tower personnel. Diversion of a plane, using machine-gun fire, is of course tantamount to hijacking, which carries the strongest penalty. However, Beukels was now allowed to escape prosecution and give evidence.

- So it appears that rumours about hostile aircraft are unfounded?

- There has always been a problem that people, journalists and others, have in good faith given publicity to rumours without first doing their homework. It is therefore easy to refute vague claims, and anyone believing the shooting-down theory should start with checking the range and equipment of the plane said to have been used, and a Fouga could only with the smallest of margins have reached Ndola from Kolwezi. It must also be emphasized that it is extremely difficult to locate and attack an aircraft at night.

- Would it have been possible for Katangese mercenaries to pinpoint the exact arrival of SE-BDY above Ndola?

- That depends on what radio sets they had. It would have been easy if they were helped by collaborators at Ndola or Salisbury. However, even though a flight plan only to Luluabourg was filed in

Léopoldville, a considerable number of people knew about Mr Hammarskjöld's flight and its destination. There are, for instance, statements that teleprinter tapes from the Léo tower were thrown into the waste paper basket where they were retrieved by members of the Sabena staff who fed them into their own teleprinter machines for transmission to Katanga. International news agencies had reported about Mr Hammarskjöld's departure shortly after he left Léopoldville, there were reporters waiting at Ndola and one of them, Ray Moloney, erroneously filed a report that Mr Hammarskjöld had arrived - he apparently mistook Lord Lansdowne for Mr Hammarskjöld, was fired from UPI and joined AP instead. SE-BDY was in radio contact with Salisbury nearly two hours before its estimated arrival at Ndola and, of course, it spoke with Ndola tower several times before the final contacts at 23.57B and 00.10B. Ndola had only one runway and the approach was clearly laid down in manuals. The wind was steady from the East so the plane had to land in a direction from West to East. In other words, an experienced radio operator could have made a fairly close approximation of when and where SE-BDY would come in for landing.

- Are there any indications that the SE-BDY captain feared attack?

- There was some speculation at Ndola that he deliberately came in low in order to make it more difficult to be hit by ground fire from the so-called Katanga pedicle which juts out into Northern Rhodesian territory only 7 miles from Ndola. He specifically said twice, at 20.40Z and 21.11Z, that he was avoiding Congolese territory in order to land at Ndola. That very plane had the previous day been hit by ground fire in Elisabethville. He also came in earlier than indicated - at 20.02Z he said to Salisbury that his expected time of arrival at Ndola would be 22.35Z whereas it was in fact 22.10Z, something that can be interpreted as a way to mislead any attackers. It seems, in fact, to have been routine in certain dangerous areas at the time, such as the Middle East, to give incorrect landing times in order to confuse potential attackers. However, even though SE-BDY - probably deliberately - had given his ETA as 22.35Z he said at 21.11Z he would be abeam Ndola at 21.47Z which he also was. The flying time from Kolwezi to Ndola is approximately 45 minutes, so if a Fouga pilot had overheard SE-BDY at 21.11Z and started at 21.25Z he would have reached Ndola at the same time as SE-BDY.

- What about bullet holes?

- None were found. However, this was the subject of a serious

dispute between the Swedish observers, supported by the Swedish Government, and the Rhodesian Board of Investigation. Approximately 75-80% of the plane was destroyed by fire. The Swedish observers wanted to have the wreck melted down so that one could identify bullets which would have a higher melting point than the fuselage aluminium. The Rhodesians were content only to break it up mechanically, by sledgehammer, a process that can have deformed or destroyed bullets or rocket remains, if any.³⁸ The UN Commission later asked a Swiss expert, Dr Frei-Sulzer, to study the question and he found nothing.³⁹ To the layman, his report seems impressive but the Swedish police considered his report "very meagre indeed."⁴⁰

- Were any bullets found?

- Yes, but only bullets which would have been carried as ammunition for the weapons of the four security guards and the two Swedish UN soldiers.⁴¹ They were examined by a ballistics expert. No other bullets were found, but the Transair people pointed out that no bullets had been found in the fuselage of the plane after the previous day's attack either.⁴²

- Any possibility of sabotage?

- The plane was left unguarded for several hours at Léopoldville before departure and a number of people could have had access to it. However, Transair staff was working on a nearby plane most of the time. A time-bomb can be excluded since no one knew until shortly before departure that SE-BDY would take a time-consuming roundabout route. A time-bomb would have been set to explode much earlier. An aneroid bomb, on the other hand, would have exploded just at the moment of landing: Such a device is detonated by a trigger mechanism set to the barometric pressure calculated to exist at the approach to Ndola. Another possibility would be a device triggered by the lowering of the landing gear. There is, however, no trace of such a device (but a plastic bomb may theoretically have gone undetected during the examination of the wreck) and the theory presupposes the existence of a well-trained and purposeful saboteur at Léopoldville. Nevertheless doubts, however vague, exist: Such a bomb could conceivably have been small enough not to leave any traces. It would not necessarily have been intended to incapacitate the crew members totally but only to affect them so much as to render them unable to behave rationally for a few seconds during the critical descent. Some witnesses claim to have seen two separate flashes and there is

also the testimony of the sole - and temporary - survivor Harry Julien that the plane exploded.

- Did Julien say that? Anything else?

- Sergeant Julien had 55-percent burns and had been exposed to the tropical sun until four in the afternoon. When he was found he must have been in what Dr MacNab at the Ndola Central Hospital called "drastic pain". He was given heavy sedation but during spells of consciousness he was cogent and lucid. He said that the plane "blew up" and spoke about "little explosions all around" but this could have referred to magnesium flares carried on board or possibly the optical sensations in patients with uremia which he developed as a consequence of his burns. He died in the morning of 21 September, from renal failure. Much was made of his statement that Mr Hammarskjöld had shouted "Go back!" but this can have been meant to warn his co-passengers that the best chance to survive a crash is if one is seated in the back of a plane.

