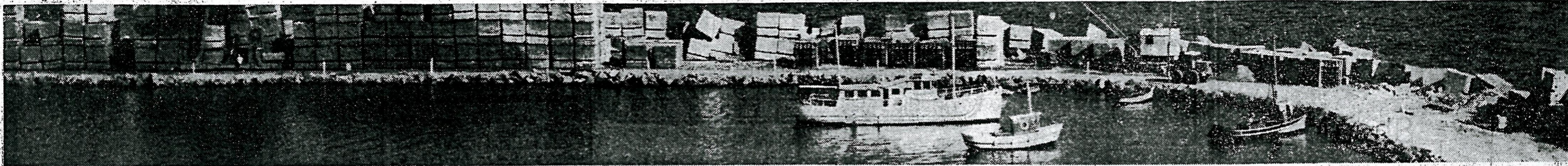


With this boat, The Albatross, Freddie Forsyth mounted a coup, turned fact into fiction—and made £450,000



THE REAL DOGS OF WAR

INSIGHT

ALAN MURPHY broke one of the cardinal rules of the mercenary's trade. He wrote things down. That may explain why, five weeks ago, Murphy shot a policeman and then, apparently, himself in his bed-sitter in East London.

Around his home in Goldsmith's Row, Hackney, Murphy was known as a delivery driver, a body-building fanatic and a collector of firearms. It was after local children talked of seeing guns there that two constables went to Murphy's place. Murphy opened fire with a .38 revolver. As the police tumbled back down the stairs, one had a gunshot wound in the chest.

The resulting police siege only lasted an hour. After hearing another single shot, police eventually broke down the door, to find Murphy dead with a bullet through his heart. They also found what Murphy had seemingly been trying to protect: not his modest arsenal of gleaming and illegal weaponry but something more sensitive, a collection of documents.

Murphy was 43 when he died. For 15 years he had been a professional mercenary—one of the tough breed Frederick Forsyth indelibly labelled "The Dogs of War". Through those years, he kept a diary and any other documents he could lay his hands on. All over Europe, Murphy's ex-comrades are now wondering uneasily what Special Branch—which took away those papers—has learned.

For the world knows about two of the affairs Murphy was involved in: the Congo and Biafra. It does not know about several secret operations.

From Murphy's ex-comrades—scattered now in Europe and Southern Africa—we have pieced together one of the most remarkable of those unknown assignments: the attempt in 1972-1973 to overthrow the regime in the west African state of Equatorial Guinea, a coup master-minded and financed by the millionaire novelist Frederick Forsyth.

Our conclusion is startling. Forsyth's best-selling novel, The Dogs of War, is in fact a thinly-disguised account of that operation. There is, however, one major difference. After a daring sea assault, Forsyth's valiant band succeeded in their objective of taking over the west African state he called Zangaro. In real life, Forsyth's mercenaries were arrested by Spanish police 3,000 miles from their target

The novel The Dogs of War made half a million pounds for its author, Frederick Forsyth. The world regards it as fiction; a small band of mercenaries know it is largely fact. They

took part in a real-life attempted coup which Forsyth financed. **INSIGHT** tells how it was planned—and how, unlike the novel, it met an ignominious end.



ALEX GAY: recruited mercenaries, hired the boat.



ALAN MURPHY: died in a police siege, but left a diary.



GENERAL OJUKWU: denies involvement in the affair.



FREDERICK FORSYTH: planned and financed the coup against Equatorial Guinea.

Forsyth even improved on his plan. The Dogs of War recounts, for instance, the revised procedure for paying arms dealers that Forsyth and Gay in reality worked out only after the Hamburg debacle. And though Forsyth mentions the Albatross by name, it is only to dismiss it as unsuitable.

When the novel appeared late in 1974, only Gay could have revealed the truth. But by then Forsyth had repaid his debt to him. For when Gay, on his return to Britain after the operation, was promptly charged with possessing arms, and obtaining the passports used in the operation, it was Forsyth's eloquent testimony as Gay's main character witness which almost certainly saved Gay from prison. The secret of Fernando Poo was safe.

THE SECRET that remains even now is: who was the model for the softly-spoken African general with the bushy beard who flies into exile at the beginning of The Dogs of War—and is installed as the new President of Zangaro at the end? Who did Forsyth want to install?

and ignominiously packed off home.

"WHAT KEEPS you reading," the New Statesman wrote when The Dogs of War was published in September 1974, "is its detailed dwelling on the plotting of the coup." But when reporters went to see Forsyth in Dublin—for tax reasons, he could not set foot in England—they found him oddly coy about his source of inspiration.

Forsyth's first book, The Day of the Jackal, had drawn on the OAS attempts to kill President de Gaulle. His next, The Odessa File, was based on the Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal. But it was left to Forsyth's British publishers, Hutchinson, to declare that his latest plot was "drawn from Forsyth's experiences as a BBC reporter during the Nigerian civil war."

It was in 1970, within months of his return from Biafra, that Forsyth began to plot his coup d'etat. From the first, Forsyth's target was Equatorial Guinea. His confidant and adviser was a mercenary named Alexander Ramsay Gay. His objective throughout was to provide a new homeland for the defeated Biafrans.

