



UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY
COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL

S/14211
8 October 1980
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

LETTER DATED 8 OCTOBER 1980 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES AD INTERIM
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF BENIN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to forward herewith two copies of the periodical Historia, No. 406 bis.

The article by Véronique Vucher-Bondet entitled "Benin, the dismal failure of a daring raid" contains much important information about the act of armed aggression committed against the People's Republic of Benin on 16 January 1977.

In the context of the complaint by Benin of which the Security Council is already seized, I have the honour to request you to issue, as a document of the Security Council, the articles entitled "Bob Denard, 20 years as a mercenary" by Alain Leluc (annex I) and "Benin, the dismal failure of a daring raid" by Véronique Vucher-Bondet (annex II).

(Signed) Patrice HOUNGAVOU
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex I*

Bob Denard, 20 Years as a Mercenary

by

Alain Leluc

It seemed to us that this issue must begin with Bob Denard, since he is the best known, most often mentioned and most controversial of the French mercenaries, and, something which few mercenaries can claim, has apparently made money in the 20-year span of his activities. Simply making that statement is a very different matter, however, from giving an accurate portrait of Denard and from knowing and speaking the whole truth about his career, his behaviour and all the facets of his activity, especially as he has not retired and is not given to confidences. Within these limitations, Alain Leluc, who knows him and has seen him in action and in repose, recounts the events of his life. He covers the 20 years (1960-1980) in which we are interested. We shall meet Denard throughout this issue, as the various authors divulge pieces of information about him which add to his portrait.

Bob Denard, alias Gilbert Bourgeaud, alias Jean Maurin, is definitely Robert Denard and is definitely of French nationality. Although, because of his penetrating blue eyes and his early career amidst mercenaries of Belgian nationality, there was some doubt about this at one time, his accent, profile and birth certificate proclaim that he is a Frenchman from the Gironde. At 51 years of age, he resembles a dynamic but reserved company chairman, of discreetly elegant appearance and deliberate speech. He neither smokes nor drinks; at lunch and dinner he eats moderately. He seems to be an ordinary man, leading an uneventful life ...

The few people who have had either a close or a superficial relationship with him know that this quiet life is full of secrets, with many pseudonyms, frequent changes of address, ultra-secret telephone numbers and codes. They discover, too, that Bob Denard never lets people fully and permanently into his confidence but always holds something back. And they come up against the systematic "compartmentalization" of his life, with which no one can claim to be truly familiar.

A Girondin from the Médoc

Robert Denard was born in the spring of 1929, in the village of Lesparre-Médoc, close to Pointe-de-Graves. His father, a regimental sergeant-major in a colonial division of the Army and a tough, brawny man, was approaching retirement. His mother, a gentle and dreamy woman, who liked to read in her rare moments of leisure, lavished affection on little Bob. Life as a small French farmer opened up before him.

* The original article in French contained captioned photographs which are not included in this translation.

/...

Bob was a dutiful child in those early years in the Gironde marshland; he received his first communion when he was 10 years old and his primary school leaving certificate when he was 12. His world consisted of the village, an authoritarian father, who had been a soldier in the Far East and who terrified him somewhat and fascinated him greatly, and a mother who constantly treated him with feminine tenderness. And there was the natural environment: the family duck pond, on which hours would soon be spent navigating in craft of his own making, and the woodland nearby, where he had "his" tree, in which he hid his childish secrets and treasures.

Bob Denard's childhood was short-lived. He was celebrating his tenth birthday when the Second World War broke out. The carefree times were over. The French Army, about which his father had had much to recount in the long winter evenings, was defeated. He saw it pass by, on the road to Bordeaux, humiliated and in disarray - a pitiful sight. Some time later his childish gaze would perceive the first units of the Wehrmacht, triumphant and well-disciplined. Those memories would never leave him.

The baptism of fire

Bob was only 13 years old when his father joined the Maquis and became a franc tireur and partisan. As the absences of the head of the family grew longer and more frequent, the adolescent boy, already physically adult, took over as head of the household. The heavy chores were his to perform, but he gained his independence. The German Army did not attract him; it was a foreign, occupying presence which hampered his freedom. Barbed wire and threatening notices now proclaimed out of bounds the beaches where he had once bathed with his friends from the village. Bob followed the example of his father, who said nothing about his activities, leaving and returning without a word, but whose secret Bob had long since guessed. On his own, Bob began "his" Resistance.

He very casually stole a sub-machine-gun from a German officer's car. Then, with a friend, he set fire to some installations that were intended to mislead the Allied aircraft; in so doing, he was oblivious to the terrible reprisals to which his village and his family could be subjected.

Bob was not yet 15 when the Allies landed. Soon he would take up arms for the first time and undergo his baptism of fire. When the inhabitants of his village were evacuated to Bordeaux, he seized the opportunity to join the French Forces of the Interior, using forged papers. At that time, there were pockets of German resistance, which were still putting up a fierce fight. Bob acted as guide to the French Forces of the Interior across the marshes of Pointe-de-Graves, which he knew like his own hand. He was entitled to a rifle, his first. On his return to the village, there was no hero's welcome for him. His father, although enrolled in the Communist Party, merely said: "You want to be a soldier, and so you shall be". A promise must be kept. The father enrolled his son in a naval engineering academy, to start when he was 17.

After 18 months at the academy, Bob Denard left for Indo-China, where he would be a naval gunner. His career seemed to be mapped out, just as his father's had been. It was, he said, "the only time that I saw my father with tears in his eyes".

Neither his courage nor his passion for the military could be questioned. Why, then, did he leave the Service in 1952, only five years after entering the naval engineering academy?

Bob was discovering the world and was discovering himself. Born into a modest family, he had shown proof of his valour, his determination and his authority. Consequently, when he perceived the barrier that the French Navy erected to dash the hopes and ambitions of a young petty officer, when he realized that he would probably never have an opportunity to rise above his grade of petty officer second class (equivalent of a sergeant), Bob Denard rebelled. He knew that he deserved better. And he knew, too, that he wanted more from life.

Before leaving the Navy, Bob underwent training in the United States. He discovered the New World, and another Service, modern and more egalitarian. He saw officers of the United States Navy lunching modestly with their men in the cafeterias of the port in Philadelphia; that was unthinkable in the French Navy. And he saw prosperity in America, the triumphant dollar within reach of all, or at least all who showed courage and determination.

He, too, had courage and determination. Perhaps, then, it was with regret that he went back to the civilian world.

Plot against Mendès-France

With the aid of the relationships he had established in the United States, Bob Denard obtained employment in Morocco with an American company. His work - security and protection - brought him into frequent contact with the French police, and he struck up friendships with members of the police force. Perhaps he was hankering after the uniform. In any event, he was swift to follow his new friends' advice and take a course of instruction at the Ifran police school.