- Did Mr Hammarskjöld himself survive for any period of time?

- His injuries were fatal and in all probability they caused instant death. He may have been alive but unconscious for a very short time. His body was thrown clear of the wreckage and was the only one not exposed to fire.

- No other witnesses?

- As already mentioned, many people heard the plane and several saw a glow in the sky. However, there were African charcoal burners who saw the burning aircraft and possibly even the crash. It was a report from a charcoal burner, Mazibisa, which brought police to the site, at the same time as Flying Officer Craxford spotted it from the air.⁴³ Three European witnesses (Mrs Joubert, Mrs Anderson and Mr Chappell) claimed they heard two aircraft, one of them a jet, a version which tallies well with the one given to Ambassador de Kémoularia. However, aviation experts state that they themselves can have difficulty distinguishing a jet from a piston engine, especially from a distance. Moreover, the DC-6B was considerably noisier than the planes usually coming into Ndola. There were also certain other doubts about the credibility of these three witnesses.

- Did any African see or hear a jet?

- Yes, at least a smaller plane, even two.⁴⁴ Those who did so became, however, a bit discredited by the appearances of a few witnesses who gave pathetically naive statements about having seen two Rhodesian jets start from the airport - whose runway lights were

then turned off - and pursue the larger plane. These and certain other statements were obviously designed only to embarrass the Rhodesian Government. Of the other witnesses, there was quite a reliable one, Mr Timothy Kankasa, who at the time was Chairman of the Twapia Township and who later became a member of the Government of independent Zambia and his country's ambassador to Zaire. However, his timings were wrong, and he stuck to them: He based them on the fact that he listened to Springbok Radio when he came home but the Springbok news came much earlier. He denied that he had mistaken a Brazzaville newscast - which was later - for that from Johannesburg and stuck to his timing which rather coincided with the arrival of Lord Lansdowne's aircraft. Contrary to the charcoal burners, Mr Kankasa had a watch and was of course in the habit of using it. It might have been possible that he listened to news broadcast from a station in a different time zone. The radio had been tuned in by Mrs Kankasa but she was not heard, nor were any of the African visitors in the Kankasa home.⁴⁵ Anyway, Mr Kankasa held and conveyed a very strong and sincere belief that an unknown plane was up and about, albeit at the wrong time.

- And the other Africans?

- Two of them seemed trustworthy and reliable but when reading the verbatim records of their statements it is hard to avoid the impression, held by the Board of Inquiry, that they were victims of what may be called "imaginative reconstruction". Their story of a small plane on top of and behind the larger aircraft is precisely the kind of position sketched on a paper by the Belgian pilot who spoke to Ambassador de Kémoullaria. However, the imaginative reconstruction can have been on the part of the Belgian who may have heard or read about the Africans' testimonials.⁴⁶ The conclusion of the Board of Inquiry was that they had probably seen the tail section of the DC-6B which, with its flashing light, can in the darkness look like a small separate plane. It must be remembered that DC-6B was a very large aircraft for Ndola - the only one of comparable size was the Britannia which only flew there in daylight. However, this does not explain testimonials of African witnesses who said they had seen the smaller plane go off in another direction.

- Were Africans invited to testify?

- Certainly. Posters were distributed and broadcasts made, inviting anybody who had anything to say to report to the police.⁴⁷

- Were Africans not afraid to go to police stations?

- The officers of the Northern Rhodesia Police did not think so, rather the contrary - they felt Africans came very often with minor complaints. However, some of the witnesses who appeared claimed they were frightened to go to the police and that policemen were in the habit of beating them up.

- White policemen beating Africans?

- No, African policemen beating Africans. The implication however, was rather that an African who reports for instance that he has seen a dead body is treated by the police with suspicion, as if it was he who had done the killing.⁴⁸ The testifying charcoal burners all repeatedly said they had been very frightened, that they thought somebody might kill them as well, that the war in Katanga was spreading into Northern Rhodesia and so on. So even though they had practically seen the crash they did nothing until one of them the next day reported it to the Forest Office which called the Police.

- So some of them went up to the wreck?

- Yes, a few did. They claimed they did not see any survivor. One of them, Ledson Daka with an accomplice Moyo, stole what he took to be a typewriter but which turned out to be a coding machine carried by Mr Hammarskjöld's secretary, Miss Lalande.⁴⁹ He was convicted and sentenced to two years hard labour and this act was by the white Rhodesians mentioned as typical for African behaviour in general. This may have deterred other Africans from volunteering to testify. The theft of a coding machine was also the cause of many rumours that the crash was engineered by the Soviet Union which, gossip had it, must have been interested in acquiring access to UN coded messages.⁵⁰

- Is there any feeling that the Africans were discriminated against during the investigations?

- They were treated in a somewhat condescending, even intimidating, manner, never referred to as "Mr Buloni" but as "African Buloni". Oaths were not administered. It is not clear from the records whether they were heard in English or through an interpreter. There is, of course, a wide gap between European and African concepts of thinking and reasoning, a problem well known to anyone who has lived and worked for a longer time in foreign cultures. Many European ways of reasoning are as alien to Africans as theirs are to us, and whites often get exasperated with blacks because they seem to think

and argue in an incomprehensible manner. For instance, affirmative answer to a negative question means agreement with the negation ("Did you not see it? - Yes" means that he agrees. i.e. he did not see it.) Times are often given in the Biblical way, "when the cock crowed he second time" There are also other difficulties in translating African languages into English ⁵¹ and vice versa, and there is frequently a habit among Africans to want to please the stranger, something that easily leads to contradictions and confusion. The Swedish police investigators who were there as observers felt that more information could have been obtained with more delicacy.

