

The Velvet Rocket

Online Magazine

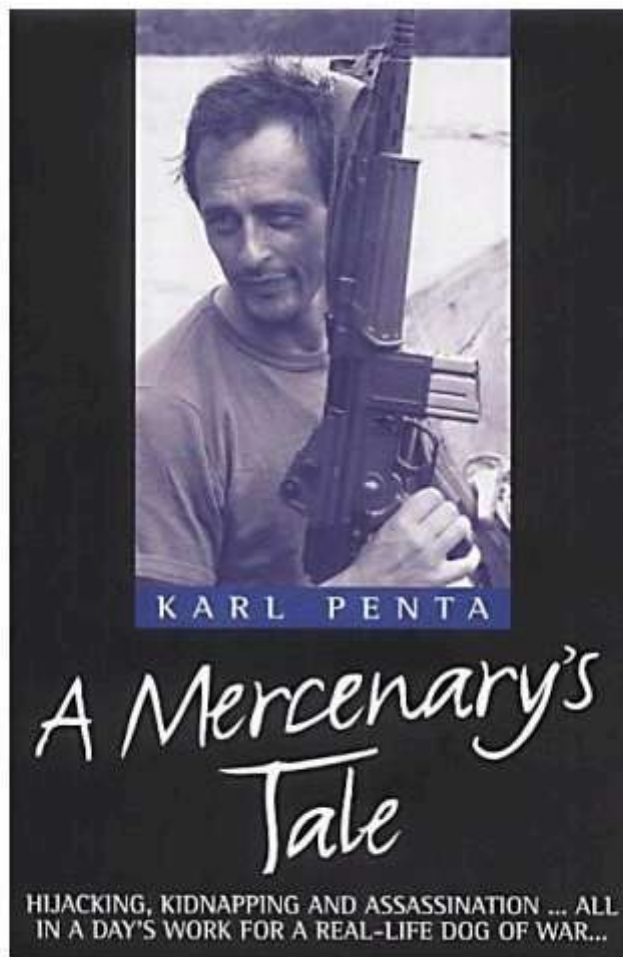
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Searching For Karl Penta's Suriname & French Guiana

Posted on [February 7, 2010](#) by [JUSTIN](#)

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I first became interested in Suriname after Tanja Gromala told me about it. It was after reading Karl Penta's "[Have Gun Will Travel \(http://www.amazon.com/Have-Will-Travel-Karl-Penta/dp/1904034500/ref=pd_rhf_p_t_1\)](http://www.amazon.com/Have-Will-Travel-Karl-Penta/dp/1904034500/ref=pd_rhf_p_t_1)" (the hardcover edition is pictured below), however, that I realized an investigation into Suriname as well as French Guiana by The Velvet Rocket was now compulsory.



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/karl-penta.jpg>

Here is how the jacket of Penta's book reads:

"As I rose to my knees behind the cover of a giant tree, I brought up the barrel of my FAL assault rifle, flicked the weapon to automatic, and took aim at the truck full of troops. There were all staring down the road ahead. One of them was leaning with his left arm over the edge of the truck, a rifle clutched in his right hand. Over the haze from the muzzle blast, I saw men bouncing and jumping. Another burst straight into them. Click – the mag was empty..."

Karl Penta is a tough, wiry Liverpudlian with a Scouser's natural dark humour. He has served in many of the world's hotspots, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Kosovo. It was whilst in Sri Lanka that he saw an advert: MEN WANTED. Ex-military personnel to work abroad. Underneath was a Rotterdam phone number. Soon, Karl found himself in Surinam. His brief: to bring down the government. Within weeks, the government was on its knees: **KARL PENTA IS THE ONLY MAN EVER TO CRIPPLE A GOVERNMENT SINGLEHANDEDLY.** The twists and turns of this amazing operation are still going on, but Karl feels it is now safe to tell the whole, incredible story. This is it."

Now, that gushy introduction to Karl Penta and the book overstates things a tad as other European mercenaries were quite involved in Suriname with Ronnie Brunswijk and the Jungle Commando as well. To his credit, Penta himself has pointed this out and has made strenuous efforts to distance himself from exaggerated descriptions of his contribution. Despite his modesty, however, he was very much in the thick of things in Suriname and French Guiana during this turbulent period and provides an interesting account of this forgotten conflict.

You're probably thinking that a little background information would be useful now...

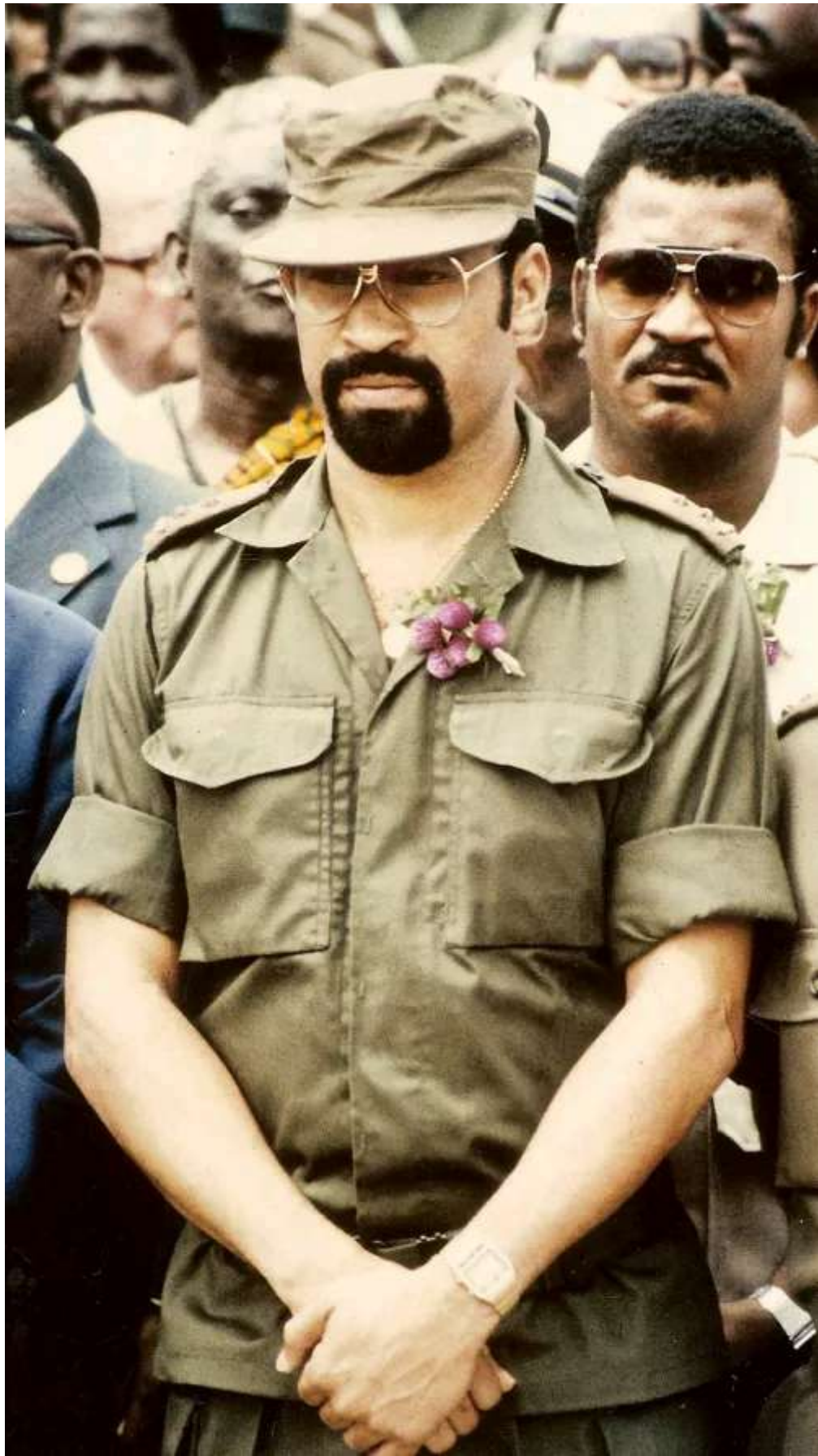
A Little Background Information:

Suriname was once Dutch Guiana but became independent in 1975. In 1980, Desi Bouterse, then an NCO PT instructor in the Surinamese army, launched a military coup with just sixteen men, successfully overthrowing the civilian government.

Bouterse declared martial law and claimed the People's Republic of Suriname would take its inspiration from Cuba. Prime Minister Chin-a-sen fled to Amsterdam and launched the Committee of Liberation. Bouterse's next step was to cold-bloodedly execute fifteen of his political opponents – two former cabinet ministers, the dean of the local university, four prominent lawyers and four journalists were among the dead.

Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi paid Bouterse \$100 million to open a "cultural mission" in Suriname's capital, Paramaribo. The Libyans were also allegedly running a military training camp near a remote village on the Brazilian border in conjunction with the Cubans.

Desi Bouterse in 1985:



(https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/desi_bouterse.jpg)

In July 1986, six years after Bouterse seized power, one of the dictator's own bodyguards led an uprising of the Maroon – descendants of black slaves who lived in the jungle along the Maroni River (also known as the Marowijne) that divides Suriname from French Guiana. The former bodyguard, Ronnie Brunswijk, and his rebel force captured twelve government soldiers in their first attack against an army post. On the same day another attack against the garrison town of Albina failed because the rebels – known alternately as the Jungle Commando (JC) or the Surinam National Liberation Army (SNLA) – lacked enough weapons.

The above was the quick and dirty version of events... Below, a detailed timeline of events has been compiled. However, if you just want to cut to the chase, you have enough information to skip ahead now over the timeline...

Timeline Of Events In Suriname:

25 November 1975

Suriname is granted independence.

25 February 1980

Desi Bouterse (a physical-training NCO in the army) and Roy Horb launch a coup, with 16 men, to overthrow the civilian government of Henck Arron. The National Military Council promises elections at some future date, but from the beginning the movement is closely connected to Cuba.

May 1980

A countercoup fails. It was launched from French Guiana by Fred Ormskerk (a former Dutch resident of Suriname) using Dutch, Belgian, South Moluccan, Bolivian (from the Bavaria Club in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, which counted among its members Nazi Klaus Barbie) and Venezuelan mercenaries.

16 August 1980

Bouterse declares a state of emergency and deposes President Ferrier in favor of Prime Minister Chin-a-sen.

4 February 1982

Chin-a-sen resigns after Bouterse, backed by the army, seizes power. Chin-a-sen moves to Amsterdam and launches the "Committee for the Liberation of Suriname".

12 March 1982

Sergeant Major Wilfred Hawkins attempts a coup, fails, and is executed by firing squad on 13 March.

11 December 1982

Martial law is declared and Bouterse says Suriname will take its inspiration from Cuba. He executes 15 of his political foes. Among the dead are four journalists, four attorneys, two former cabinet ministers and the dean of economics at the local university. The Netherlands suspends a \$1.5 billion aid package.

14 January 1983

Suriname is declared a "Peoples' Democracy".

2 February 1983

Major Roy Horb hangs himself in his cell following a failed coup against Bouterse.

1983

The CIA presents a plan for approval by the House and Senate intelligence committees for the overthrow of Bouterse. Fierce opposition from House committee chairman Edward Boland, a Massachusetts Democrat, shelves the plan. Boland, also responsible for the Boland Amendment, which cut off aid to the anti-Sandinista Contras, reasons Suriname is too unimportant to justify such "extreme" action.

25 October 1983

Frightened by America's invasion of Grenada, Bouterse expels all Cuban advisers from Suriname. But by 1984 the Cubans are back, reportedly involved with the Libyans in running a terrorist training camp located near Sipaliwini, a remote village on the Brazilian border.

1985

Libya's Muammar Gaddafi signs an agreement with Bouterse offering him \$100 million in "aid" if he allows Libya to open a "cultural mission" in Paramaribo. After the Libyans arrive, the French note increased dissident activity in French Guiana and on the French-controlled islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. American mercenaries working with Surinamese exiles in the United States are arrested in Baltimore, Maryland.

22 July 1986

Ronnie Brunswijk, a former Bouterse bodyguard, begins a revolt with an attack against a military post at Stolkertsijver, capturing 12 government soldiers. On the same day another attack against the garrison in Albina fails due to a lack of weapons (Among the weapons being used by the Surinamese guerrillas in the uprising were swords and guns from the 19th century). Brunswijk started the war after an attempt on his life, presumably by Bouterse.

30 July 1986

The FBI arrests 14 American mercenaries (http://articles.latimes.com/1986-07-30/news/mn-18780_1_suriname) in New Orleans, Louisiana. Leaders Tommy Lynn Denelley and John Ambielli say they were hired by a Dutch foundation named "ANSUS". The director of ANSUS is George Baker, a Surinamese living in Amsterdam's red-light district who operates the Karel Appel 2 coffee bar. Baker is not arrested by the Dutch police.

21 August 1986

Bouterse sends his elite Echo Company commando unit out to hunt down Brunswijk. The guerrillas engage Echo Company on the banks of the Maroni River, killing four and wounding five. Echo Company commander Henk van Randwijk defects to the guerrillas.

September 1986

Bouterse aide Captain Etienne Boerenveen is arrested in Miami, Florida by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) after being taped and filmed while offering to make Suriname and the many dirt strips built there in recent years available to drug traffickers in exchange for U.S. dollars.