Denard was embarking on a new career as a policeman. Although it might not have as much style as the Navy, the police force was more democratic; there were no social barriers, and it was possible to rise through the ranks.

All the more so in that Morocco - in 1953 - was experiencing the first cases of terrorist violence: a determined, courageous and ambitious man is noted more quickly in a confused and dangerous period.

After six months' training he began at the bottom of the ladder. As an ordinary cop he directed traffic with a white truncheon in the streets of Casablanca. However, he moved ahead quickly. His superiors considered his record good, so he took the police adjutants' competitive examination and passed. At the age of 24 he was making a promising beginning in his police career. He

/...

joined the Lucoter, an anti-terrorist squad whose activities finally matched his temperament of a man of action.

However, fate had definitely chosen another path for Bob Denard.

Bob liked it in Morocco. He had friends, he fell in love seriously for the first time, got married and became the father of a small boy. This time, at the end of 1954, fate took the form of the attempted assassination of Pierre Mendès-France, planned by colleagues and superiors. Out of a sense of solidarity and because of his hostility towards "the man who was selling off the French Empire", Denard did not back out, 1/ even although he thought the operation was risky. He was imprisoned for 14 months, then put on trial and acquitted. It was at that point, at the end of 1956, that Morocco gained independence. Denard, like all French officials, was then repatriated.

When he returned in March 1957 his father was dying. Since he was suspended from his duties, Denard had practically no money. He had been divorced after one year of marriage and was alone. However, he met other men who had been repatriated. Among them were Colonel B. and a lawyer, who found him work until he was readmitted to the police force. However, Bob had been demoted, and his record was marred by a sensational trial and 14 months in prison. Therefore, when the Ministry of the Interior sent him to take up a post at Constantine in Algeria, he followed the advice of his repatriated friends and claimed the leave to which he was entitled. He returned to France at the beginning of 1958 and resigned from the police force a few months later.

Made wary by the plot against Mendès-France, Bob Denard would not listen to the activist sirens, even although he was frequently in contact with certain leaders of Algérie française and even with important members of the Main Rouge. Since first the Navy and then the police had failed to live up to his expectations, he planned, probably reluctantly, to take a further try at civilian life. After all, he had to live.

So there was our future adventurer, working as a representative, a delivery man and as a repairer of household appliances or, to be exact, of cookers and heating appliances for a small factory situated in the Allier. It was a quiet and uneventful life which soon became monotonous. Although for a while he enjoyed a kind of life that he had never really known before, Denard then became restless because he was approaching the age of 30 and had the feeling that he was not getting anywhere.

He would have to champ the bit for almost two years. His will to succeed prompted him to avoid any involvement in the Algerian tragedy, which may surprise and disappoint some people, particularly in view of all the lost causes ahead of him, from which he would not run away.

1/ It should be borne in mind that after the Geneva Conference on Indo-China Pierre Mendès-France began the process that was to lead Tunisia to independence, and that the Algerian War began on 1 November 1954.

Trinquier did not want him

Denard spent a considerable amount of time on patient consideration of his situation and on methodical reading. For him the press and journalists would always be an invaluable source of information and ideas. What was he looking for? He had no idea, to be exact. He was after the minor detail that would put him on the right track. Reading an article of l'Aurore was what triggered things. It referred to Katanga, the "affreux" and to Mr. "Cash-till", alias Moïse Tshombé, who had proclaimed the Congolese province of Katanga independent and was clashing with the United Nations and with the Léopoldville Government and its army (ANC). 2/

Strangely enough, it was not altogether the Belgian mercenaries' adventure that attracted him. He saw that country, which was said to be very wealthy but which was in complete chaos at the time, as new ground to be broken. The article in l'Aurore gave the name of the only Frenchman involved with the "affreux" at that time, Tony de Saint-Paul. Bob laid his newspaper aside. The decision had been made: "Today there is one Frenchman in Katanga, tomorrow there will be two!"

The decision had indeed been made, and Denard could think of nothing else. He heard about Colonel Trinquier's network. Trinquier, whom he met in Paris, did not want to have anything to do with him, probably owing to an old dispute with the Ponchardier commandos, to which Bob had belonged in Indo-China. So he looked elsewhere and discussed the matter with his friends. In particular, with C. D. 3/

When he finally boarded the plane for Africa, it was with a letter of recommendation from C. D. to Albert Kalondji, "Emperor" of the Balubas and head of the "Autonomous State of South Kasai", a "State" whose chief wealth was diamond mines. Enough to make anyone dream. Bob Denard arrived in Elisabethville, where he only intended to make a short stopover. At the beginning of 1961 the Katangese gendarmerie was in the midst of being organized, but Bob paid hardly any attention to that because he was eager to reach the Eldorado of South Kasai.

After two weeks, the small amount of money he had possessed had melted away in the sun of Elisabethville. Fortunately, Bob had made a few friends. Thanks to them, he met Munungo, the Katangese Minister of the Interior, with the idea of getting himself engaged as a policeman! It seems that, as far as he was concerned, his military experience belonged to the past.

2/ See below: "We, the 'affreux' of Katanga".

3/ For those wishing to identify that name: the person in question was involved in a number of affairs that received wide coverage in the press (Editor's note).

Once again his plans came to nothing. In Katanga the police were recruiting only Belgians. The only possibility open to him was the Katangese gendarmerie, which could engage him as a private individual. Unless he was going to return to France penniless, there was virtually no other option.

He was therefore assigned to a mobile battalion of the gendarmerie commanded by Major Jenssens. This time luck seemed to be on his side. Out of ignorance, the major in SI (the headquarters of the Katangese gendarmerie) granted him what the French Navy had refused him. He confused the title officier marinier, which applies to petty officers in the French Navy, with the rank of officer in the army, and engaged him as a second lieutenant. After many mishaps, Bob Denard had finally become an officer ...

"The sweeper"

In 1961 the Katangese gendarmerie was carrying out operations to maintain law and order, avoiding contact with the United Nations forces as much as possible. It was an opportunity for the young mercenary with the rank of second lieutenant to rediscover what was, in spite of everything, his vocation.

Denard, who had a feeling for order, found an unorganized army. He established his authority over the other Europeans (there were approximately 20 in his battalion) by means of his scrupulous, sometimes excessive, feeling for discipline, hygiene and maintenance of equipment. He also established his authority over the Africans, which would establish links between him and them that would be decisive in the future.

