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Peter Whaley, Outspoken U.S. Diplomat in Africa, Dies at 54

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By Patricia Sullivan

Washington Post Staff Writer

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Peter F. Whaley, 54, an American diplomat who served during the 1990s in central Africa and who won awards for his provocative political dispatches from hot spots around the globe, died Jan. 29 of pancreatic cancer at his sister's home in Pittsfield, Mass.

As the deputy chief of mission in Kigali, Rwanda, in the mid-1990s, Mr. Whaley was asked to befriend rebels in eastern Zaire, as the Democratic Republic of the Congo was known at the time, in order to carry U.S. government messages to them about respect for human rights. He traveled into the war-torn region so often that some dubbed his mission "Whaley's War."

"I think of Congo as a whirlpool at the heart of Africa, where there are no rules and no expectations," Mr. Whaley told the Associated Press in 2001. "There is no reason to think the fighting is going to end."

In 1993, Hutus opposed to the Tutsi government of Rwanda fled to Congo and were given shelter and food by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Some Hutus soon launched an insurgency and in 1994 orchestrated the genocide of more than 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates. After a Tutsi

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rebel force took power, 2 million Hutus took shelter in Congo and some in its militia started attacking Rwanda from those camps.

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"If the United Nations had never opened those camps, none of this would have happened," Mr. Whaley told the Associated Press.

That plainspoken assessment earned him the American Foreign Service Association's 1997 William R. Rivkin Award for "intellectual courage and constructive dissent." The award came after he defied most of the international diplomatic community in 1996 by accurately predicting that some 500,000 Hutus would abandon a string of refugee camps in eastern Zaire and would return peacefully to their homes in Rwanda.

Mr. Whaley was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., and graduated in 1972 from Tufts University in Massachusetts. He attended Stanford University in California after winning the Wallace Stegner Fellowship for creative writing. He spent several years as a writer and was known throughout his life for turning his homes, wherever they were, into salons for local intellectuals, political dissidents and visiting journalists.

He joined the Foreign Service in 1982 as a political officer, with assignments at embassies and consulates in Haiti, Rwanda, Zaire and Bosnia. His work sometimes irked local officials.

Mr. Whaley was evacuated from Haiti in 1990 after regime officials in Port-au-Prince declared him persona non grata because of his wide contacts with opposition figures and his relationship with radical priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who later became president of the island nation.

In Rwanda, Mr. Whaley was chargé d'affaires at the embassy in Kigali and helped supervise reconstruction after the genocide. He later became the chief U.S. contact in eastern Zaire with guerrilla leader Laurent Kabila, who sought to oust the longtime dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko.

Kabila "frequently called me at my house, sometimes in the middle of the night," Mr. Whaley told the Los Angeles Times in 2001. "Once he called me, drunk as a skunk, and he said: 'Mr. Whaley, I took the high moral ground! I didn't attack! Aren't you proud of me?' " Kabila toppled the government in 1997.

Whaley returned to Washington in the late 1990s, focusing on nonproliferation issues at the State Department. After his retirement

in 1999, he worked part-time for Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to improve recognition for retired foreign service officers.

His marriage to Katherine Crawford ended in divorce.

Survivors include his daughter, Susan Katherine Whaley of Chevy Chase; his mother, Eileen Callahan, of Whiting, N.J.; and two sisters.

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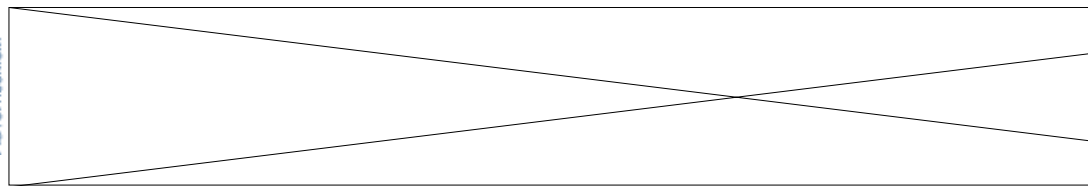
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