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New York Prepares To Exhume a Body In CIA's Hugel Case

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Doctor Says Brother of Accusers Of 'Spymaster' Died From Severe Cirrhosis of Liver

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NEW YORK — Authorities in Queens County said they are taking preliminary steps to exhume the body of Dennis McNeil, the 42-year-old brother of two men who recently disappeared after accusing the Central Intelligence Agency's "spymaster" of wrongdoing.

The investigation into Mr. McNeil's death follows a report in Wednesday's Chicago Tribune suggesting that there was reason to suspect foul play in Mr. McNeil's death June 1. The death occurred just a week after Mr. McNeil's two brothers first contacted the Washington Post with allegations concerning financial improprieties by Max C. Hugel, the CIA's director of operations. The Post's subsequent article on July 14 led to Mr. Hugel's resignation.

But the doctor who treated Mr. McNeil and pronounced him dead told The Wall Street Journal that Mr. McNeil suffered from severe cirrhosis of the liver and that he had been "living on borrowed time."

Mr. McNeil collapsed with severe abdominal pains May 31 and was taken to Elmhurst General Hospital in Queens after paramedics detected a sharp drop in his blood pressure, indicating massive internal bleeding. The Tribune reported that his widow, Jean, was told by doctors that her husband's spleen might have ruptured.

A ruptured spleen, the Tribune noted, is often associated with "trauma," or injury, such as might be sustained in a beating.

But Dr. Michael Plokamakis, who treated Mr. McNeil at Elmhurst General, said that Mr. McNeil's liver had practically ceased functioning as a result of cirrhosis and hepatitis. Therefore, he said, the liver wasn't making proteins needed to halt the sort of hemorrhage that had apparently started in his abdomen.

"The slightest scratch from any food could open up bleeding in his esophagus," Dr. Plokamakis said. "He was a man who was going to die."

Before his death, Mr. McNeil worked with his two brothers, Samuel and Thomas, in the downtown Manhattan office of Triad Energy Corp., of which Samuel was president. As reported, Triad and another concern controlled by the McNells are missing over \$3 million in assets, and both Samuel and Thomas vanished after the Washington Post's July 14 article on Mr. Hugel.

Mr. Hugel has denied the McNells' charges, published in the Post, of financial misconduct. But his wife said he would decline comment for the time being on the matter of the missing McNells and their dead brother.

The Queens district attorney's office said yesterday, in response to questions, that it has received a request from the New York medical examiner's office to exhume Dennis McNeil's body, and that contact has been made with the attorney general in Maine, where Mr. McNeil is buried, to look into the procedural steps that would be required.

The D.A.'s office indicated that it is aware of Mr. McNeil's cirrhosis by cautioning reporters that "other health factors may have been a factor in the death." Those other factors weren't disclosed.

Even if an exhumation shows that Mr. McNeil's spleen had ruptured, that wouldn't prove that he had been beaten because his cirrhosis might have led to the rupture. But given the mystery surrounding Mr. McNeil's death, the Queens authorities have little choice but to proceed with an investigation.

The Tribune's copyrighted story quoted a Triad director, Stanley Kielmar, as saying that he had told the Federal Bureau of Investigation that he heard that Mr. McNeil had been "abducted and beaten" before his death. But Mr. Kielmar said Wednesday that he couldn't remember who had told him that.

Yesterday, a friend of the McNells, Thomas Walsh, told The Wall Street Journal that Dennis McNeil had told him that he had indeed been beaten several times in recent months.

Mr. Walsh, an oceanographer who is also a Triad director, said that Dennis McNeil had owned a bar in a tough Queens neighborhood. "He had been beaten up in some fights in his bar," Mr. Walsh said. "He felt it was part of the business."

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