Denard, who had suffered as a result of his ostracism by the officers of the French Navy, established a straightforward, intimate relationship with his Katangese soldiers. He shared their meals and had their mess-room cleaned. Out of a motley body of soldiers, he rapidly made an army. Eccentric or ill-assorted uniforms disappeared. The privates were washed and shaved. Within six months the mobile battalion was transformed. Denard took over its command ... He was on his way up.

When the Katangese gendarmerie paraded on 11 July 1961 at Elisabethville before President Tshombé during the independence celebrations only one unit was integrated, that is to say, officered by white and black chiefs of section. It was Denard's unit. Perhaps it was a political calculation on his part. In any event, Tshombé noticed his unit and asked to meet him. By the time the United Nations obliged Tshombé to dismiss his Europeans, at the beginning of August 1961, Bob Denard was at the head of a group of which he was very proud, mobile group C. He had been able, in complete freedom, to set it up, organize it and give it an esprit de corps, and had even had a badge made up, representing a witch on a broom, hence the group's name: "The sweeper".

At the order of Tshombé, Bob Denard was thus obliged to lay down his arms and return to Paris. However, he had developed a liking for the profession and had finally found his true vocation, so he left Katanga with the firm intention of returning as soon as possible.

/...

In Katanga he gave himself the rank of captain

He was back a few days later, on 10 September, and immediately took over a command again. He then took part in the bloody fighting against the United Nations forces at Elisabethville and captured an Irish contingent. Denard was eager for action. Wounded during a skirmish with the ANC, he went back to his unit a few weeks later. However, the situation had changed. Commander Faulques, under whose command he had been during the battle against the blue berets, was not an easy person to get on with. He had said to the Katangese Chief of Staff:

"I would not want you, even as my orderly."

That was a severe judgement, for which he would not be forgiven. It meant the end of the Katangese adventure for Faulques and most of his French officers, and they returned to Europe. Denard, however, remained. He took advantage of the circumstances to set up a group that was in direct liaison with Tshombé. From that time onwards he no longer had a hierarchical superior. Heading 25 Europeans and 150 Katangese, Bob was totally autonomous. To such a degree that, since his deputy had the rank of lieutenant as he did, he decided to "give himself" the rank of captain ... Do it yourself ...

Two other autonomous groups were set up, that of the Belgian Schramme and that of Tavernier. The three men divided up zones of intervention and influence among them. Throughout the autumn of 1961 the three groups harassed the ANC. The United Nations forces did not intervene. However, in December 1961 the blue berets suddenly returned to the attack. 4/ In the face of 25,000 well-armed men, the only solution was to withdraw and engage in guerrilla activities. The three groups would devote their energies to sabotage and mining bridges and installations of the Union Minière at Kolwezi. They did wonders, taking into account how few they were in number. Tshombé was aware of this, since he appointed Bob Denard as commander.

It was, however, not possible to work miracles. At the end of 1962 Tshombé was obliged to capitulate, and the mercenaries, together with a number of their Katangese soldiers, were forced to cross the border with their weapons and belongings, into Angola, where they were disarmed by the Portuguese.

Solitude in Yemen

Once he was back in France, after a few weeks' holiday "Commander" Denard was once again ready to wage war. There was a revolution in Yemen. 5/ The Egyptians had landed in order to help the new republic and the royalists had withdrawn to the mountains. They needed assistance. Or, to be more exact, they needed instructors to train their warriors in the use of modern equipment. Denard

4/ See below: "We, the 'affreux' of Katanga".

5/ See below: "To Yemen, for the King".

accepted the offers that were made to him. He had reached a new stage in his career. He was given a budget, which further strengthened his independence. The military commander was becoming a company director. He would administer that budget with the feeling for order and the almost fussy meticulousness that were characteristic of him.

He bought the airplane, a DC4, that was to take him and his men to Yemen (for \$1,000 per month), their complete packs (neither cigarette lighters nor sewing kits were missing!) and hunting weapons (as far as the French authorities were concerned, the merry band was supposed to be going on safari).

Although Bob did not leave anything to chance from the material point of view, he was obliged to leave the rest to luck, because Yemen was really an adventure. When the DC4 landed in the middle of the desert, without even coming to a halt for fear of sinking in, and took off again immediately in a cloud of sand, those seasoned mercenaries all had heavy hearts. They would remain there three days, alone, forgotten by the rest of the world, until suddenly the desert was miraculously peopled by dark eyes and a voice called to them:

"Are you Mr. Bob?"

They would wait a further seventeen days before liaison was established with the royalist forces. Bob and his men began to undergo the hard apprenticeship of the desert, where time does not count and where solitude is the worst enemy. Some of them would be unable to tolerate the monastic life forced on them by Yemen. Months spent without seeing a European and, above all, without seeing a woman, made them lose their mental health, and they would have to be repatriated at the earliest opportunity.

Bob Denard devoted himself fully to his mission. Everything was new or, in any event, very different from what he had known in Katanga. No maintaining of order and virtually no fighting. His role was that of an educator, an adviser; his function, he said, was "more social than military". He organized an instruction camp in which men from the neighbouring villages came in turn to familiarize themselves with mortars and automatic weapons, but he also made untiring health rounds with a medical orderly, took action against the lack of hygiene and treated wounds and infections; penicillin was his best ally in building up his prestige, since it worked miracles among people who had never used antibiotics.

Nevertheless, when he learnt in 1964 that the rebellion had broken out again in the Congo, notwithstanding his commitments towards royalist Yemen, Bob Denard did not hesitate. He took the first plane to Paris and went in quest of information.

/...

The Congo: full powers

Tshombé was back in a Congo that was once again running with blood. ^{6/} Moreover, Tshombé, the former separatist, had become head of the Léopoldville Government. Denard met him in December 1964 when he was passing through Paris and agreed to take up service with him again. At the same time, he did not wish to abandon Yemen and suggested to Faulques that he should succeed him there.

When he finally returned to the Congo it was with a promise from Tshombé that he would have the command of an autonomous unit, the seventh batallion. However, that unit would never come into being, and Bob was incorporated into the sixth batallion, within which, it is true, he would set up his own autonomous group, the "First shock group". He went to the north of the eastern province, heading 90 Europeans and 3,000 blacks from Katanga and the ANC. He devoted himself totally to his mission, freeing many European hostages who were detained and were to be executed by the rebels in the town of Bondo and saving many others who had been taken into the bush by their torturers.

However, once the rebellion had been crushed, Tshombé ceased to be "providential". Mobutu toppled Tshombé and Denard took service up with him, which would soon lead him to oppose the new secessionist inclinations of the Katangese and thus, persons and a cause that he had at one time defended.

"I was 3,000 kilometres from Léopoldville and its shady deals, I was not involved in politics."

It is with that brief reply that Denard today justifies what some people call his "betrayal" of Tshombé and his former Katangese friends. As far as Denard is concerned, things happened quite simply.