December 1986

Approximately 8,000 civilians flee the war zone into French Guiana. Amnesty International verifies reports of massacres of women and children by government forces. Rebels claim Libyans are involved in the massacres.

Below is an eyewitness account of one of the massacres which took place in the village of Moiwana (also known as Moi Wana):

They dragged my 12-year-old son from a house and shot him. They shot my wife in the foot. She fell on the ground and begged the soldiers not to kill her...another woman, she was pregnant. She pleaded with the soldiers not to kill her and pointed to her belly. She was running away and they shot her in the back. She was dead. Another soldier grabbed a six-month-old baby and put the barrel of his gun in its mouth and laughed. The baby took it eagerly, like a baby bottle. The soldier pulled the trigger. The soldiers rounded up another group of seven people: six children and one woman. They lined them up in the middle of the village, and placed a guard around them on both sides and kept them there, so they couldn't escape. They begged for their lives, but the soldiers shot them all to death...Bouterse's soldiers took some of the bodies away. They dragged some of the bodies into houses, which they doused with diesel oil and set on fire. Before the soldiers left, they burned down the whole village.

Estimates of the number of Surinamese who have voted with their feet against the communist government of Suriname reaches 180,000, most of them in the Netherlands.

Enter The Mercenaries:

In 1986 a reserved advertisement appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* which simply read as follows:

MEN WANTED

Ex-military personnel to work abroad

The individuals responsible for the placement of the ad were members of the Surinamese exile community. They had money and they desperately wanted to be rid of Desi Bouterse.

Karl Penta responded to the ad and his experiences that followed form the basis of the book mentioned in the opening paragraph. However, Penta was not the only one to respond.

As least eight other British, French and Belgian mercenaries headed for Suriname as well. The mercenaries were instructed to call a telephone number in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, at a specific hour on either Wednesday or Thursday. Prospective mercenaries would reach "Persad," who told them to

present themselves, with proof of prior service, at an address in Rotterdam. If accepted, the mercenaries were flown on Air Maroc from Amsterdam to Rio de Janeiro via Casablanca and then on a Brazilian airline to Kourou, French Guiana, where contracts were signed.

Karl Penta and another British man were the first mercenaries to arrive in Suriname in September of 1986. Their initial successes were remarkable as working with Brunswijk's guerrillas of the Jungle Commando/Surinam National Liberation Army (SNLA) they were able to, in two months, cut off the roads from Albina to Moengo and from Moengo to Paramaribo and to force the closure of Suriname's valuable bauxite mines. And on October 30 of 1986, they were even able to force the Paramaribo airport to close down.

These achievements are all the more stunning when one considers the massive military imbalance between the two sides.

At the time, the two forces matched up as follows:

Armed Forces of Suriname

2,500 personnel (approx.)

- 1) Cascavels – a Brazilian-made six-wheel armored car with a 90 mm gun and laser range finder
- 2) Urutus – another Brazilian-made six-wheeled armored car equipped with a .50-caliber machine gun
- 3) YPs – a Dutch-manufactured DAF two-man scout car
- 4) S-class boats – a Dutch-built coastal patrol boat (approximately 30 meters long) with 2 x 40 mm Bofors cannons plus machine guns
- 5) MAGs – 7.62 mm machine guns
- 6) FN-FALs – 7.62 mm rifles manufactured in Belgium or Brazilian copies
- 7) Defenders – Britten-Norman Islander aircraft (military versions)

Jungle Commando/Surinam National Liberation Army:

250 personnel (maximum)

- 1) 40 fire extinguishers
- 2) 250 sticks of dynamite
- 3) 14 shotguns

Rather extraordinary, no? And, remember, the numbers presented above do not even include the hundreds of Libyan "advisers" fighting on behalf of the government of Desi Bouterse against the guerrillas.

So, with the extensive background out of the way, let us proceed with the results of the investigation...

FRENCH GUIANA

I'll start this story in French Guiana.

If this story is about Suriname, why are we looking into French Guiana? Well, French Guiana is a "department" of France (You and I would use the word "colony" but that apparently isn't a politically correct word to use – so "department" it is). And this is where Karl Penta started his South American odyssey by flying into Cayenne (the capital of French Guiana) from Paris on Air France.

The government of France was never particularly keen on a communist dictatorship sympathetic to Libya next door to their lucrative space center. And so, when the mercenaries began operating in Suriname, the French government, while not always actively supporting their work, certainly approved of their actions.

Obviously, once the activities of the mercenaries garnered some international press attention, the French had to make public noise about how they did not support mercenaries or what they were doing and even conducted an arrest of Penta and some of the others. However, in private, they told the mercenaries that they were doing an excellent job.

Here is a view out over Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana. It's tiny, but it is still the largest city in the country:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-7.jpg>)

Penta would stay in the Toucan Hotel when he was in Cayenne to either rest up or meet with French intelligence officials. Here is a view of downtown Cayenne:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/karl-penta-french-guiana-3.jpg>).

These are some of the French government offices in the government sector on the edge of Cayenne:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-3.jpg>).

The strategy of the French seems to be to keep just enough military and police personnel around to prevent trouble-makers from getting any clever ideas around French sites of interest, such as the Guiana Space Centre (usually referred to as CSG or Centre Spatial Guyanais where the European Space Agency, the French space agency CNES, and the commercial Arianespace company conduct launches from) at Kourou which is where the picture below was taken:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-2.jpg>).

The police and military jobs are held by individuals brought over from France (either ordered over or attracted by more lucrative pay and benefits than available in France):



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-police.jpg>).

This region has calmed down a lot since the 1980s and so I doubt there is still a significant presence of intelligence personnel as during Karl Penta's time. However, during Penta's era, you can be certain that Penta and any intelligence officer would have been intimately familiar with the facility pictured below – French Guiana's Ministry of Defense, located in the capital city of Cayenne:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-4.jpg>).

The above picture was actually taken inside the grounds of the Ministry of Defense. I had simply intended to take some pictures of the outside given the relevance of the French Ministry of Defense to our story, but to my astonishment we were able to simply walk right in.

Below, you can see how seriously they take security by observing these “secure” communications lines inside the Ministry of Defense complex:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-5.jpg>)

Another view of the Ministry of Defense:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-6.jpg>).

The “city” of Cayenne soon gives way to this...



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/karl-penta-french-guiana-2.jpg>).

...Which soon gives way to this...



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/karl-penta-french-guiana.jpg>

These were taken on our drive up to St. Laurent where one crosses the Maroni (Marowijne) River over into Suriname. This is also the route Penta first drove to enter Suriname:



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/karl-penta-french-guiana-5.jpg>

And it gives you an idea of the kind of terrain he was working with when he and the other mercenaries were running around the countryside of Suriname blowing up power lines to cut off electricity to Paramaribo, shutting down the country's main airport or ambushing Surinamese troops:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/karl-penta-french-guiana-4.jpg>).