- And the UN Commission?

- The questioning was more considerate and it may have helped that a senior Sierra Leone Justice was on the board. It was meticulously noted in which language each witness spoke (if other than English). There is, of course, as in courts the world over, a sometimes very unfortunate reliance on interpreters. Professional ones possess the deeper knowledge to find adequate words for vague and strange concepts and complicated nuances, whereas untrained ones lack these skills. This problem is known to anyone who has had to listen to the questioning in court of someone whose language he understands - the listener can then find that the statements of the witness are translated in an insensitive and even misleading way. Whatever the reason, almost all African witnesses changed their stories when questioned at different times, something that may indicate that they did not speak on the basis of clearly remembered observations. The Swedish envoy to Pretoria, dr Bratt, reported from the hearings that witnesses began answering even before the question was asked, thereby giving the impression that the procedure had been carefully rehearsed.

- Is it possible that Africans knew more than became known?

- Possible but not probable. It may, however, be noted that the counsel for the Swedish Government, an eminent Rhodesian lawyer, in his submission to the UN Commission made a very able analysis of the entire case, with fairly severe criticism of the lack of search and rescue and with an equally critical analysis of the findings of the Rhodesian Court of Inquiry. However, he felt that no attention could be paid to any African testimony, a not untypical Rhodesian attitude. Besides, the IFALPA representative wrote at the time that whereas counsel for the Rhodesian side was very experienced in

aviation matters, counsel for the Swedish and other observers were not.

- How did the Africans react?

- Over the years, quite a number of Africans have written to say that they are convinced that African testimonials have been overlooked, belittled or ridiculed. It is remarkable that quite a few people after 31 years still voice their view that something untoward happened at Ndola and that there was a cover-up. For instance, one European nurse at Ndola wrote in response to an article in The Guardian that there was no one in Ndola who was not convinced that Mr Hammarskjöld was deliberately killed.

- This of course proves nothing at all, except the existence of a lingering mood of suspicion.⁵² Are there other indications to this effect?

- There were demonstrations and apparently a certain amount of unrest among the black population. One counsel at the UN Commission hearings said that "since the disaster many wicked and baseless things have been said about the British Government, not in the course of this inquiry but outside."⁵³

- Did anybody speak on the Africans' behalf in a more general way?

- The nationalist UNIP Party apparently made a few very unfortunate attempts to discredit the Government. More important is perhaps that some of the charcoal burners were encouraged to testify by Mr Sven Mattsson, a Swedish trade union official who was helping the Africans of future Zambia to unionize. His efforts were not appreciated: One member of the Rhodesian Board of Investigation, Mr Fournier of ICAO, is on record as having asked why he put his nose into the matter and wanted to know whether he had Communist sympathies.

- Are there any other theories, apart from shooting and sabotage?

- Yes. A few can be excluded right away (such as the absurd one that Mr Hammarskjöld committed suicide). Nothing was found technically wrong with the plane which was examined in detail. It was the best plane Transair had, carefully nursed by engineers and the crew, but 75-80% of it melted in the fire following the crash and it can therefore not be excluded totally that there was a technical defect of some kind. However, experts consider this to have been most unlikely. There was no fire on board. The crew was competent; Captain Hallonquist was a teetotaler and fully rested. The co-pilot and the first officer had flown also the previous day but there were

bunks available for resting. Not only one but three pilots were on the flight deck at the time of the crash, together with an engineer and a radio operator (and a steward). In fact, by the time they were approaching Ndola the crew had, without a hitch, just completed a very difficult flight, in radio silence and without navigational facilities, over an unknown route. They were used to flying in Africa.

- Could there have been altimeter failure?

- All three altimeters were sent by diplomatic pouch to the United States for inspection and no defect was found. They were set at the correct QNH (the barometric pressure given by the Ndola tower). However, Swedish police stated that there had been a considerable delay in sending them off to the US manufacturers, Kollsman, and that they were meanwhile not properly kept and could have been tampered with. The Rhodesians said they had difficulty finding packing suitable for such delicate instruments. Anyway, the Board of Investigation, the Court of Inquiry and the UN Commission excluded altimeter failure.

- Wasn't there also a theory about a seventeenth man on board?

- Yes, and he has even been given a name, Gheysels, a Belgian allegedly put on board by French "affreux". How he would have been dressed is unclear. He cannot have pretended to be a collaborator of Mr Hammarskjöld's, a member of the crew or a Swedish-speaking UN soldier. The theory has it that he posed as a security guard, meaning that Harry Julien, acting head of the UN security in Léopoldville, would have accepted under his command an individual he had never seen before and whom none of the other guards knew. It further presupposes either that he was suicidal enough to carry a metal identification tag so that his charred corpse could be removed by Rhodesian agents or, alternatively, that the Rhodesians were lucky enough to choose his body for removal since all of the sixteen victims were - with one exception - positively identified. It is incomprehensible how such a seventeenth man could know when the plane was landing; had the purpose been to divert the plane the hijacking ought to have been taken place much earlier, while SE-BDY was still over Congolese territory and flying under radio silence. It is a far-fetched and unrealistic theory, originating in the unreliable Notre guerre au Katanga where confused "confessions" of killing Mr Hammarskjöld are given. Besides, it can be argued that not even mercenaries would be likely to put one of their own men on

board and at the same time try to shoot the plane down. Moreover, the mercenaries were not exactly kamikaze material: They were paid to kill others, not to get themselves killed if they could possibly avoid it.⁵⁴ However, this may possibly not apply to the most vengeful among "les affreux" but even if they had considered a Belgian colleague expendable he himself might have thought otherwise.

- After it became clear that the plane had not diverted but had in fact crashed, did the Rhodesian authorities put forward any theory?