"General Mulamba, whom I had met in Paris with Moïse Tshombé, came to see me at Buta, where my headquarters was installed. He said to me: 'It was anarchy at Léopoldville, nobody could agree on how to govern, General Mobutu decided to take power with the army. As far as you are concerned, nothing has changed, if that is what you wish. I shall make you the person responsible for military and civilian matters in the area that you control.' Since I was not involved in politics, I agreed and continued my mission until 1966."

That is his defence.

For a few months Denard was in favour with Mobutu. He was seen at every official reception at the side of the new leader. Mobutu swore only by him. He put him at the head of the sixth batallion (which was to become the sixth brigade) with the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

"I thus had full powers and carte blanche where military matters were concerned," he recalled.

^{6/} See below: "Congolesse horrors and deceptions", by Michel Honorin.

However, in July 1966 the sky began to darken. Denard had to face the first revolt of the Katangese. A number of his European officers who were less alert to the way things were developing and had less political instinct sided whole-heartedly with the rebels. Denard knew when he should be diplomatic and could show unquestionable human warmth, which enabled him to handle the grumbling of his men who, as he liked to repeat, were not "choirboys". On such occasions he found the right words and set himself on the same footing as them. That was a talent which would be useful to him a number of times and of which he made use during this first rebellion. The crisis was solved from within without too much damage. However, the worm was in the fruit.

The end of the "adventure"

Denard prefers authority and force to feelings. Refusing to give way to the slightest weakness himself, he tolerates none in others. He threw out of his unit his so-called "bras cassés", the undesirables. Two hundred of his 600 men. What a purge! Although he has acquired a few faithful followers, the number of his enemies matches his ambitions.

In May 1967, on hearing of the death of his mother, he rushed back to Paris. A fateful absence. Word spread rapidly in Mobutu's entourage that Denard had had a meeting with Tshombé. To this day, Denard denies it. One thing is certain, Tshombé tried to see him again.

In any case, the outcome is undeniable. When he returned to Léopoldville in June, attitudes towards him and towards mercenaries in general had changed. Mobutu, anxious to get into the good books of the progressive camp and of OAU, wanted no more to do with him. Denard realized that he could never regain his former trust. However, he clung on there, working on an idea he had long cherished - a joint intervention brigade, a mobile super-unit for the "big-time" coups. But, for him, as for Jean Schramme, the end of the Congolese adventure was close at hand.

When Mobutu tried to disarm Schramme, Bob knew that his turn would come. He made common cause with Schramme, and so it was that the mercenaries rebelled against the central power.

By mutual agreement, they launched the second Katangan mutiny, much more violent than the first. Denard returned to his first love. Seriously wounded at Kisangani by a bullet in the back of the neck, he was evacuated to Rhodesia. But after two months' treatment in a Salisbury hospital, Bob returned to Angola to mount a final operation designed to relieve Schramme and his men, entrenched in Bukavu. It was a total fiasco. He was unable to obtain the necessary means to carry out the operation as promised, something for which Schramme bitterly reproached him.

The Congolese page was turned, and with it that of the first generation of "affreux".

/...

First stocktaking

Times had changed, and Denard knew it. He had not lost his taste for military adventure, far from it, but he had a sense of reality. He had to alter course while there was still time. War should not bring only risks and wounds. The bullet which had hit him at Kisangani had ricocheted off a wall; though not aimed at him, it had almost proved fatal - a warning he perhaps heeded, especially as he suffered the after-effects.

Bob Denard did not personally fight in the Biafran war (1968), but he was concerned with it in another way. Doubtless with the unofficial blessing of Mr. Foccart's services and of the French Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Branch, he procured a boat, aircraft, arms and men for the Biafran army. It was perhaps the first indication of a change of course that was slowly to take place.

Denard clearly stood back to take stock of the situation, and also to rest. He had never given himself time to convalesce and now he was feeling tired and disoriented.

Eight years as a mercenary had brought him a notoriety which did not displease him but had become an embarrassment. Mercenaries are very useful people; no one claims authority over them - especially in France. They can be disavowed or dropped at will, and care is taken to deny them the slightest hint of official cover. The rule that applies is the one so dear to the Foreign Legion - "Get yourself out of the mire, I don't want to know." If he wanted to pursue his career, Denard had to fall into oblivion, disappear from view. Many readily assert that Denard became of valuable assistance to the French Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Branch and the secretariat for African and Malagasy Affairs, insinuations to which Denard responds with a categorical denial that he ever met Jacques Foccart even once.

In the late 1960s, the now famous soldier of fortune stepped out of the limelight. For a time it seemed as though, like Schramme, Paulques and others, he was done with adventuring.

In fact, Bob still had his inner band of loyal supporters, his captains and lieutenants, a real network. His ambition remained intact. Moreover, he found the means to keep his head above water financially, to travel, to make contacts, to gather news continually from reporters covering the hot spots of the globe for major newspapers and television, places where another Katanga, another Biafra, another Yemen, might erupt at any moment.

Comoros: first version

At this point, Bob Denard went into business, a garage in his home village. This was certainly one way of investing his money. More important, it was also a way of marking his trail, of getting back into civilian life, acquiring bourgeois respectability and the "cover" which he needed to follow his career more unobtrusively.

/...

"Business", however, was slow. The unrelenting chain of events of 1960-1970 was no more. In 1972 two operations were mounted against Libya, financed by ex-King Idriss. Denard set up one, some of his lieutenants were involved in the other. Neither took place. Two years later, Bob went "prospecting" in the Middle East. He spent four months with the Kurdish resistance, but an agreement between Iran and Iraq led to the collapse of the rebellion and of his personal hopes.

Denard had not forgotten Africa, where he had friends, including several Heads of State. He was a much-heeded adviser in Gabon in particular, going several times a year to Libreville, as well as to Abidjan and Yaoundé. Bob is pig-headed. Others had long ago resigned themselves to the fact that adventure was over, but he remained on the look-out for the slightest news which might lead to the chance of a further contract. His obstinacy was to pay off.

On 6 July 1975 a referendum in the Comoros brought independence to three of the four islands. In August Bob had a telephone call from an old friend, a former senator from Algeria, who wanted him to meet a Frenchman from the Comoros.

Denard, of course, agreed to the meeting ... and a month later, on 5 September, he landed in Moroni, capital of Grande Comore, aboard an Air France scheduled flight. The operation being proposed was simple. Some young Comorian political leaders had just mounted a minor armed coup against the feudal rulers, whose undisputed leader, Ahmed Abdallah, had taken refuge in his fiefdom, the island of Anjouan. Abdallah and his supporters had to be neutralized.

Denard sent for seven of his men, together with five Africans he had trained.