The picture below was taken in St. Laurent, the border with Suriname...

Penta passed through St. Laurent a number of times. On one of these visits, he sorted out a Surinamese spy named Koyku who had received training in Libya and was harassing and assassinating Jungle Commando supporters in French Guiana.

Karl Penta crossed the river into Suriname by utilizing a forty-foot long wooden canoe equipped with an Evinrude outboard motor. And nothing has changed at all since Penta's day as that remains the way to get into Suriname today as well.



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-8.jpg>)



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne.jpg>

SURINAME

Crossing into Suriname through Albina as Karl Penta and the other mercenaries did... But, oh the indignity, the mercenaries never had to pay a bribe of 30 euros (as we did) to a character like the one pictured below merely to be allowed into Suriname:



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/suriname-paramaribo-2.jpg>

The Jungle Commando/Surinam National Liberation Army never seized the capital of Suriname, Paramaribo. But, for a time, the guerrillas and the mercenaries controlled much of the rest of Suriname. Driving from the border (Albina) in to Paramaribo it was fairly easy to see how – even the main road to the capital (the N1 which is pictured below) was narrow, poorly maintained (dirt at times) and completely deserted. With the windows down, I could hear the crickets and frogs in the jungle.



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/suriname-paramaribo-3.jpg>

Karl Penta had little trouble closing these roads to the capital and laying siege to Paramaribo after setting up roadblocks, using logging equipment to dig deep trenches in the road (and laying bombs constructed from fire extinguishers stuffed with gunpowder around them to deter tampering) and destroying some of the ramshackle bridges leading in.

The below is a view of downtown Paramaribo, so you know what we're working with (This picture was taken from the Albergo Alberga (<http://www.guesthousealbergoalberga.com/>), which is quite nice if you're looking for a place to stay):

The question that needed to be answered at this point was: Could the mercenaries and the Jungle Commando/Surinam National Liberation Army have taken Paramaribo?



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/suriname-paramaribo-4.jpg>).



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-21.jpg>).



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-6.jpg>).



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-7.jpg>).

One of the first things that struck me was the proximity of all the important buildings to the river.

The Jungle Commando/Surinam National Liberation Army were based on two islands – Langatabbetje and the headquarters on Stoelman’s Island – They had plenty of access to the rivers of Suriname and used them all the time. Thus, they had the watercraft and knowledge to launch an amphibious assault from the river along Paramaribo.

And despite shutting down the roads leading to Paramaribo, it was still these roads that were heavily patrolled by government forces rather than the river.

Lastly, I have [discussed before \(https://thevelvetrocket.com/2009/11/14/coup-d-etat-an-operators-manual/\)](https://thevelvetrocket.com/2009/11/14/coup-d-etat-an-operators-manual/) the benefits of launching an invasion from water, but will spare dear readers an extensive discussion of this method here.

The Italian and I observed plenty of convenient landing sites along the river for an offensive force:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-9.jpg>)



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-10.jpg>)



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-12.jpg>).



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-11.jpg>)

Now, during the time Desi Bouterse was in power, the government principals based themselves in the historic Fort Zeelandia.

But, Fort Zeelandia has never really fulfilled its purpose as a defensive location, for history shows it was easy to sack and as a result changed hands often. For instance, in 1712, Fort Zeelandia was used actively when the French pirate captain Jacques Cassard attacked Paramaribo. Nevertheless, Captain Cassard managed to overcome its defenses and depart with a sizeable amount of loot.

As an interesting, "Oh by the way", the Fort has also been the backdrop for gruesome events such as the punishment, and even execution, of slaves and prisoners alike. In 1872, the Fort was converted to a jail which was used until 1967. In 1972, it became a museum until 1982 when the military rulers took over the Fort.

An oil lamp is permanently lit in the last cell in the Fort to commemorate the fifteen prominent individuals (mentioned above) that were executed on December 8, 1982.

By the way, Fort Zeelandia is *right* on the river. Literally. It touches the river – just one of many other vulnerabilities you can spot for yourself below:



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-25.jpg>

Inside the fort:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-26.jpg>).

Had the principals (the president and military chiefs of staff) not been in Fort Zeelandia at the time the mercenaries and the Jungle Commando launched their hypothetical assault on Paramaribo, here's how it would have looked...

First of all, the Ministry of Defense is also right along the river:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-28.jpg>).

And the security is comprised of a couple of bored guards with rusty automatic rifles slung lazily across their backs... Not a significant obstacle to overcome:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-27.jpg>).

And the nearby presidential palace is completely unprotected:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-22.jpg>).

Oh, excuse me, Penta and the Jungle Commando might have strained their knees while stepping over this traffic barrier on the way to seizing the Presidential Palace:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/suriname-paramaribo.jpg>).

Conveniently less than a block away (and also along the waterfront) sits the Central Bank of Suriname. Guess where all of Suriname's foreign currency reserves are housed? If you guessed the Central Bank of Suriname, then give yourself a prize. Do you think those currency reserves might have proved useful to

a rebel army?



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-20.jpg>).

Again, security was a joke. Just a couple of bored guards standing around:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-19.jpg>).

Interestingly, a monument to the “heroics” of the 1980 coup still stands in this main square near the Central Bank building:



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-18.jpg>

While conducting our investigation, I found it difficult not to notice that all of the significant communications sites around the country were as unsecured as those in French Guiana. In other words, it would have been incredibly easy for the mercenaries and the Jungle Commando to knock these out in order to prevent reserves being called in to defend the capital:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-8.jpg>).



<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/south-america-442.jpg>

And even if force didn't work, I suppose Karl could have tried voodoo. Plenty of the necessary ingredients are for sale in this voodoo market located just next to the Central Market (and also conveniently located along the waterfront in case he needed them in a hurry).



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-14.jpg>).



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-15.jpg>).



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-13.jpg>)



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-16.jpg>)

I don't believe much progress would have been made in trying to stir up the country's religious minorities to foment unrest. Have you ever seen a mosque and a synagogue peacefully co-existing next to each other like this? I certainly haven't.



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/suriname-paramaribo-17.jpg>)

Seriously though...

My conclusion: Karl Penta and the Surinam National Liberation Army could have walked right in and taken this city had they chosen to do so.

And I sincerely doubt that the many casinos or gold companies in Suriname would have had much of a problem with a transition back to a capitalist government. And either way, conflict is bad for business.

As Penta and the Jungle Commando/Surinam National Liberation Army were so massively outmanned and outgunned, a cornerstone of their strategy was to focus on bringing down the Surinamese economy

“We’ll blow up pylons, bridges and roads,” Penta declared.

For example: SurAlco was the fourth largest producer of bauxite in the world and Penta was able to shut it down by simply walking in with an armed crew and politely telling the workers to go home.