Gay, a former Scottish bank clerk, had fought in the Congo, and in Biafra, commanded a brigade of 3,000 men. He had met Forsyth there in mid-1968. Now, in 1970, sitting in Forsyth's small flat in Camden Town, they dreamed of a Biafran comeback.

FEW PEOPLE would lament the overthrow of Francisco Macias Nguema, President for Life of Equatorial Guinea. From his palace on Macias Nguema Island—more widely known as Fernando Poo—he rules in summary fashion. Supported by shock troops entitled "Youths in March with Macias" he imprisons, deports or kills all political opponents.

The place had other attractions as a target. Fernando Poo lies barely 100 miles off the Nigerian coast—it was the base for a flight into beleaguered Biafra, some 20,000 Biafran workers and their families already lived there. It was Gay who, with his ability, rare among mercenaries, to distinguish fact from fantasy—pointed out to Forsyth the one major obstacle: neither of them had any money.

By 1972 Forsyth had solved that problem too. The Day of the Jackal had made him a rich man. In spring 1972, Forsyth asked Gay to reconnoitre Fernando Poo.

Tourists are scarcely welcomed there, but Gay got a visa in Cameroon and flew into the island's capital, Santa Isabel—now renamed Malabo. A few days exploring possible landing sites and observing the palace defences were enough. A dozen determined mercenaries, backed by 40-50 ex-Biafran soldiers, Gay reported, could take Fernando Poo. The cost, Gay reckoned, would be £50,000. Forsyth would go ahead.

AS FORSYTH subsequently recounted it, the planning was complex, meticulous, brilliant. The reality fell somewhat short of this.

Certainly, it involved all the thriller, writers' paraphernalia of false passports, numbered bank accounts, crooked arms dealers, and false "end users" certificates. Gay had two false passports, in the names of Greaves and Mair. (It was Gay's proven method of acquiring these—essentially, by purloining other people's identities—that Forsyth adopted in The Day of the Jackal.) And it was in the name of Henry George Greaves that, as the first step in the operation, Gay opened account number 47009081/93 at the Kreditbank, Ostend.

The next step was to approach a prominent Hamburg arms dealer with a shopping list: 40 Belgian automatic rifles, four light machine guns, two 60 mm mortars, two bazookas, 40,000 rounds of ammunition, and a good deal more.

The dealer agreed to supply them from a stockpile in Spain. He also agreed to obtain, through judicious bribery, two key documents. An official of the Spanish Ministry of Defence would provide an export licence. And a pliable Iraqi diplomat would supply an "end user" certificate, purporting to show that the arms were bound for Iraq.

Gay paid a deposit—in several instalments—of 120,000 Deutschmarks (then about £20,000). He also introduced the dealer, by telephone, to his "principal," a "Mr Van Cleef." "Any problems" Gay said, "talk to him." Van Cleef was Forsyth.

WITH ARMS apparently fixed, Gay now set about acquiring men, boat and a plan. For men, Gay hired nine French and Belgian mercenaries; a Hungarian, Al Varga, who had come west in 1956; and three Englishmen: a for-

mer RAF military policeman Scott Sanderson, who had advertised his services in the Daily Telegraph; a Convent Garden porter, Ronald Gorman; and the tough, experienced East Ender, Alan Murphy, who had fought with Gay in the Congo and against him in Nigeria. The pay was \$1,200 a month.

Gay found his boat in the southern Spanish resort of Fuengirola. She was the Albatross, a 64-foot converted fishing vessel, British-registered, and owned by a British expatriate named George Allan. Gay chartered her for three months at £2,000 a month—telling Allan he wanted to survey for oil off Africa. Allan could not have been convinced for long. As one of those involved observers: "It was obviously a bent operation right from the start."

When the mercenaries began to arrive in southern Spain in late October, 1972, the "oil survey" looked even less plausible. (The picture of the Albatross we show above was taken at this point. It now hangs in the harbour master's office in Fuengirola.)

The cargo flowing aboard the Albatross was bizarre enough: three landing craft with engines, 10,800 litres of diesel fuel, 75 army uniforms, £3,000 worth of food, seven cases of Scotch, copious quantities of wine, beer and cigarettes, 384 Andrex toilet rolls, and one and a half tons of rice (to feed the Biafran soldiers).

The mercenaries were equally unmistakable. Gay installed them in comfortable hotels and instructed them to "stay inconspicuous," but one of the Albatross crew recalls: "They stuck out like sore thumbs." They descended on the astonished pharmacists of the nearby resort of Marbella and bought up their entire stock of seasickness and diarrhoea pills. And the local Guardia Civil became particularly suspicious of one "oil technician" who was fond of marching about the deck of the Albatross in full camouflage fatigues. (His mates knew him, none too fondly, as Woodentop.)

WITH MAPS, colour slides and a balsawood model of the target built by a London model-maker, Gay was now ready to brief his motley band.