In a fortnight, with the help of his lieutenants, he was to form and organize a Comorian army of young recruits from Moroni and nearby villages. He hastily sent for some fatigues from France and, on 21 September, launched an airborne operation on Anjouan with his young Comorian soldiers whose weapons, as a precaution, were not loaded. The operation was successful. But Bob's satisfaction was short-lived. The man he had brought to power, Ali Soilih, turned out, in a few months, to be a fanatical scientific socialist. 7/

Relations between Denard and Ali Soilih deteriorated rapidly. One was authoritarian, militaristic, the other, paranoid, dreaming only of people's commissars and revolutionary committees. Bob was disappointed. He had fallen in love with the Comoros and, always thinking ahead, believed he had found an ideal rearguard base. Where better to train his future recruits and prepare future operations than these small, remote, unspoilt islands?

"Monsieur Gilbert"

Moreover, the people were fond of "Monsieur Gilbert" (the name Bob had adopted. He no longer wanted to attract the attention of the curious, especially reporters). And "Monsieur Gilbert" had grown attached to these peaceable, poor people. The seven mercenaries who had accompanied him returned to France, but he wanted to stay put. You don't find a Comoros around every corner.

7/ See below: "Denard, king of the Comoros".

The small group of Africans who had taken part in the Anjouan operation and one or two civilian observers stayed behind while he made frequent trips. Contracts started to come in again - for Angola and Cabinda, its little dependent enclave. Things seemed to be looking up and Denard could take a more ambitious approach. He was to place a team in Cabinda and another in Angola, headed by his two principal adjutants. As for him, as boss of the organization, he shuttled back and forth between his three main "construction sites" and France, co-ordinating operations.

Alas, times had changed and Denard's men, all too few, could not hold out against thousands of Cubans armed to the teeth. The operations were short-lived. During the summer of 1976 Bob, who doesn't give up easily, returned once again to the Comoros. A surprise awaited him: Ali Soilih had called in Tanzanian officers to command his army. What was more, Ali Soilih would not let Denard near the army he had virtually created less than a year before, which still considered him as its leader. The terrorized population had lost count of the excesses of the secret police - the famous Moissine commandos - and was interested only in fleeing. Denard felt some responsibility for all that and, after all, Ali Soilih was now openly hostile to him. As long as he remained president, Denard could "cross off" the Comoros.

Early in September 1976, Bob left Moroni. He would not return until 20 months later, at the head of his mercenaries, aboard the Antinea.

4,000 replies to an advertisement

However, for the moment, Denard was involved in another important project. The aim was first to overthrow Kérékou, head of the progressive State of Benin, and set up a moderate Government which would align itself with the neighbouring pro-Western States, and then to provide a permanent presidential guard for the new regime. 8/ Several African countries, including Morocco and Gabon, supported the planned coup d'état. The prospects were heady. The unit formed for the operation would not be disbanded upon completion of the mission, it could become a permanent intervention group, ever-ready to dash to the help of friendly countries threatened with destabilization.

Such an opportunity, one of Bob Denard's wildest dreams come true, was well worth a few risks. Colonel Maurin - his code name for the forthcoming operation - and his men were to take many. The first was recruitment. Some 60 men were needed, in top physical condition, with commando, Foreign Legion, or parachutist training. His little band of faithful followers had shrunk over the years. Some had died or been wounded, mostly in Angola, some were too old, others had "packed up", some had decided that their years as soldiers of fortune had not been profitable.

For the ordinary mercenary, the pay had hardly increased in 10 years: 1,000 dollars on average in Yemen, 1,500 for the operation being planned - and the dollar exchange rate had dropped considerably over that period. There was no getting rich at that rate. The "family" was somewhat disgruntled.

8/ See below: "The dismal failure of a daring raid".

Denard needed to renew his team. He was to recruit, largely through small ads in national and regional newspapers: "Overseas company, security and protection, seeks fully qualified cadres, top physical condition. Preferably served with crack units, etc. ..."

Four thousand replies came into the Havas agency, the address given by this famous security company. After carefully double-checking the replies, a mere 50 were finally recruited. The selection process was tough, but the risk remained. Denard did not know these 50 "supermen". He had never commanded them. Many, if not the majority, had not gone through the baptism of fire.

He supplemented the recruitment with a dozen or so old hands who, in some cases, would find themselves under the orders of the more highly qualified "greenhorns".

Failure at Cotonou

As was his wont, Denard oversaw every detail, including the recruitment and training of the men at the Benguérir base in Morocco, but it was impossible to be everywhere at once. He had very high-level contacts to make, which meant delegating a great deal.

Bob entrusted his chief adjutant "Commander Mercier", with the technical side of the operation, in other words, for six weeks he gave him carte blanche to form a super-trained team. Mercier, an athlete of quiet strength, used the marines' method, breaking his recruits physically with training perhaps somewhat ill-suited to the demands of an urban guerrilla operation.

At Benguérir, apart from the old hands and a small group of Belgians, the recruits were virtually unknown to one another, the atmosphere was ominous. It was a submissive bunch of men who boarded Denard's chartered DC8 on 16 January 1977. It was a dog-tired bunch who touched down in a DC7 at Cotonou 24 hours later. (The failure of the raid is recounted elsewhere. It was a major disappointment to Denard.) It was also a bad blow to his prestige. Many of his detractors were quite categorical, "The old man's finished, burnt out." They were over-hasty in writing him off. Yes, the Cotonou raid had failed and, true, there was that surprising slip-up in leaving a case of damning documents on the tarmac at Cotonou, but a handful of men, lightly armed, invading an African capital for four hours and withdrawing almost without a scratch - that came close to a major exploit. In any case, there had been other defeats. Isn't it the fate of mercenaries to be involved with lost causes?

A battle, but not the war

Bob Denard had lost a battle, but not the war. He had not forgotten the Comoros.

When he returned to Paris, he did not lapse into melancholy, but immediately renewed his contacts with Ali Soilih's opposition in Paris, in the shape of

/...

Ahmed Abdallah, the man who, less than two years earlier, he had chased out of the Comoros. He also met up again with Yves Lebret, roving ambassador and confidant of Ali Soilih, who proposed that he should kidnap Abdallah. However, Denard had already made his decision long before the Cotonou operation.

The only thing was that Bob could not afford another failure. For more than a year he was to put all his energy, all his willpower, into achieving his desired goal - the overthrow of Ali Soilih. He was to mount an initial airborne operation, then a second: both were cancelled because of lack of outside support. Apparently, Denard no longer enjoyed the trust of his "sponsors". However, he could not, or would not, step down and acknowledge defeat.