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/suriname-paramaribo-5.jpg>).

On another occasion, it was discovered that Bouterse owned most of the shares in the country's national airline, Surinam Airways. Surinam Airways owned three 22-seat Twin Otter passenger planes and one DC-8. At that time a Twin Otter was worth about \$2 million.

Thus an elaborate hijacking of a Twin Otter took place at Raleigh Falls airport.

The hijacked aircraft:



(<https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/hijacked-surinam-airways.jpg>).

This economic warfare was effective. The French estimated that the economy of Suriname was reduced to 1/6 of its previous value. And over 250 Surinamese soldiers gave themselves up in French Guiana.

So, what happened?

Ronnie Brunswijk ended up dealing cocaine with Desi Bouterse... That's right – If you can't beat 'em, buy 'em.

The activities of Penta and the other mercenaries had put Suriname in such a vice-like grip that eventually Bouterse was forced to reach out to Ronnie Brunswijk to end the stalemate. Cocaine was bought very cheaply in Paramaribo and shipped across the river into French Guiana. So, Ronnie Brunswijk, the rebel leader evolved into a drug baron after he and Desi Bouterse caught on to the fact that drug deals together were a tad more lucrative than waging war against each other.

It was at this point that Karl Penta and the other mercenaries he had brought along with him walked away from the Surinamese conflict.

Others, such as John Richards who ended up being murdered by fellow mercenaries (<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/STUNTMAN+IN+REAL-LIFE+DOG+OF+WAR+'EXECUTION'+007+movie+tough+guy...-a060640022>), stuck around for a little too long. (<http://cervens.net/legionbbs123/archive/index.php/t-5049.html>).

Despite the agreement between Ronnie and Desi, death squads backed by Desi Bouterse began operating in Suriname as Ronnie Brunswijk became increasingly marginalized on his island base.

One group of six Jungle Commandos was foolish enough to walk into a bar in Paramaribo during the "ceasefire" period and were gunned down by one of Bouterse's death squads.

The exiled Surinamese community grew fed up with Ronnie and tried to start a new rebel group, but there was a slight problem. There was no money left. They had invested it all in Ronnie. Desperate to get things moving again they tried hiring anyone that expressed even minor interest in the job. One of these individuals was the late Phil Sessarego (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Sessarego) (calling himself Phil Stevenson at the time) whose body was recently discovered (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1128630/Death-SAS-fantasist-Was-Tom-Carew-murdered--did-fake-death.html>) in a garage in Belgium and was even then trying to pass himself off as a member of the SAS.

Ronnie Brunswijk became rich trading in timber, gold and cocaine. He still lives in Suriname.

In 1987 Desi Bouterse allowed the election of a new government but kept control of the army. Three years later he staged a “telephone coup,” dismissing the government with a single phone call and taking power again. But with the end of the Cold War, Bouterse found his popular backing had thinned considerably and he eventually did stand down as dictator, allowing a properly elected government to take control in 1991.

Desi Bouterse did not give up Surinamese politics though, as he soon became a member of parliament (MP) in Suriname. But Bouterse was not content with merely being an MP... And so, on 19 July 2010, with the assistance of political support from Ronnie Brunswijk and Bouterse’s coalition, the Mega Combination (De Mega Combinatie), he was elected President of Suriname.

Desi Bouterse being inaugurated on 12 August 2010:



(https://thevelvetrocket.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/president_desi_bouterse.jpg).

Rather than playing down his past, Mr. Bouterse has defiantly celebrated it since his election by Parliament. He has designated Feb. 25, when he carried out the coup in 1980, as a national holiday, calling it the “day of liberation and renewal.”

Cynics have suggested that the real motive for Desi Bouterse running for president involves his trial for the excesses of his dictatorship during the 1980s (such as the December 1982 killings or the army’s 1986 massacre of the villagers of Moiwana during the civil war with the Surinam National Liberation Army/Jungle Commando).

The investigation of the massacre in Moiwana in 1986 had already been hampered by the death of the chief inspector of the police, Herman Gooding, who was murdered while carrying out an investigation of the massacre. Reportedly he was forced out of his car near Fort Zeelandia and shot in the head, with

his body left outside the office of Desi Bouterse. Other police investigators fled the country, stalling the investigation. The government has stated that it is still continuing its investigation of the massacre, but that prospective witnesses have either moved, died or were uncooperative.

Bouterse insists that as President he won't impede his ongoing trial, which began in 2007. However, he doesn't really need to impede it. While the presidency does not grant him immunity from prosecution; if he's eventually found guilty, as President he can simply grant himself amnesty.

And while Bouterse has said he will not interfere in the trial against him in Suriname, he named one of his co-defendants in the trial as ambassador to France, showing little deference to the legal cloud hanging over them.

Bouterse has also begun remaking Suriname's governing institutions, sometimes with his own family. He put his wife, Ingrid Bouterse-Waldring, on the government payroll, paying her about \$4,000 a month for her duties as first lady.

He also named his son, Dino Bouterse, 38, convicted in Suriname in 2005 of leading a cocaine and illegal weapons ring, as part of the command of a new Counter-Terrorism Unit. Dino Bouterse, released from prison in 2008, had also previously been arrested in connection with a 2002 theft of weapons from Suriname's intelligence agency.

In 1999 Desi Bouterse joined Ronnie Brunswijk in being convicted in absentia in Holland for cocaine trafficking. Naturally, both Ronnie and Desi deny the charges and were able to avoid prison time in the Netherlands since it and Suriname have no extradition treaty.

Now, as head of state, Desi Bouterse has gained further immunity with Interpol shelving its arrest order for him. He has tentatively begun traveling abroad, visiting Brazil, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis and the United States, where he attended the United Nations General Assembly. Additionally, as of 2012, Desi Bouterse has taken over as chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the 15-member regional grouping.

Surinamese officials essentially just shrug at Dutch reports, based on United States diplomatic cables revealed by Wikileaks, contending that Bouterse continued illegal activities long after his 1999 conviction by arranging protection for a Guyanese drug lord's smuggling operations.

The U.S. State Department noted that cocaine found in sea cargo from Suriname was recently seized in Britain, Pakistan and the Netherlands, after Bouterse returned to office. Nevertheless, Surinamese antinarcotics officials say he is against trafficking.

Ronnie, however, will still supposedly be arrested if he ever visits a country where Interpol has some weight.

Karl Penta's book was published in 2001 and I know he also gave an interview for a television documentary, but I do not know if that documentary ever aired. Rumor has it that he was doing contract work in Iraq for Aegis during the 2000s. Now, other than the fact that he is back living in the UK, I am afraid I know nothing more about Karl's activities (and he probably likes it that way).

