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The Washington Post

December 14, 1989, Thursday, Final Edition

## **France** Sends Force to Oust Mercenary; 'Soldier of Fortune' Takes Over **Comoros** After Killing of President

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**SECTION:** FIRST SECTION; PAGE A51

**LENGTH:** 1028 words

**DATELINE:** PARIS

Bob Denard, one of the last of a breed of mercenaries who has bounced from one bloody African conflict to another for three decades, has approached the end of what may be his final adventure on a tiny Indian Ocean archipelago.

**France** and South Africa, both of which at one time or another sponsored Denard's dirty work, have withdrawn their tolerance for his extraordinary role in running the **Comoro** Islands since President Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane was assassinated just before midnight Nov. 26 in his official residence in Moroni, the capital on the main island of Grande **Comore**.

To press Denard and the approximately 30 European mercenaries under his command to leave, South Africa has stopped paying their salaries and **France** has dispatched a half-dozen helicopters and several hundred commandos to the nearby French island of Mayotte.

[News services reported Wednesday from Dzaoudzi, Mayotte, that four French warships were positioned off the **Comoros** in a show of force -- and in case the 1,600 French citizens there need to be evacuated. However, French President **Francois** Mitterrand, during Wednesday's regular cabinet meeting, ruled out any French military intervention in the **Comoros**, Agence **France**-Presse reported from Paris.]

According to French officials, Paris and Pretoria have sought to negotiate a peaceful departure for the graying soldier-for-hire, but Denard is setting stiff conditions that include high-priced compensation.

"We should be offered an honorable exit," Denard, a 60-year-old Frenchman, said in an interview Tuesday with the Paris newspaper, Le Figaro. "We are soldiers, soldiers of fortune, of differing fortune perhaps, but soldiers," said Denard, the reported alias of Gilbert Bourgeaud, who started out as a French soldier in Indochina. "After all, we have our honor."

Denard's concept of honor for pay first took him to the Belgian Congo, now Zaire, to fight with Moise Tshombe's secessionist Katanga forces in the early 1960s. It propelled him to Nigeria to fight with Lt. Col. Emeka Ojukwu's secessionist Biafrans at the end of the '60s. It moved him to Yemen and Chad for gritty conflicts there and on to Benin in 1977 for a botched commando landing that was supposed to have been a coup d'etat against the Marxist government.

With such figures as "Mad" Mike Hoare, an Irishman, and Jean Schramme, a Belgian, Denard became part of a group of Europeans dubbed "the hideous ones" or "soldiers of fortune," whose violent adventures were the subject of books and

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movies.

The **Comoros**, an impoverished former French colony comprising three islands 300 miles east of Madagascar's northern tip, first became acquainted with Denard in 1976, when he commanded a team of mercenaries who helped overthrow Abdallah. That expedition reportedly was mounted in collusion with French intelligence, exasperated that Abdallah used his position to get rich in a country where more than half of its budget was made up of French aid.

But the replacement, Ali Soilih, proved worse than his predecessor, in the eyes of Paris as well as those of the local population. So Denard was back in the **Comoros** in 1978 with mercenaries who helped bring off another coup d'etat, this one to restore Abdallah to power.

By this time, Denard was in trouble back home for his part in the failed Benin coup one year earlier. He settled in the **Comoros**, took a **Comoran** wife and called himself Mustafa Muhajou to accommodate the Islamic tradition of the islands' 500,000 residents.

Denard was saluted as a hero by Abdallah, who put him in charge of the country's security. For a while, Denard commanded the army. Then he formed the Presidential Guard, an elite force of 7,000 **Comorans** commanded by Denard and his European followers, most of them French.

According to Denard, the South African government paid the guards' salaries from the beginning, including his monthly stipend of \$ 6,300. South Africa was delighted to have a black African president who proclaimed his willingness to get along with Pretoria's apartheid government and, according to press reports, tolerated use of the **Comoros** to ship South African supplies to rebels in Mozambique, just to the west.

Abdallah also allowed South Africans to construct tourist hotels and invest in farms. Denard formed a private security company, Sogecom, with contracts to protect the hotels built by the South Africans.

But South Africa's shift toward better relations with its neighbors compromised support for the guard. At the same time, Mitterrand, whose government was uncomfortable with Denard's role in the **Comoros**, refused to heed Abdallah's invitations to visit as long as Denard was in the background managing security. French authorities revived a criminal case against Denard for the Benin attack, alleging that it had been prepared in part on French soil.

Against that background, Abdallah was reported to be seeking a way to arrange Denard's departure. A French security expert, according to reports here, visited Moroni recently and drew up a plan for reorganizing the Presidential Guard.

The goal of easing Denard toward change fell apart, however, with the Nov. 26 assassination. Since then, Denard and the Presidential Guard have been openly running the country despite several demonstrations demanding the Europeans' departure.

Denard has denied reports that he killed the president after getting word he was about to be dismissed.

[Denard told the Star, a Moroni newspaper, that Abdallah was killed by a Staff Sgt. Jaffar, who accidentally shot the president in his office, news services reported Wednesday. Denard said Jaffar was immediately killed by a captain.

[Denard said he was in Abdallah's office at the time of the shooting but gave no other details. "I have had enough of being viewed as an assassin," he declared, calling the president's death "an accident due to the general state of mayhem" in the palace.]

Denard told Le Figaro that he knows he has to leave, but insists on a dignified end to his career.

"I am 60 years old," he said. "I think I've raised enough hell, that I've given enough of myself. I now have the right to a little rest."

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**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**SERIES:** Occasional

**GRAPHIC:** MAP, PRESIDENT ABDALLAH, CENTER, IS ESCORTED BY STAFF SGT. JAFFAR, LEFT, IN  
UNDATED PHOTO. MERCENARY BOB DENARD SAID IT WAS JAFFAR, NOT HE, WHO KILLED  
PRESIDENT. LARRY FOGEL; PHOTO, AFP

**TYPE:** FOREIGN NEWS

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