



## Stories

[Home](#) • [News](#) • [Stories](#) • 2004 • July • [A Byte Out of History - 1986 Prevention of Suriname Coup](#)

### A Byte Out of History

#### A 1986 Prevention: The Foiled Takeover of a Foreign Government

07/28/04

More than a dozen U.S. citizens were on the tarmac, decked out in business suits, ready to board a private plane just outside New Orleans and head out of the country. Inside their bags were a large cache of weapons and ammunition, thousands of dollars in cash, and a how-to manual called "Ambush and Counter Ambush."

**They were on their way to Suriname to take over the country.**

The date was July 28, 1986. It would be another 15 months before Wall Street movie character Gordon Gekko would deliver his infamous line, "Greed is good." But this band of criminals had already taken that message to heart in their own twisted way.

**The ringleader of the group—one Tommy Lynn Denley, aka "Tango"—had cooked up an illegal plan to make them all instant millionaires.**

Earlier, a Netherlands café owner named George Baker—originally from Suriname—had supposedly agreed to pay Denley some \$300 million to overthrow the country. Denley had promised to pay his hired guns a million dollars a piece for their help.

**How exactly did Denley plan to take over an entire country?**

- Posing as a banker, Denley asked the government of Suriname to set up a secret off-shore bank account in return for a small commission. Denley then arranged for a meeting with Suriname President Desi Bouterse in late July to seal the deal.
- During the meeting, Denley planned to take Bouterse prisoner by force, and then have him call in other top government leaders, who would also be taken hostage.
- Then, high-ranking members of the Suriname military would call for a military coup to complete the overthrow of the government.

**The takeover never happened, of course, thanks to a proactive joint investigation of the FBI and what was then the U.S. Customs Service.**

In June and July of 1986, the FBI and Customs learned of the plot through separate sources. Working in tandem, investigators contacted Denley and his associates, masquerading as investors and fellow mercenaries willing to help. Denley laid out his plan in a series of meetings with his "team" (including the undercover agents) in the days leading up to July 28. That morning, FBI and Customs agents arrested the 13 criminals at the airport. Another conspirator was arrested the next day.

**The upshot.** Denley and three others pled guilty to violating the Neutrality Act, which bans the attempted overthrow of foreign nations. The rest pled guilty to lesser charges. Most got jail time. Case closed, and a potentially serious international crime prevented.

[Accessibility](#) | [eRulemaking](#) | [Freedom of Information Act](#) | [Legal Notices](#) | [Legal Policies and Disclaimers](#) | [Links](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [USA.gov](#) | [White House](#)  
 FBI.gov is an official site of the U.S. government, U.S. Department of Justice

Close

## Story Index

### By Date

### By Subject

- Art Theft
- Civil Rights
- Counterterrorism
- Crimes Against Children
- Criminal Justice Information Services
- Cyber Crimes
- Director/FBI Leadership
- Field Cases
- Foreign Counterintelligence
- General
- History
- Intelligence
- International
- Lab/Operational Technology
- Linguist/Translation Program
- Major Thefts/Violent Crime
- Organized Crime/Drugs
- Partnerships
- Public/Community Outreach
- Public Corruption
- Recruiting/Diversity
- Responding to Your Concerns
- Technology
- Training
- White-Collar Crime