Virtually single-handed, he prepared a third operation. Many of the old hands had left him after Cotonou. Even his first lieutenant, "Commander Mercier", abandoned him in this third attempt. He called it "madness" when Denard revealed his plan to him - a seaborne operation from the coast of France to Moroni, if possible without any intermediate port of call.

Bob Denard had received a budget of 3 million francs from Ahmed Abdallah. When he planned the third operation, more than half of that had been spent. Twice he had hired his team, paid them, and then had to pay them off for breach of contract. Abdallah and the two other paymasters of the planned coup, Mohamed Ahmed and an Indian merchant long resident in the Comoros, could not meet any further expense. Denard had only two options: to give up, or to stake his all, in other words, to put some of his own money, the fruit of 18 years as a mercenary, into the operation. He likes to emphasize the fact that he mortgaged his garage, his only legitimate business, because he doesn't like anyone to allude to his wealth or his bank accounts.

The coup d'état of 13 May 1978 was probably Bob Denard's greatest adventure, because the adventure and the victory were his alone. Bob was alone. He confirms having prepared that "lonely crossing" from Lorient to Moroni without any support or accomplices. If the French services, in which he has friends, were perhaps aware of the operation, officially France was once again - or pretended to be - unaware of what was in the works. Not that that would prevent it from cashing in on Denard's success. That he knew. Besides, he had always "played the game".

The liberator

At Lorient, where he bought and readied his deep-sea trawler Antinea, Bob Denard would, for many weeks, leave nothing to chance. More than ever before, he took all the decisions himself, inspected everything, right down to the last bolt in the hull. He surrounded himself with reliable, experienced men, his friend, Commander G., several chief engineers, a crew who, even once at sea, would be unaware of the Antinea's final destination ...

But, more than a victor, Bob Denard on 13 May 1978 was a liberator. The population of Grande Comore, from village to village, would show their gratitude to him, sometimes to the point of delirium. Bob discovered the heady intoxication of

/...

plunging into the crowds, he was welcomed as a messenger of Allah by the devout Muslim population. What Denard put into the Comoros, the Comoros well and truly repaid: the condottiere let himself be seduced by the warm and tender islands he knew so well, by their long-exploited, poverty-stricken population, in search of a hero and a protector ... Bob found another vocation for himself: to rebuild the Comoros, reorganize and control the administration, the police, the courts, the economy. He did not think of himself as king of the Comoros, but at 49 he seriously pictured himself sharing in the new destiny of the archipelago, finding a position there to match his ambitions. He thought he had finally found that second African homeland, that rearguard base, perhaps, of which he had dreamt, certainly a place for his retirement. No one in the Comoros could deny him that right. But international opinion was watching; especially OAU, the spokesman for the progressive countries for whom Denard is the devil of Africa. Denard had to go; that was the price of recognition of the new Comorian régime by the third world.

For Bob the hour of his retirement has not yet struck. But is that so unfortunate for a man who has always confided to his intimates that the one thing he fears is dying in his bed?

Alain Leluc.

/...

Annex II*

BENIN, THE DISMAL FAILURE OF A DARING RAID

by

Véronique Vucher-Bondet

The mercenary's two basic qualifications are the ability to fight and the ability to remain silent. The law of silence is a golden rule. So much so that in many operations, the plans, instructions and objectives are revealed only at the last minute, a stone's throw from the beach where the commando unit is to land, or after the aircraft carrying it has taken off. Once on the scene, the order of orders is not to leave anything behind if the operation fails. No matériel, no wounded and, a fortiori, no documents. If that order is not followed, then failure becomes a downright fiasco. In this regard, no mercenary likes to speak of Benin (formerly Dahomey) - a "messy affair", a painful memory for many who took part, especially their leader, Robert Denard. What makes the memory particularly painful is that all the related documents were seized by the Government of Benin and published in 1977 by the magazine Afrique-Asie.

"We can't be very far from Marrakech."

Oumar Bâ had heard an officer say those words when he arrived at the training camp a few days earlier. For him it was simply a clue. But actually he did not at all care to know exactly where he was. He was not in the habit of asking himself too many questions, and for the past 10 days he had been asking even fewer than usual. On the day in question, one of his friends, also a Guinean, came to see him in Dakar and said:

"You are a Peuhl. And you know how the Peuhls are being wronged by the régime of the President of our country, Sékou Touré. If you want to do something about that, I can show you how."

The friend had produced a card issued by the Rassemblement des Guinéens de l'extérieur (Assembly of Guineans Living Abroad). Bâ did not have enough money to pay for the card, but his friend gave it to him without more ado. The following day, he was told about the need to train and about a friendly country where he would be able to train. Having left Guinea almost 10 years earlier and now an unemployed tailor, Bâ had nothing against the idea of going "to train in a friendly country". And that was how he had ended up being vaccinated and boarding, under an assumed name, a Royal Air Maroc Boeing 737 together with 12 other black youths, only to arrive, after an over-land journey, at a base deep in the heart of Morocco.

He had now been in training for 10 days under Colonel Maurin, a white man, no doubt French or Belgian. When Bâ arrived, there were already 26 Africans

* The original article in French contained captioned photographs which are not included in this translation.

and 60 Europeans at the base, not including the Moroccan gendarmes guarding the base and the cooks, who were also Moroccan. Ten days without a word on what they were going to do. But the day before, something new had happened. Colonel Maurin and Commander Mercier had introduced a Beninese man, Mr. Wakou, Chairman of the Front de Libération, who was going to direct the forthcoming mission.

So without being too sure about the connexion with the struggle against Sékou Touré, Oumar Bâ realized that he would soon be leaving for Benin.

Benin, for Colonel Jean Maurin - who usually went under the name of Gilbert Bourgeaud and whose real name was Robert Denard - was to be an operation without a hitch. For some time now, though, he had been involved in fewer and fewer such operations. After the successful 1975 coup in the Comoros, he had suffered two set-backs, in Zaire and in Angola. But the French Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Branch, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Gabonese President Omar Bongo - whose technical adviser he had been since August 1976, receiving 500,000 CFA francs per month - apparently still had confidence in him.

With the support of Morocco and Gabon

He had planned this operation carefully. Long before signing, on 5 November 1976, a duly formulated contract with the Front de libération et de réhabilitation du Dahomey (FLERD) (Front for the Liberation and Rehabilitation of Dahomey - now Benin), Bob Denard had already received and spent \$145,000 for "reconnaissance mission expenses".

Thanks to that reconnaissance mission, he had learnt that the new Marxist President of Benin, Mathieu Kérékou, had a rather small following among the people and the armed forces. The latter consisted of 6,000 men, scattered throughout the territory, including 600 stationed in Cotonou, the capital.