- Yes, several. An especially catchy one - embraced by Lord Alport in his autobiography - was that the pilot had mistaken Ndola for Ndolo, a small and virtually abandoned airport at Léopoldville. The commonly used approach manual, Jeppesen's, was after the crash found in the wreckage, opened at Ndolo which, at 951 feet, is 3.200 feet lower than Ndola. The interpretation was that the captain had thought that the airport altitude was 951 feet instead of 4.160. However, Jeppesen's is a loose-leaf binder and the very purpose of having it loose-leaf is that one takes out the chart needed which is put into a clip, one next to the captain and one next to the co-pilot, rather than balancing a bulky binder. The fact that the binder was opened at Ndolo rather proves that the Ndola chart had been taken out during the descent and was burned to ashes in the wreckage. There was also talk about the possible use of a United States Air Force approach manual which was freely distributed at N'Djili, the international airport of Léopoldville. One of these was found in the wreck with some notes in green ink which turned out not to have been made by any of the three pilots. The US Air Force manual was only used for very small airports, not included in Jeppesen, to which UN flew supplies and staff. An inventory made by Transair accounted for all distributed Jeppesen manuals except three, i.e. those issued to the three SE-BDY pilots. As alphabetical happenstance has it, the approach charts for N'Djili, Ndola and Ndolo follow each other in the U.S. manual and the Ndola chart is on the opposite page to the N'Djili one. Any pilot operating out of N'Djili can hardly have missed seeing the Ndola chart many times, much in the same way as anybody who looks up his Monday-Wednesday engagements on the left page in his pocket calendar is likely to notice also what he has pencilled in for Thursday-Sunday. Moreover, Ndolo is followed by "Republic of the Congo"; "Ndola" by "Northern Rhodesia". Ndolo has no approach control and no tower, facts clearly

noted in bold type. The approach to Ndolo is from the East, the one to Ndola from the West. That landing procedure at Ndolo is to turn descending from 4.000 feet to 2.500, i.e. starting even lower than the Ndola runway. Captain Hallonquist had often flown into nearby Elisabethville and had, both the day before and while going to the airport, discussed the Ndola altitude with Swedish colleagues. Finally, Ndolo is located between the large cities of Léopoldville and Brazzaville, close to the Congo river, largest in Africa after the Nile and here at its widest point. Ndola lies inland, in the midst of Africa. To mistake Ndola for Ndolo would be like explaining a crash at Geneva with the theory that the pilot was looking at the approach chart for Genova, mistaking the Alps for the Mediterranean.

- Was there anything odd in the plane's behaviour just before the crash?

- No. The engines were developing power, the flaps were down in approach position, it was on an even keel but banking slightly to the left, the undercarriage was down and locked in approach configuration. The retractable landing lights were not yet on, and since they are generally switched on when the plane comes in on final approach, that may be interpreted as an indication that the plane was lower than the pilot thought it was. The angle of descent was three degrees so in fact everything seemed normal except of course that the plane was far too low.

- How low?

- The altitude of Ndola airport is 4.160 feet and the crash site was at 4.357 feet. If one accepts that the plane came in low, say at 5.800 feet, this means that it lost 1.443 feet in less than three minutes which approximates the normal rate of descent, 500 feet a minute.

- Is there any possible explanation for this, except pilot error?

- The UN Commission writes as follows: "If the pilot had for some reason descended to 5.000 feet in the course of his procedure turn (= the turn from a course parallel to the runway around and into the wind), as is permitted in some instrument landing charts for Ndola, or in a visual or semi-visual approach, his margin of safety over the crash site could have been reduced to less than 650 feet. It is possible that some momentary distraction, either from inside or outside the aircraft, during the precise flying needed for his procedure turn, may have caused him to lose the remainder of this rather narrow margin. It would be extremely difficult either to

prove or to disprove this hypothesis as a possible cause of the accident."

- What kind of distraction could that be?

- One theory has it that a smaller plane, such as a De Havilland Dove, fired a rocket which, without hitting the plane, distracted the crew.⁵⁵ Mr Danielsson wrote in his report that two witnesses, Mr Peover and Mr Phillips, stated that they saw two separate glows which could mean that one glow came from the crash and the other from a bomb or rocket hitting the ground after having frightened the pilot into an altitude-losing manoeuvre. Mr Danielsson therefore wanted tests made with flares so that the testimonials of Mr Peover and Mr Phillips could be rechecked. Col Barber refused to arrange such tests. Another theory is that a small plane simply made a mock attack.⁵⁶ If a pilot sees an unexpected aircraft diving towards him from above, his reflex action would be to duck. He may then have straightened up the aircraft again sufficiently to resume level or near-level flight but lost too much altitude.⁵⁷

- Would he not have sounded an alarm?

- Yes. Having got over the shock he ought to have developed full power, retracted the undercarriage and radioed Ndola but there may simply not have been sufficient time for it.⁵⁸ Or maybe he did though Martin did not notice or record it...

- Were there any small planes available?

- This was bush country, but with large industries and mines. There must have been quite a few small planes available, though no inventory was ever made.⁵⁹ The UN Commission notes that the Rhodesian authorities had stated that they had no knowledge of any aircraft other than SE-BDY being in the air in the Ndola region at the time (except OO-RIC, Lord Lansdowne's plane), but it also notes that since no radar watch was maintained the possibility of an unknown aircraft cannot be excluded. Also the Katanga side had several small aircraft with a longer range than the Fouga but obviously with much lower speed.

- But how could a smaller aircraft have caught up with the much faster SE-BDY?

- It would not have had to. It could have been circling Ndola, above the approach lane where it was certain that SE-BDY would be coming in, listened to the signals exchanged between the tower and SE-BDY, calculated fairly exactly where SE-BDY would make its approach, and

on top of it been "lucky". It could, for that matter, even have been a helicopter.