The plan Gay had refined

with Forsyth was simple enough. The arms would be dispatched from Madrid in mid-December, and the Albatross would load them in Malaga. Then, calling at Gibraltar for her remaining equipment and supplies, she would head south, taking on fresh food and water at the Cape Verde Islands. The 50 Biafran ex-soldiers would go on board at Cotonou in Dahomey—they would have to sleep on deck—and the Albatross would arrive at Fernando Poo, 500 miles to the southeast, by night.

The first assault group was to consist of all the mercenaries and at least half the Biafrans. They would land in the three inflatable dinghies fitted with silenced engines, mount the low cliff, and dispose of the palace guard. The intended fate of President Nguema was tactfully covered.

A communique had been prepared for broadcasting to the people of Fernando Poo. "Regrettably Don Francisco Macias committed suicide or accidentally died in this bloodless coup" one of the mercenaries recited to us. "It was with deep regret that this step was taken—you know, the usual sort of thing."

Success would mean a bonus of 30,000 dollars a man—in part, to compensate for Gay's "no looting" edict. And since Fernando Poo boasts a large Soviet embassy, whose tasks include the servicing of Soviet spy-trawlers in the Atlantic, there seem to have been plans to offer the embassy and its contents to the CIA for a million dollars.

In the second week of December, 1972, the dream went sour.

THE SPANISH Ministry of Defence official who had pocketed the Hamburg arms dealer's bribe refused to issue the arms export licence when he discovered that the Albatross was not a freighter but a private, wooden-hulled craft. When the Albatross sailed into Malaga at dawn on December 16, therefore, no arms were waiting. But the Hamburg dealer refused to refund Forsyth's 120,000 Deutschmarks.

Desperately, Gay and Forsyth tried to save the operation. While the Albatross and its mercenaries were sent on, via Gibraltar, to Lanzarote in the Canary Islands, Gay flew to Hamburg to try to arrange for the arms to leave Spain

by another route, thence to go aboard the Albatross at sea. It was too difficult. On January 15, Gay flew to the Canaries and told the mercenaries that the operation had to be abandoned for the time being.

The Spanish authorities evidently took the same view. Next day, the island's police got orders from Madrid to impound the Albatross and arrest the "armed mercenaries" aboard her.

But the Spaniards did not want them: after a few days the mercenaries were put on board planes or boats to their various homes. Gay was questioned by the Spanish Special Branch from Madrid—their view was that his plan was entirely feasible—and then allowed to leave for Paris

(Gay did not name Forsyth to them). The Albatross' owner, George Allan, had the toughest time: three gunboats escorted him out of Spanish waters, and it was more than a month before he was allowed to return to Fuengirola.

Even though the operation had finally cost £100,000—double its budget—the person who did best, of course, was Forsyth himself.

BY DECEMBER, 1972—this is, even before the operation was finally abandoned—Forsyth was at work on The Dogs of War.

President Macias Nguema became President Jean Kimba; Fernando Poo became the republic of Zangaro. With the benefit of hindsight,

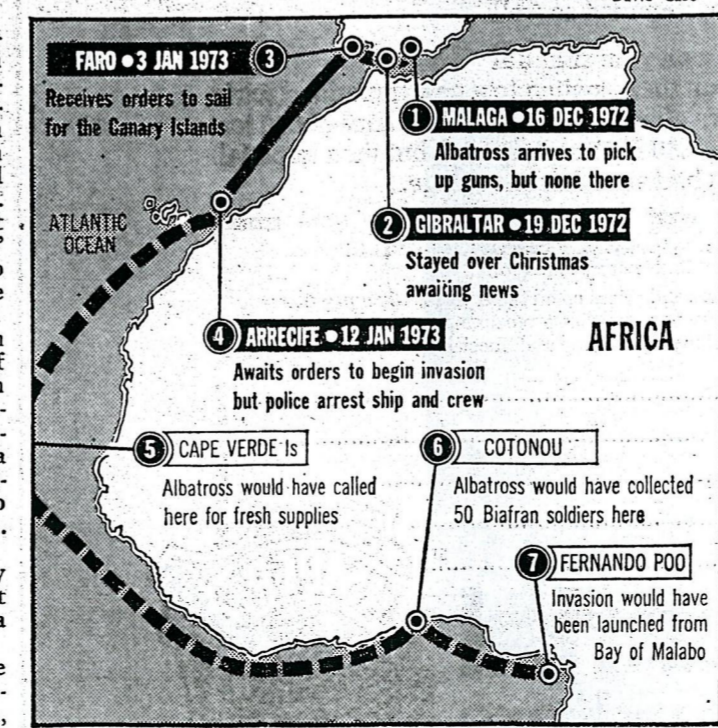
Mr Charles Clark, managing director of Forsyth's publishers Hutchinsons, told us that he understood—from a source he could not reveal—that if there was a plot, Ojukwu was not involved in it; indeed he would have strongly disapproved of it.

Messrs Harbottle and Lewis—who are Forsyth's London solicitors—then wrote to The Sunday Times on Ojukwu's behalf. They wished to make it clear that Ojukwu strongly denied that he was in any way connected with the activities of a group of mercenaries and a certain West African state.

The one man who could have resolved this question is, of course, Forsyth. He has refused to discuss the affair.

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The route of the Albatross



Fernando Poo was the target, but it ended in the Canaries