Starting from that premise, Denard's plan was simple: according to him, all he had to do was neutralize Kérékou and his friends by laying siege to the capital with about 100 men. Later on, calm could be maintained in the rest of the country by troops coming from Togo.

Collaboration with Togo, a State bordering on Benin, posed no problem. Border incidents between the two countries had for some time been on the increase and rumours of an impending invasion of Togo by the Beninese had ultimately persuaded the Togolese Head of State to attend a meeting on 2 January 1977 with Omar Bongo and Bob Denard on "the need for preventive action".

The Togolese Head of State, Omar Bongo and King Hassan II of Morocco were to provide Denard with funds for the operation against Benin. Channelled through FLERD, the funds were to be paid in a first "pre-operation" instalment of \$US 475,000, followed by a second "post-operation" instalment of \$US 530,000, making a total of \$1 million, apparently very little for an operation of this kind. Be that as it may, that money, some of it deposited in accounts in

/...

Luxembourg and Switzerland, would at least go towards the recruitment of the European mercenaries.

Ninety-one mercenaries for Cotonou

Eighty white candidates were considered, 61 finally recruited. Seventeen requests for transfers of funds to the bank in Luxembourg - advice dated 24 December 1976 - give some idea of the payments made to them at the beginning of the contract: 5,000 to 7,000 French francs, representing monthly salaries, all transferred to French banks in Paris or in the provinces. All told, over 245,000 francs in 41 transfers were paid out in December.

By then, the mercenaries whom Denard had undertaken to recruit had almost all arrived at the Benguérir base in Morocco. There were 91 of them. The 60 Europeans trained the 30 Africans - Guinean and Beninese nationals recruited in Senegal and the Ivory Coast - and disclosed to them the code name of their commando unit: Omega Force.

The training was particularly arduous and over-militarized. The atmosphere in the camp between the "Alphas" (the blacks), who were kept apart, and the Europeans was not good. Most of the Alphas had never carried arms; injuries, even among the whites, were very frequent. Under those conditions, the Omegas were exhausted, both physically and psychologically, by the end of their training.

On 15 January 1977, the day after "Wakou", the Beninese man, had arrived at the Benguérir camp, "Colonel" Maurin instructed his men to get rid of anything that might be used to identify them: personal papers or Moroccan-brand cigarettes. At 2.30 p.m., they boarded a DC8 with their matériel, landing at 9 p.m. at Franceville airport in Gabon, where a propeller-driven DC7 flown in by an American pilot and a Swedish engineer was awaiting them.

Once the matériel was on board, the pilot checked out the aircraft and noticed a leak in the oil circuit. Take-off was impossible. The plane was to fall two hours behind schedule, landing at Cotonou at 7.30 a.m. But Denard was not unduly worried by that snag: he knew that at that time on a Sunday morning the airport would in any event be virtually deserted. No flights were expected before the UTA flight at 11 a.m.

Gratien Pognon reads over his speech

In the DC7, Denard gave his final instructions to his men, who were sitting on the floor of the cabin. He was confident. The conclusion of his "reconnaissance" report read: "Provided that the operation is considered desirable, the political will exists and the necessary resources are available, the chances for success may be considered absolute." To his men, he said: "It should be all over in three hours."

Three hours to attack and neutralize the presidential palace, the military camp at Guezo and Kérékou's personal residence. Denard was counting mainly on the

/...

element of surprise and on the elimination of Kérékou to guarantee the success of the operation.

Sitting beside Denard among the Omegas, "Wakou" (real name: Gratien Pognon) was as confident as Denard. A colourless and pretentious character, a former Ambassador of Benin at Brussels, Gratien Pognon was quietly reading over his first speech as "President of the Republic, Head of State and Government for the liberation and rehabilitation of Dahomey". In particular, he was polishing up the peroration: "Children of Dahomey, arise! The tyrant is no more!", when the plane came within sight of Cotonou.

Expertly piloted by the American, the DC7 flew against the wind 30 metres above the waves. No sooner had he landed the plane on the main runway than he braked hard and swung sharply to the civilian strip which is normally reserved for Red Cross planes and is the one closest to the airport buildings. The plane was still moving when the side doors were slid open. Two poles were dropped down to the ground and half a dozen men in fatigues jumped out, opening fire on the buildings.

The President is not in his palace

In the control tower, the Beninese sergeant-major Jean-Baptiste Favi rushed to the telephone. He had time to get through to the air force command and the military headquarters before the mercenaries burst into his office. As he was dragged with three other soldiers towards the plane, he saw other soldiers running towards two small armoured vehicles parked at the end of the runway. With grenades and a burst of machine-gun fire, the armoured vehicles were neutralized and 40 mercenaries rushed off in the direction of the presidential palace.

Advancing in Indian file along the coastal road leading to Cotonou, the mercenaries, black and white together (the operation had to be Africanized at all costs), quickly arrived at their target. About a dozen men remained slightly behind the pack in order to install two 81 mm mortar units. But the rest of the operation was going to prove much less "easy" than Denard had said.

In front of the palace there is a large gravelly square. The vanguard was completely exposed. Under fire from the presidential guard, which had been alerted by the telephone call about the shooting at the airport, the van was obliged to keep its distance. Instead of engaging in hand-to-hand fighting, they pounded the palace. A mortar shell even fell in Kérékou's room, literally blowing to smithereens the place where he might well have been asleep.

"Where he might well have been asleep". Only ... Kérékou was not in his palace. Although Denard had stressed in his report the fundamental importance of "neutralizing" the Beninese Head of State, he apparently subsequently showed poor judgement in choosing the "priority targets". While the mercenaries were fighting to take a palace abandoned by its occupant, Kérékou had already quietly left home, going on the air to prove that he was still alive and to launch an appeal "to the valiant citizens of Benin against this heinous act of imperialist aggression".

/...

Among the mercenaries confusion reigned. Those responsible for radio contact had forgotten most of the frequencies. In contact only with the airport unit, they had absolutely no idea what the other units were doing. An early order to retreat was issued to those besieging the palace. The mortar man lagged behind with a wounded foot and his burning-hot weapon in his hands. About 200 metres behind, some black men were running towards him. He was unable to use his rifle. Fortunately too, for when they caught up with him, he realized that they were Alphas, and not Beninese as he had feared ...

Some distance on, an armoured vehicle suddenly appeared in front of a group of mercenaries. None of them had "Energa" grenades or M.72 rocket-launchers. And that was another lucky break, because the armoured vehicle had been captured by their own forces an hour earlier, and they still did not know because of the lack of radio contact!