- Were helicopters available?

- Apparently, though the investigators never mentioned it. From the verbatim records of testimonials it transpires that Assistant Commissioner Hicks, who was at Kitwe when he received news that the wreckage had been found, immediately travelled to Ndola in a private helicopter. There may have been others. The Belgian who spoke to Ambassador de Kémoularia claimed that he was taken in a helicopter from Kolwezi to Kamina for a "court-martial".⁶⁰ There are also reports that Mr Tshombe had access to helicopters belonging to the Public Works Department.

- Would not a small plane or a helicopter have been seen or heard?

- Not necessarily. There were, as we know, reports about another aircraft. One witness, Mr Bermant, said he heard a plane travelling from south to north, crossing Albertina's track. And as to the noise, it should be kept in mind that no one heard the crash. Admittedly though, an overhead noise is better heard than a distant level explosion.⁶¹

- If we exclude the unknown aircraft theory, what errors could the pilot have made?

- The most common theory at the time was that he had come in too low,⁶² with help of the instruments, but seeing that it was a clear night gone visual, started the procedure turn and flown into what is called a black hole, an area where a ridge prevents him from seeing the lights from Ndola and the other towns and townships, Kitwe and Mufulira. He may then have gone back to instruments and there have been those - notably Wing Commander Evans who was a member of the Board of Investigation - who claimed that the pilot had misread 4.600 feet for 6.400 feet, in the same way as one can read a quarter past twelve for three o'clock on a watch. However, this presupposes that also the co-captain had misread the altimeters and that both of them had misread them not only once but several times.⁶³ The co-pilot routinely calls out altitudes during descent. Especially among UN officials this theory seems to have gained some acceptance whereas aviators strongly doubt it: Pilots do not misread altimeters but it can happen that they forget to look at them if they are disturbed by something else.⁶⁴ This theory also presupposes that the pilot misjudged the altitude already when he was overhead

Ndola. Ground witnesses then estimated the altitude at 2,000 feet above ground level, and it stands to reason that the experienced pilot estimated the lights to be 2,000 feet below him and the plane thus at 6,000 feet. He could then hardly have believed that he was higher a few minutes later, at 6,400 feet, after having descended during the procedure turn.

- Why would he come in too low?

- To avoid being fired upon from Katanga, 7 miles away. The lower the plane, the more difficult it is to hit it. And, as has been pointed out before, the plane had been hit by a bullet above Katanga the day before.⁶⁵

- Was it a clear night?

- Yes, except for a slight haze from the cobalt refinery. The moon was in its first quarter and soon setting, at 00.24B. SE-BDY had radar for map reading. The airport lights were on at full power.

- Could there have been an optical illusion?

- Ndola is not situated in the kind of desert country where heat-induced haze can cause what is known as "inversion". However, in recent years many studies have been made of sensory illusions. Experience has shown that pilots flying into an unknown airport at night, unable to see the horizon, can make mistakes about the altitude. Boeing has carried out simulator tests which have shown that many pilots, however experienced, can misjudge altitudes unless they are specially trained, for instance to land on aircraft carriers. Nowadays, planes are equipped with alarm signals, "Ground Proximity Warning System", sounding an artificial voice when the plane gets too close to the ground.

- Any other possible scenarios?

- Certainly. It does happen that pilots who are in control both of their plane and their faculties nevertheless misjudge circumstances, and such accidents are frequent enough to have been given an abbreviation, CFIT, "Controlled Flight Into Terrain". An experienced Swedish air accident investigator has in a detailed memorandum given CFIT as the possible, perhaps even probable, cause of the crash. Such optical illusions are not uncommon and do not have to be the result of incompetence or fatigue.

- So there are people who believe in pilot error as the probable cause?

- Yes, that is the conclusion reached by the Rhodesians and, as mentioned earlier, this appears to have been their preconceived

idea. The mandate of the Board of Inquiry was explicitly to look into the "accident". The conclusion of pilot error was, however, strongly criticized because, it was argued, one cannot more or less at random choose a certain order of theoretical causes, eliminate one after the other and then be left with pilot error. It should also be mentioned that whereas elevations at and in the immediate vicinity of the airport are given on the landing chart, there are no elevation points given for the approach area and the tower gave no warning. Changing from visual to instruments is always dangerous, and it is possible that the unexpected disappearance of all lights, perhaps combined with moonset, briefly confused the pilot, but he he can also have been disturbed by something else.

- So pilot error seems a likely cause?

- Error is an unpleasant description for an action that may have been caused by the way the human eye functions. We must always keep in mind that the fact that it could happen does not prove that it did. One cannot, as the counsel pointed out, conclude that for instance a car accident was caused in such-and-such a manner because other drivers had made such-and-such a mistake. It is, for that matter, remarkable that those at Ndola who so briskly accuse the pilot of a moment's misjudgment do not find it unreasonable that so many senior and experienced people at Ndola failed to draw the conclusion that the plane had crashed and its passengers most probably in need of immediate succour. It does not require hindsight to suppose that a plane during landing, eagerly expected and the subject of extraordinary security arrangements, had not likely chosen to fly elsewhere but was lying burning exactly where it could be calculated to be, beneath the approach path which it and every other aircraft into Ndola took. It can even be said that the main, and perhaps only reason, why pilot error is not established as the likely cause is that the negligence of airport and other staff at Ndola leads one to suspect that there were efforts at a cover-up, though, of course, one does not know whether, in that case, such a cover-up was motivated or not.

- So the Swedish Government holds the view that the search-and-rescue - or rather the lack of it - should be looked into again?

