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FOREIGN DESK

## Accused of Hiding War Crimes Suspect, Liberia Says It Killed Him

By SOMINI SENGUPTA (NYT) 523 words

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, May 6 -- For a week, the Liberian president, Charles Taylor, has been accused by United Nations investigators of harboring an accused war criminal, a West African warlord named Sam Bockarie. Today, Mr. Taylor's government said its forces had shot and killed Mr. Bockarie this morning as he tried to enter the country before dawn.

The body of Mr. Bockarie, who led a campaign of rape and mutilation in his native Sierra Leone and more recently aided rebels in this country's seven-month-old war, was taken to the morgue in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, said the Liberian information minister, Reginald Goodridge.

Sierra Leone government officials have inspected the body, Mr. Goodridge said. "We are pretty sure that is his body," he said.

Nicknamed Mosquito for his blood-sucking reputation, Mr. Bockarie was among West Africa's most infamous warlords.

He was second in command of the Revolutionary United Front, the Sierra Leonean rebel group known throughout the world for cutting off civilians' limbs.

Two years ago, sanctions were imposed on the Taylor government for its support of the front. Since their March 7 indictment, both Mr. Bockarie and a former junta leader of Sierra Leone, Johnny Paul Koroma, were believed to have been in hiding in Liberia.

The news of Mr. Bockarie's death comes as the noose tightens around the Taylor government. Two rebel groups have gained ground in capturing vast swaths of Liberian territory.

The war crimes court in Sierra Leone, backed by the United Nations, has warned Mr. Taylor that he is vulnerable to indictment for aiding and abetting an indicted war criminal. Diplomatic pressure has continued to mount on a country long seen as having spread chaos across West Africa. Today the United Nations Security Council renewed sanctions, barring Liberia from selling diamonds and buying arms. The Council also threatened to add timber, among the government's most prized exports, to the list of prohibited goods.

Already, fighting in the east has forced one of Liberia's principal logging concerns, Oriental Timber, to curtail its operations drastically.

This evening, the Liberian information minister said villagers had tipped off government forces that Mr. Bockarie would try to slip into the country from Ivory Coast early this morning. A

gunfight ensued, he said, and two Liberian soldiers were killed, along with Mr. Bockarie and two of his men.

Alan White, the war crimes court's chief investigator, said last week that the court had obtained evidence that Mr. Bockarie had slipped across the border and had been holed up in Kahnple, near the Ivory Coast border, with up to 50 fighters.

Mr. Bockarie, a secondary school dropout from eastern Sierra Leone, had followed his father into the diamond mines and tried his hand as a professional disco dancer and hairdresser before taking up the business of war.

He volunteered for the Liberian war in 1989 and took it to his own country a few years later.

United Nations investigators said Mr. Bockarie came to Ivory Coast to offer his expertise and his veteran fighters to the rebels operating in the west of the country.

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