Tags: [Desi Bouterse](#), [French Guiana](#), [Jungle Commando](#), [Justin Ames](#), [Karl Penta](#), [mercenaries](#), [Mercenaries in Suriname](#), [Ronnie Brunswijk](#), [Surinam](#), [Surinam National Liberation Army](#), [Suriname](#), [Surinamese military](#), [Team Ames](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

53 thoughts on “Searching For Karl Penta’s Suriname & French Guiana”

ELEONORA says:

[February 8, 2010 at 2:59 am](#)

Karl Penta sounds like a badass... taking over a country completely alone with unexperienced “soldiers” and a few fire extinguishers and wooden sticks???? Absolutely awesome!

Great post, J.

[Reply](#)

LEROY says:

[February 8, 2016 at 1:07 pm](#)

I do believe – according to his own book – that he had some help – in the form of some other mercenaries (some former British soldiers, some former French Foreign Legion.... both, especially the latter, noted for being some “badasses” themselves!).

Even in his book (did you read it?), Penta spreads the action around, it wasn’t “me, me, me”.

[Reply](#)

[HGV LGV TRAINING](#) says:

[April 28, 2010 at 1:25 pm](#)

He had some balls and drive to even contemplate such an adventure. What sort of specialist Driver Training would he have needed?

[Reply](#)

JUSTIN AMES says:

[April 28, 2010 at 10:01 pm](#)

No doubt balls and drive were involved... A good military force always needs good drivers, does it not? Karl Penta would most likely not be an exception.

And military aside – Suriname could definitely use some trained drivers.

[Reply](#)

REDS says:

[May 28, 2010 at 9:21 pm](#)

i found some pics yesterday trying to find out more about the subject and saw some more pictures..the sticks were not wooden, but sticks of dynamite.. it’s just a detail.

[Reply](#)

REDS says:

[May 28, 2010 at 9:29 pm](#)

as for the book, it seems that much is twisted reality or fiction.. penta himself does not seem to agree with it at least. if anyone has info or pictures on the subject feel free to contact me on id28sr at the hotmail thingy. i live in Suriname and am very interested in our “unwritten” history.

[Reply](#)

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 1:16 pm

What book?

Penta's own "Have Gun Will Travel"? The book that Penta authored?

Why would he disagree with his own book (did you read it)?

Where did he disagree with his own book? I have read it through twice (and parts of it in several places) and have never seen anywhere that he disagreed with his own book. Nor have I seen that in any interviews or other places where he is mentioned where he questions it or that it is "twisted reality" or fiction.

In my opinion, if you live in Suriname, what you get is the fictional, twisted reality story that the government wants to put out.

[Reply](#)

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 1:40 pm

The only think remotely like this that I have found was in some forums where individuals, clearly trying to disparage Penta, claim that they heard from someone who heard that Karl had (coincidentally years later) downplayed his personal actions – but not the overall scenarios – that were in the book. But not one DIRECT SOURCE that confirms Penta saying that.

J. says:

February 8, 2016 at 1:49 pm

About the book...Karl told me that he did not like "A Mercenary's Tale" its the same like "Have gun will travel"....

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 11:46 pm

Both books are identical. I have them both.

"A Mercenary's Tale" is the hardcover version that was released in England in 2001.."Have Fun Will Travel" is the paperback release version released in America in 2003.

I have seen on forums where he has been accused of not writing the book, of using a "ghostwriter". The book(s) were openly co-authored by Mike Ridley who Karl openly acknowledges in the first sentence of his dedication (referring to his "co-writer" – as Karl calls him – Mike Ridley).

That is by no means unusual. Few military / mercenary people are also automatically great writers.

Look at Ralph Pezzullo and all the people that he has co-authored books for (and he is one example of a great many).

(Speaking of Pezzullo, don't waste your time – IMO – with Zero Footprint... I borrowed a copy that my friend got through a library loan; definitely not something I'd pay money for)

Karl was the bottom line author and if he didn't like the bok should have withdrawn it. I think that he later likely had some problems with a couple inaccuracies (I have yet to read ANY book that didn't have some inaccuracies, exaggerations, "guesstimates", etcetera).... For example, as one person (who knew Karl and was supposedly in Suriname after Karl left) has said... "The part in the book about that part of the war, where Karl was not present, is not accurate. I do not blame him since he only writes what has been widely reported other places: Soldier of Fortune (If I remember correctly it was the 20th anniversary issue), in English newspapers (The Sun), French RAIDS and probably a few other. ..."

Okay.

If he felt he got bad info and put it into the book without totally vetting it, maybe that type of thing made him feel bad (but doesn't make the book itself "fiction" or "twisted reality" as alleged).

And personally doesn't bother me at all.

MARK A..... says:

January 19, 2011 at 3:18 am

JUST REVISITING MY PAST. FOUND THIS SITE. I WAS MUCH INVOLVED WITH KARL HERE IN LIVERPOOL IN THE LATE 80S KARL TRAINED ME BEFORE HIS LAST VISIT TO SURINAM AND HIS TRIP TO BOSNIA

Reply

EMMA says:

May 9, 2011 at 11:16 pm

does anyone know the truth on the death of john richards?

Reply

CHRIS says:

June 18, 2011 at 8:45 pm

Emma, I was like a brother to john from 17 to 25. John had real guts and a genuine bloke. Bad upbringing and lousy life chances make people like John turn into mercenaries. He will always be my best friend. Chris

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 1:36 pm

I have heard on multiple sources that his fellow mercenaries killed him after a botched raid (the Suriname government forces claimed that after fighting off the raid that they killed the mercenary rebel leader during the pursuit).

For what it is worth, there's this (I have absolutely no information on its veracity):

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/STUNTMAN+IN+REAL-LIFE+DOG+OF+WAR+'EXECUTION'+007+movie+tough+guy...-a060640022>

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 1:48 pm

Also there is this very similar version.

(Actually it appears that Richards, in looking at both versions, had switched sides and hired some other mercenaries on taking a contract to do a "hit" on rebel leader Ronnie....

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/My+mercenary+comrade+was+kidnapped,+roped+to+a+tree+ar a088540957>

STEVE says:

August 28, 2018 at 2:26 pm

Just found this, The truth, John was tied to a tree and shot with a shotgun, we, Karl and I, supposed they were bought off by the Government. They tried to lure Karl back a few times and even sent someone from the embassy to his home. By the names given, I think I know of some of those answering and they were not there so do not trust a word. Karl was not a trained soldier and that seems to piss off these ex army types, the fact that he could do something they could only dream of, follow the money it cost Alcoa upwards of £500,000,000. and brought their mining to a practical halt. this is hardly the work of a phony. As for the book Karl truly hated it, the thing did not turn out as he had hoped which was to have been a part of the history of the war and had the idiot publisher bothered and done a proper job it would have been a joy of a read. I know for a fact the government were after anyone involve and that Karl warned psycho to watch his step but John was John. There was some talk of John ripping them off, but no soldier I ever met would tie someone to a tree and shoot them for it, as the dosh is gone a good kicking would suffice. I would suppose they were paid by the embassy and since to my knowledge no one was jailed for it UK GOV know all. Karl was genuinely shocked and saddened by John's death especially the manner of it.