- No, the Swedish Government holds no view on the matter. It had been represented both on the Board of Investigation and in the UN Commission of Investigation and it has accepted the report of the latter. The present, somewhat argumentative, paper has been prepared

as a sort of aid to those who, after 31 years, cannot possibly be familiar with all the findings.

- Do people question the investigation, i.e. express an opinion that the Ndola crash has never been completely clarified?

- Certainly. There are obvious similarities with, for instance, the Kennedy and Palme assassinations, one of them being an anti-establishment doubt, fed by strong views pronounced by people who have a high position but are neither fliers nor detectives and not even very familiar with the existing evidence. At intervals, individuals and journalists bring up what they like to call new evidence but which turns out to be old rumours or assumptions which have previously been very carefully studied.

- Do people still write in with what they think is new and valuable information?

- Yes, a considerable number of people do. Most of them report that they have heard from ex-mercenaries or former UN soldiers who in turn had heard that the plane was shot down. Possibly some of these people could be traced but hearsay is of little use, however widespread. Some reports are quite specific: A CIA agent, name of Southall, is, according to two separate sources, reported to have said he had listened to a radio conversation between a Fouga pilot and the Ndola tower. An English historian, Alan James, reports that the then British Consul at Elisabethville, Denzil Dunnett, had been told by a Belgian that his, the Belgian's, brother had shot down the plane. A Scot ex-mercenary living in Norway shared detention in Elisabethville with a South African, Svanepoel, who claimed that he knew how the crash had been caused and that he had gone out to the wreck in a Land-Rover during the night; however, he also claimed that he had shot and killed Hammarskjöld and his bodyguard which is patently untrue. This partly fits in with another version given by a Mr Taylor, who claims that police had very early on 18 September found the coding machine offered for sale in Chifubu market, asked the seller where it came from and gone out to the wreck from which parts with bullet holes were dismantled. An employee at a Ndola smelting factory, Mr Waddacar, states that parts of the plane brought there for smelting were riddled with bullet-holes. Colonel Maitra of the UN Gurkha battalion has said that he had been told by a mercenary that the plane had been shot down, and so on. To investigate such clues would, however, require the cooperation of Interpol, and since more than 31 years have passed, the chances

that any such witness is alive is slim.

- Have such rumours and suspicions been voiced also in the past?

- Yes, and there has perhaps been a certain reluctance among officials to listen to or reply to queries and theories. This may be understandable since those who have spent months, possibly years, studying the Ndola crash eventually tire of people who somewhat pretentiously appear with accusations and allegations founded on the flimsiest of gossip. But the attitude of considering the case closed has contributed to the birth of conspiracy theories involving various interests from CIA to KGB. There are even those who feel that investigators have deliberately been led up blind alleys by being made to concentrate on far-fetched or absurd theories given publicity by media.

- Have the files - or part of them - been kept classified?

- In Sweden a set of documents has been kept classified or, rather, not been formally declassified. At the time their publication may have influenced witnesses not yet heard, trespassed on personal integrity and honour, or possibly affected Swedish relations with the Federation which shortly afterwards ceased to exist. The critical reports of the Police and the Board of Civil Aviation have been marked Secret but there appears to have been a decision taken already in 1962 to declassify them though apparently nobody has asked for them. In principle, all Swedish official files are, under the constitution, public except for certain reasons listed in an act. It is uncertain whether there would be any secret UN files. The British Foreign Office has a 30 year limit - and also a 50 and a 100 year limit - but when the 1962 files became available in January 1993 nothing new was found. The files of the Commonwealth Relations Office will be opened only in 1994. To what extent Special Branch files can be declassified is not clear and inquiries have yielded no result. It is possible that there may be additional information available in American or other archives - but it would be very painstaking to find out. Any research must be done with great care and criticism since it is only too easy to build a scandal out of a loose statement. To give an example: A testimonial of one charcoal burner popped up again recently, the one in which the witness said that he had watched how the Ndola airport was suddenly darkened and two jets started - without runway lights - and got up and pursued Mr Hammarskjöld's plane. It is a very silly statement, coming close to the "little-green-men-in-a-flying-saucer" kind of story. Still,

it was considered news and that sort of thing contributes to rather irresponsible accusations of cover-ups and thus creates an automatic disbelief both in "news" and denials.

- But this paper itself seems to subscribe to a conspiracy theory, namely in regard to the search-and-rescue, does it not?

- Yes, unfortunately. If those at Ndola and Salisbury who were responsible for aviation safety had done what was right and proper and immediately dispatched whatever they had available of police, fire brigade, search aircraft and volunteers - and there was a lot of that available and waiting to be used at Ndola airport - they ought to have located the wreckage very quickly, possibly in a matter of minutes. In that case it seems likely that most people would have thought that the crash was what it probably was, the disastrous result of a sensory illusion for which no one could be blamed. As it now turned out, the inactivity during fifteen hours bred speculation, and this man-made mystery remains the chief reason why the Ndola crash cannot be considered solved.

- Please specify!

- Let us go over it again: Radio contact is lost with an expected plane coming in for landing, carrying an extremely important person for whom a large gathering is waiting, including security personnel. There was what the counsel for the Federation called "a shooting war" going on in the Congo and the UN feared that SE-BDY could be attacked and therefore no flight plan was filed - still, Rhodesia claimed it should have behaved as in normal times. Ndola did not start a search-and-rescue because the captain had not said who was on board - but the British Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs had personally gone to Ndola to say that Mr Hammarskjöld was coming and left only when he heard and saw his plane come in. It was said that the pilot was evasive but Col. Barber had himself, on instruction from Whitehall, notified that the flight should be considered a security operation and that knowledge of it should be restricted to as few people as possible. Ndola airport was teeming with police and military to safeguard Mr Hammarskjöld. The Royal Rhodesian Air Force had taken over the Briefing Room and the British High Commissioner the airport manager's room. The plane came in and said "Your lights in sight, overhead Ndola, descending" and disappeared but no action was taken on the ground when its radio went dead.