On the way, they picked up three wounded men, whom they carried to the airport in civilian vehicles. They had to cross a road under gun-fire. One Belgian thought it would be easier to go round a block of houses. Wounded by the Beninese, the next time his mates saw him was in a photograph at the Cotonou morgue with a bullet in his head. Today many of them believe that, cornered by blacks, he preferred to take his own life rather than fall into their hands ... But no one has ever been able to say precisely what took place behind the block of houses.

Catastrophic retreat

In Cotonou, the mercenaries were continuing their retreat left, right and centre. Gun-fire could be heard virtually everywhere, but the "Omegas" were not really being pursued. The Beninese were prudently remaining under cover, and the few "citoyens" who had taken up arms in response to Kérékou's appeal were not noticeably more courageous.

One of them, Sylvain Comlan, did however come out of his house with a weapon in his hand, only to run head-on into a group of mercenaries. Without protest, he at once threw down his weapon and surrendered. The Omegas took him with them to the airport.

At the airport, Gratien Pognon was beginning to panic. He had so far been sitting discreetly on some boxes. He now instructed the pilot to take off, had his face punched by the American for his trouble and went back to his seat on the boxes. In any case, even if the pilot had been amenable, he would have been unable to take off. With the wisdom acquired after long experience in Africa, Denard had taken the precaution of parking a jeep in front of the wheels of the plane ...

A wise precaution indeed, in view of the panic now prevailing at the airport. The Omegas, who, in retreat, had carried all their matériel with them, were instructed to abandon it there and then: the 81 mm mortars and the two 12.7 machine-guns installed on the runways, as well as the cases of ammunition, grenades, rocket-launchers and broadcasting equipment. Another sign of the growing

/...

panic: the four soldiers from the control tower were allowed to leave, but "witness" Comlan was carefully escorted into the plane!

At 11 a.m., the pilot was finally instructed to take off. A few Beninese snipers fired at the plane, which veered towards the sea 5 metres above the ground with all the doors open. But nobody was injured and none of the tires were hit. The take-off was something of a miracle. Even the Omegas could not believe it. They were already picturing themselves marching through the bush towards Togo for days on end, pursued by the Beninese horde.

The forgotten mortar case

For half an hour, an atmosphere of relief prevailed. They looked after the wounded and attended to a gunner who was having a heart attack ... Then Denard went up to one of the men. He was looking for a case of documents. Not a suitcase ... not a chest ... but a mortar case into which he had crammed all the documents concerning the operation and which he had simply labelled with his name: "Colonel Maurin".

A mortar case? Sure. It was unloaded with the other cases and was still at the airport, right in the middle of the runway ... But there was more to the catastrophe. On making a head-count, Mercier realized that in addition to two dead men - one black, one white - who had been left behind, an Alpha was missing!

Stationed with a machine-gun on one of the roofs at the airport, Oumar Bâ missed not one detail of the mercenaries' retreat. At around 10.30 a.m., when he saw everyone gathered on the runway, he left his post to join the others. But at the bottom of the staircase, he ran into his team leader, who was not in a good mood ... "What on earth are you doing here? You should be on the roof!"

Oumar submissively went back upstairs to stay with his machine-gun.

Shortly afterwards, he saw the plane take off. Then the Beninese invaded the airport. Very soon they went up to the roofs, found Oumar and brought him to Kérékou, who, curiously enough, did not seem in any great hurry to hurt him. One week later, Bâ realized what they wanted him to do. Cotonou was overrun by foreign officials - apparently sent by the Security Council of the United Nations. They were inspecting every bullet hole, every shell fragment; one after the other they were marching into his cell to ask him constantly the same questions. And when they were finished, they would go to the morgue for their untiring examinations of the bodies of the mercenaries killed during the operation.

In his own way, Bâ had become an oral archive, living proof of "the heinous aggression of imperialism on its last legs", in the words of Kérékou. So he was only too willing to repeat all day long the statements already placed in the record by the officials: "I was tricked by politicians. I have a clear conscience because I did not kill a soul. Anybody could have been tricked like me. Long live the People's Republic of Benin so that African unity may reign."

/...

Returning to Gabon in a bullet-ridden DC7, the Omegas were given a cool reception. They landed in an abandoned part of Libreville airport. From there they were told sometime later to go to Franceville, where they spent about 10 days before returning to Libreville for a final "decompression phase": 10 days at an abandoned base without running water or sanitary facilities.

Everywhere they went, they took Sylvain Comlan, "the prisoner", who seemed after all to be adjusting very well to his situation. At Cotonou, a few mercenaries did begin to knock him about, but Denard intervened and no one hit him after that. He merely did his share of fatigue-duty. Would he go back to Cotonou? Not if he could help it. He was afraid he would be considered a traitor, and, while he was at it, he preferred to use the opportunity to leave his wife. Comlan, "comrade in struggle", as Kérékou called him, had relatives in Africa, somewhere in Somalia or Nigeria. One day Denard gave him an airline ticket; he has not been heard from since ...

At least, that is the account given by the mercenaries today.

This is one of the few points of the episode that have remained obscure. For the rest, the mass of documents which Denard left behind at Cotonou constitutes to this day the most comprehensive set of information that has ever been available concerning an operation by mercenaries. 1/

Through the commission of inquiry of the Security Council of the United Nations, Kérékou published everything: Bâ's testimony; all the plans for the operation against Cotonou; the contract between Denard and FLERD; Pognon's "victory" address; pay slips; the list of mercenaries, with their real names, past service record, money received by each of them and the names of their banks; all the documents proving that Omar Bongo and the commander of the presidential guard, Colonel Louis Martin, 2/ had dealings with Bob Denard; Denard's bank statements; and even the vaccination certificates (some of them issued in the Ivory Coast) of the mercenaries!

All told, Morocco, Gabon, Togo, the Ivory Coast, Senegal and France were implicated in one way or another. On 21 February, at the twenty-eighth OAU conference, at Lomé, the representative of Morocco walked out when the report of the Cotonou commission of inquiry was being taken up. For Kérékou that was a magnificent salvaging and propaganda operation.

1/ Curiously enough, when the magazine Afrique-Asie published the dossier, it failed to make the connexion between Colonel Maurin and Denard.

2/ We are referring to "Loulou" Martin, one of the great and popular figures of the first foreign regiment of parachutists (see our issue on paratroopers). He is still Chief of President Bongo's presidential guard, with the rank of army general. His command includes control of the élite Gabonese forces, the air force and, no doubt, the intelligence services.

S/14211
English
Annex II
Page 8

As for Denard, now back in France, somewhat disgusted, and more or less abandoned by many of his former comrades, he was to be contacted a few months later by the Comorian leader Ahmed Abdallah, whom Denard himself had overthrown three years earlier. Africa was still in need of his services.

Véronique Vucher-Bondet

* The material contained in this article is excerpted from the magazine Afrique-Asie. All rights reserved.