You seem genuine so hope this helps.

P.S. Karl did not suffer fools and as such a lot of fools got the knock-back, anyone slagging him off either did not know him had talks about him with someone who did not know him, or was one of the knock-backs or wannabee's

ALAN says:

February 8, 2021 at 2:35 pm

hi mark are you still in liverpool i know karl very well

[Reply](#)

EMMA says:

July 6, 2011 at 6:10 pm

chris send me your email address much interested in more information thanks emma

[Reply](#)

CHRIS JUDD says:

July 6, 2011 at 8:00 pm

Emma, it is chris.g.judd@hotmail.co.uk

[Reply](#)

PATRICK CHAUVEL says:

September 30, 2011 at 7:22 pm

Suriname is interesting. You've got guerrillas led by mercenaries, who're into voodoo and fight with shotguns, crossbows and dynamite against a Libyan-backed dictator in this incredible malarial jungle teeming with anacondas and piranhas.

[Reply](#)

LIZ says:

October 26, 2011 at 4:35 pm

was there other mercenaries than Pinta and Richards working in Surinam, read Richards was ex Legion and a Sgt, Penta seems one hell of a guy

[Reply](#)

JUSTIN AMES says:

[November 4, 2011 at 12:26 pm](#)

Hello Liz –

Sorry for my late response, but I was on a trip. Yes, there were other British mercenaries involved as well as some former members of the French Foreign Legion (as you mentioned).

And, yes, Penta does seem like one hell of a guy...

[Reply](#)

GEORGE HARTWELL says:

[January 4, 2012 at 1:19 am](#)

Another excellent piece of reporting, Justin. When will you be back at Oregon House? Bring Eleonora with you for a good, laid-back BBQ & more Guinness! Happy NY; Happy Trails. George

[Reply](#)

ALAN says:

[January 30, 2012 at 10:04 pm](#)

yes i do but you will not not like the truth, best let john rest in peace, he did what he live for been a solder best regards, scouse.

[Reply](#)

EMMA says:

[November 5, 2015 at 8:47 pm](#)

and you know exactly the truth dont you ???

[Reply](#)

BLA says:

[April 18, 2012 at 8:17 pm](#)

i just mailed this page for a friend . he is a reporter, thanks for alll the information

[Reply](#)

TIGRI says:

[July 11, 2012 at 9:03 pm](#)

This guy is the biggest lair ever if this was so easy why he did not take over the country ask him about all the mercenaries and french legion that died in this war i think he just want to sell books (fiction)

[Reply](#)

LIZ says:

[July 12, 2012 at 1:41 pm](#)

mercenries french legion who died???

[Reply](#)

[ANTHONY PEREZ](#) says:

[November 13, 2012 at 2:02 pm](#)

Hello Friend! Great blog, id love to travel the Guianas someday ! Where exactly was the first picture overlooking Cayenne. I love that picture. <https://thevelvetrocket.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/french-guiana-cayenne-7.jpg?w=551>

[Reply](#)

JUSTIN AMES says:

[November 13, 2012 at 10:49 pm](#)

Thank you for your kind words... Yes, that is definitely an interesting part of the world and I would recommend a visit to anyone.

If you go to the side of town where the government buildings are, you will see the hill off to the side. It is part of the military headquarters, but you are free to walk up to the top of it.

[Reply](#)

BOB says:

[January 2, 2013 at 2:47 pm](#)

Karl Penta is a liar and a fake

[Reply](#)

LEROY says:

[February 7, 2016 at 7:55 pm](#)

Wrong on both counts!

[Reply](#)

J. says:

[February 8, 2016 at 12:26 am](#)

Bob...do you have ever been in contact with Karl i mean have you at least spoken with him?

[Reply](#)

ALAN says:

[March 8, 2015 at 2:46 pm](#)

Rumour Pinta is in Iraq in the fight against IS

[Reply](#)

LEROY says:

[February 7, 2016 at 8:04 pm](#)

No, I believe Karl passed away in 2014 (?). Not sure of circumstances but I don't believe that he was killed in action. After all, 2007 would be like 30 years AFTER the Suriname Civil War... so Karl would have Ben how old? I don't know that he did much after the Balkans, maybe some very early PMC work in Iraq. But I have had it verified by people who would know that he had passed in 2014 in England.

[Reply](#)

J. says:

[February 8, 2016 at 12:31 am](#)

Leroy, yes he died in 2014 in England hospital/home and yes in middle of 2000 he was in Irak..

AL MILLIGAN says:

[October 4, 2015 at 10:55 pm](#)

Does anyone know about Doctor John McClure, an american mercenary, visits to French Guyana and Suriname in 1984 and again in 1987 or 88?

[Reply](#)

JUSTIN AMES says:

October 5, 2015 at 7:44 pm

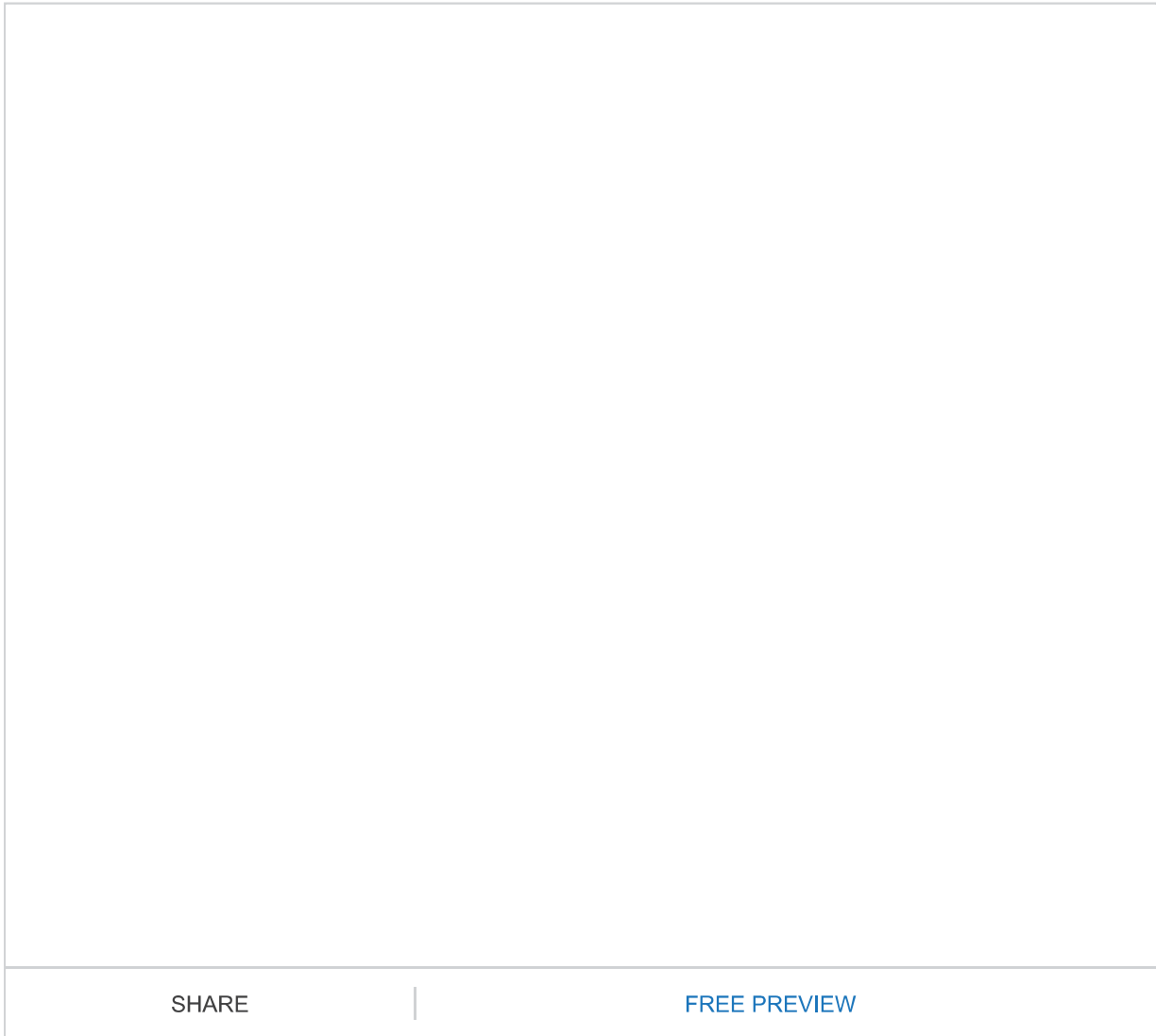
I'm assuming you read *Soldier Without Fortune* about his time in Central America and South America? I'm afraid I can't add to his story beyond that, although I have heard that the good doctor has passed away.

Reply

LEROY says:

December 27, 2015 at 8:05 pm

The Doctor John being referred to is a (IMO) wrote the book "Soldier Without Fortune" (listed as by John L. McClure, which is a typo – or maybe intentional – by the book's publisher as real name is John C. McClure).



SHARE

FREE PREVIEW

I have been tracking one of the ongoing Reviews that has a ton of comments.

I believe pretty much with Master Hahn that this whole story (aside from just a bad book) is total bull. While most of it covers the supposed activity with the Contras in the Southern Front out of Costa Rica (which seems like knee deep horseshit), there is also some published accounting of his involvement in the Suriname civil War (which sounds like even much deeper equine manure).

If you get a chance, I'd encourage reading a (CHEAP) used copy of the book. But at the very least, check out the few Reviews listed on the book at Amazon (the one in particular will jump out at you).

McClure (Doctor John) died in 1993 somewhere in Louisiana or Texas maybe in 1993 of AIDS.

I enjoyed your article very much. It gives a lot of detail about a much more minor situation than say the Nicaraguan or El Salvadoran Revolutions / Civil Wars (but had interesting involvements to a number of parties)

J. says:

November 5, 2015 at 12:15 pm

I was in contact with him the last years and i am sorry but he died in 2014 in England.

Reply

JUSTIN AMES says:

November 6, 2015 at 3:26 am

Just to confirm for those who might be confused, I clarified with him and "J" is referring to Karl Penta who passed away in 2014...

Reply

ALAN says:

November 27, 2015 at 9:33 pm

Sorry to hear Karl has passed, what ever people say "he had balls"

ALAN says:

December 15, 2015 at 5:18 pm

Just a thought what happened to the other mercenaries

Reply

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 3:19 pm

Any one familiar with this movie (more like a documentary):

<http://www.intermedium-rec.com/recordse/cd006.html>

It is also listed, but with minimal information in the IMDB (released 1993)

Also: <https://www.idfa.nl/industry/tags/project.aspx?id=a1f580af-177b-4838-a721-54b49254d3fb>

The British mercenary Karl referred to is Karl Penta.

He was 40 in 1993, so 52 when (apparently) last in PMC work in Iraq in 2005, and 61 when he died in England in 2014. Not sure of what exactly though had been hospitalized for some time previously and known to be suffering from very high blood pressure problems as early as 2006.

Reply

J says:

February 8, 2016 at 3:52 pm

Yes i know and i have it on VHS but most is about a german ex Legion guy and a part about Frank Camper and a part is Bosnia and a interview with Karl...there is not only a documentry there is also a DVD called "Warheads das Ovatorium" ..there you can listen only ..

[Reply](#)

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 4:12 pm

Yes, I had read up on the details of it. It seems the first consideration of the movie was to be JUST covering the retired (German) Lieutenant of the FFL, but as it progressed through stages that the director ended up contacting Karl and adding an interview stage with him in it.

What I didn't know was that there was a segment in it with Frank Camper.

Interesting.

I wish that I had its ISBN number so I could have the library check with WorldCat and see if any library out there has a copy of it. Maybe they can do so with just name of film and producer / director names.

We'll see.

J. says:

February 8, 2016 at 4:23 pm

ISBN 9783934847125

but most the talking is german and includes some strange sounds/music on the DVD

LEROY says:

February 8, 2016 at 6:27 pm

Thanks.

Doesn't sound like it is worth the bother.

J. says:

February 8, 2016 at 4:33 pm

Sorry mstake...the Oratorium is a CD!

And the film..i do not know if there is a DVD version i only have a VHF...it was long time on youtube but i have no idea if its still there...and at the end if you do not understand german most will be boring...

SANDER PEETERS says:

October 26, 2018 at 2:23 pm

Hi, I used to live in Suriname from 1987 to 1991 (I was 8 to 12 at the time) and having just read Penta's book (Have Gun, will travel) three weeks ago, I can confirm a lot of actions in the book are true. I did see that picture of the Twin Otter. Where did this picture come from?

Thanks in advance for your response.

[Reply](#)

BOB says:

November 3, 2019 at 2:43 pm

john richards took the photo, and sold to the french magazine Raids photo british mercenary with belguim mercenary in picture

[Reply](#)

DAVE says:

November 1, 2018 at 11:34 am

salve qualcuno conosce gaston besson era francese da quello che so anche lui partecipo come mercenario alla guerra civile

[Reply](#)

BOB says:

November 5, 2019 at 4:48 pm

later Karl worked in security for the Saudi Royal family in Europe, such a funny guy.

[Reply](#)

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