An architect, a petrol company official, a policeman, three security guards and the BOAC manager, the latter on reserve police

duty, saw a glow but did not react - the BOAC man said he thought it was a bush fire even though it lasted only a few seconds. Colonel Barber had given orders that the airport was to remain open until the arrival of the second of the two UN planes, yet it closed down and everybody except a communicator went to sleep. Two police officers went at 03.30B (or possibly earlier) to the airport manager at his hotel and told him about the flash seen in the sky - he answered that there would be no point in searching until first light and went back to bed. It is dawn in Ndola at 05.38B, yet the manager did not come to his airport until 09.00B. Col. Barber, later appointed Chairman of the Board of Investigation, was twice during the night informed that the plane was missing but only came to his office towards ten. Salisbury knew at 06.45B about the flash in the sky but took three hours to inform the RRAF, whose deputy chief of air staff had known since 07.00B that SE-BDY was missing.

The entire political problem, known the world over, was that the UN had intervened in the Congo because civil administration there had broken down - still Col. Barber said he could not start searching for a plane with which the Ndola tower had lost radio contact when it was a few minutes from touchdown until Léopoldville had replied to his signal - sent by teleprinter via Johannesburg instead of on HF radio - since such a reply "was the essential requirement before he committed himself to any material degree in one respect or another." According to international regulations, an Alert signal should be sent out if a plane has failed to land within five minutes of the estimated time of landing but was not sent out until the next day; what was sent out, and even that 90 minutes too late, was an Incerfa signal which is intended for the case when a plane fails to arrive within a certain time - but SE-BDY had already arrived. There were 18 RRAF planes ready to take off at any time, but the first one was airborne at 10.02B, ten hours after the crash. The US Air Attache offered to go up and search with his DC-3 but was refused permission to do so. It was considered meaningless to send up planes for a search since these aircraft "may be used later when you knew where to use them" - the normal procedure seems to be just the opposite: You send up planes to look for a wreck so that you can, when you have found it, direct ground rescue to the crash site through forest and bush; at Ndola they felt they should first send out ground patrols and then, after the wreck had been found, send out planes to look at it. When a

search was finally authorized it was limited to North and South of the airport, whereas the approach was from the West. And there it was found by Flying Officer Craxford, 25 minutes after he was allowed to start looking, in a plane which had been ready all night. He had been allowed to start searching only after an African charcoal burner had reported to the Forest Office that he had found the wreck.

- And how is this explained?

- With the statement that Mr Hammarskjöld probably had decided to go elsewhere.⁶⁶ After more than six hours' flight he should, according to this theory, have decided a few minutes before landing to go all the way back,⁶⁷ after the pilot had said he needed fuel, without following the basic routine to ask for reclearance for another destination, and after having previously said twice that he wanted to avoid Congolese territory.⁶⁸ Lord Lansdowne said he was absolutely convinced that Mr Hammarskjöld intended to land at Ndola; Lord Alport and his deputy said they were equally convinced that he did not. Colonel Barber said "there was a general impression at the airport that the plane had diverted - "Even the newspapers said so" - as if the reporters (who, on the contrary, were eagerly asking for news) would know more than the British Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, charged by London to prepare for Mr Hammarskjöld's arrival. The pilot himself said that he would give his further intentions on the ground, meaning that he had every intention to land. The Counsel for the Federation said in his submission to the UN Commission (hearing 28, pages 22-23) that "it was believed on high authority that [the aircraft] had gone to another secret destination" and that the airport manager, Mr Williams, "was overawed by the presence of so many VIP's and his mind may have been influenced by some words spoken by these persons."⁶⁹

- And who were they?

- We do not know. There are repeated references to "dignitaries", "diplomats" and "VIP's" reported to have said that Mr Hammarskjöld had decided to "push off", changed his mind, gone elsewhere. But no one has identified them and not one of them, except Lord Alport, has been heard.⁷⁰ It is possible that Mr Dunnett, the British Consul at Elisabethville, was at the airport, but it is not certain and he was not heard. There were military, police and Air Force officers present but they could hardly be referred to as dignitaries with

inside knowledge of what may have been going on in Mr Hammarskjöld's mind.

- So the conclusion of the investigations has been that there was negligence and incompetence at the airport?

- The Counsel for the Swedish Government, a Salisbury lawyer, Mr Thompson, put it like this in his submission to the UN: "The delay in finding an aircraft which had crashed only 8 1/2 miles from the airport after having been lost to radio contact, within a few minutes of giving every indication of intention to land, requires some clear and acceptable explanation if a conclusion of inefficiency, lack of initiative or lack of responsibility is not to be reached, and it is submitted that the burden of satisfying the Commission as to such explanation is upon those concerned."

- And was the Commission ever satisfied?

- No. There are these vague references to an amorphous and anonymous crowd of "dignitaries" but no more. And this was, of course, no "ordinary" accident at a minor airport in Africa, but revolved round a journey which was front-page news the world over. The war in Katanga and the travel of the Secretary-General on the eve of the General Assembly opening session in New York was a matter of crucial importance, a series of events conducted under the eyes of, among others, the Foreign Office in London. Rhodesia was on a war footing and the people at Ndola airport were no fools. Lord Alport was a seasoned parliamentarian, Col. Barber held the Distinguished Flying Cross,⁷¹ Mr Williams had joined the RAF as a pilot officer in 1936 and been responsible for many transports of VIP's, Sir Winston Churchill being one of them. There must have been senior civil servants, military, police and Air Force officers, some of them with war experience and used to taking quick and well-judged responsibility for other peoples' lives. Large security operations were mounted, led by people able to take initiative and give orders.

- Is any explanation offered?

- It had, out of mutual concern, been decided between Lord Lansdowne and Mr Hammarskjöld that Lord Lansdowne, after having made everything ready for the meeting, should leave Ndola before Mr Hammarskjöld arrived so that the negotiations between the UN and Mr Tshombe should not appear to involve Britain.⁷² The Federation was meant to act merely as host. Lansdowne was not supposed to speak to Mr Tshombe but did so on Lord Alport's insistence. This conversation was later, before the UN Commission, explained by

counsel for Her Majesty's Government in the following words: "It was quite clear that Lord Lansdowne was going to leave Ndola at the last possible moment in order to allay the suspicion of Mr Tshombe. As soon as it was known that Mr Hammarskjöld's aircraft was overhead, Lord Lansdowne got in his aircraft. Lord Lansdowne's attitude, as I understand it, was that he should himself remain there as, as it were, a guarantee to Mr Tshombe that the matter was being taken seriously and that the Secretary General would come." Lord Alport apparently thought the opposite. When questioned why the Ndola authorities had not paid attention to the so-called Riches telegram - from the British Ambassador at Léopoldville via Whitehall to Lord Alport about Mr Hammarskjöld's arrival in the second of two UN planes - HMG's counsel said that this telegram did not concern the aviation authorities: "So far as I am concerned - and I hope I am not putting this irreverently - it was mere diplomatic gossip." This appears a peculiar description of what was a summit meeting, designed to affect Britain which, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, was supposed to back the UN but which at the same time voiced misgivings regarding the consequences of the Katanga operation on British mining interests in Katanga and in the Copperbelt where feelings were strongly anti-UN.⁷³

- So what conclusion can be drawn?

- Anyone may draw his or her own conclusion. One - somewhat provocative, and deliberately so - set of conclusions has been drawn in the paper "Ndola. Another view of a tragedy". Some people who have studied the matter feel that it is not correct that, as the official view is, those responsible in Ndola and Salisbury were guilty of slow thinking. On the contrary, they may have done some very quick thinking indeed. One theory goes like this: Rhodesian and British intelligence must have kept themselves quite well-informed about Katanga and the mercenaries and feared that an attempt may be made on Mr Hammarskjöld's life. They therefore mounted a large security operation and it was felt necessary even to have Lord Lansdowne personally check on the arrangements. When Mr Hammarskjöld's plane suddenly disappeared it was realized that what they feared might happen on the ground had already happened in the air. In the politically volatile climate of Rhodesia there may have been both turmoil and bloodshed, with serious political consequences, had it turned out that Mr Hammarskjöld, seen as the friend of an independent black Africa, had been killed by a white

Rhodesian. Unable to verify if this was indeed the case, the authorities unwisely chose publicly to assume that there was no crash in order, for the sake of political expediency, to enable the perpetrators to escape and cover their tracks. They may have thought that everybody had died instantaneously until they to their horror discovered next day that Sergeant Julien had been alive and in agony ever since the plane went down in flames.

- Isn't that a rather sinister scenario?

- Of course. It is always difficult to think about the unthinkable, and this may have been the reason why everybody seemed - and has since then seemed - to shy away from a tougher questioning of people sheltering behind their rank.

- And there the matter was laid to rest?

- Possibly - we do not yet know. The Rhodesian, and by implication the British, Government is in a no-win situation: Either there was bad faith or bad judgment. The Rhodesians may have known that the crash was deliberately caused - that is bad faith - or they may have suspected it even though it wasn't and not started a search-and-rescue - and that is poor judgment. Or - what amounts to the same thing, poor judgment - there may indeed have been an extraordinary congregation of, to put it brutally, callous and stupid men at Ndola airport that night.

- That is a pretty harsh conclusion. Cannot the verdict be a bit milder?

- Well, one could guess that Mr Tshombe influenced the Rhodesians more than they would care to admit. He was probably in a vile mood at the outset, being asked to surrender his "state". He had retired to the Provincial Commissioner's house and was about to be hauled out of bed when told that Mr Hammarskjöld was arriving. He may have thought that he would be deliberately slighted and therefore accused Mr Hammarskjöld of trying to renege on his promise and going elsewhere, perhaps to Kamina. It is rather sad to contemplate the possibility that Mr Tshombe throwing tantrums at Ndola induced people who ought to have known better to persuade themselves that the plane had diverted. Altogether, there has been a tendency to shy away from the fact that Rhodesia was violently anti-UN and that people on the ground in Ndola may simply have thought that Mr Hammarskjöld was good riddance and did not have the decency to initiate search and rescue.

- But this would not exonerate the Ndola authorities?

- Certainly not, and in particular it can in no way exonerate the fact that search planes were not sent up at sunrise at the latest. It remains possible that some people know more than they have wanted to say and they may prefer to keep it that way rather than ignominiously admit to duplicity and lethargy. Anyway, the case was closed, Lord Alport wrote his memoirs, Mr Scott was knighted and Col. Barber, who was throughout responsible for the search-and-rescue in his capacity as Federal Director of Civil Aviation, got his OBE decoration like everyone else who had completed the required number of years of service.

- And can the truth ever be found?

- Only if someone who knows more than has become public until now speaks up. That hope remains even though it is pretty feeble after more than 31 years. Still, any crime that may have been committed would now fall under the statute of limitation, no Government would be held to account since Rhodesia is no more, and possibly somebody wants to relieve his conscience before it becomes too late. Nevertheless, one is tempted to quote the Robert Penn Warren verse with which Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien captioned the penultimate chapter in his controversial book To Katanga and Back:

*The answer is in the back of the book,
but the page is gone.*

And Grandma told us to tell the truth.

And she is dead

Stockholm November 1992 - February 1993

Bengt Rösiö