# Simon Mann, mercenary behind failed Wonga coup, dies aged 72



Simon Mann, the controversial figure renowned for his role in a failed coup attempt aimed at overthrowing the government of Equatorial Guinea, has died at the age of 72. Educated at Eton and commissioned as an officer in the Special Air Service (SAS), Mann's life was marked by his dual existence as a soldier and mercenary, leading to a notorious legacy that resonated far beyond the military.

In 2004, Mann, alongside a group of 70 mercenaries, was apprehended in Zimbabwe while attempting to execute a coup against Equatorial Guinea's long-standing president, Teodoro Obiang. This plot, infamously dubbed the “wonga coup,” also implicated Mark Thatcher, the son of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The convoluted scheme was buoyed by substantial financial backing and purportedly received tacit support from several governments, including Spain. The plotters aimed to replace Obiang with Severo Moto, an exiled opposition figure, in exchange for access to the country's lucrative oil and natural gas reserves.

The ill-fated coup was foiled when their aircraft, laden with arms and over 50 former members of South Africa's elite defence forces, was intercepted by Zimbabwean authorities at Harare airport. Subsequently, Mann and his compatriots were handed over to the Equatorial Guinean government, where they faced severe repercussions. On being convicted, Mann was sentenced to 34 years in prison—an outcome that drew international attention and condemnation.

In an alarming twist, Mann claimed that during his imprisonment, Obiang threatened brutal retribution, asserting he would "eat Mann's testicles and drag his naked body through the streets". Remarkably, he spent more than five years in two of the world’s most notorious prisons before being pardoned by Obiang in 2009. This clemency was no small matter, considering Mann's involvement in one of Africa's most audacious attempted coups.

Reflecting on his past, Mann would later reveal in correspondence with his legal team that he had been recruited by Ely Calil, a Lebanese oil tycoon and ally of Moto, demonstrating the intricate web of international intrigue surrounding the coup. Although Thatcher sought to distance himself from these machinations, claiming ignorance, he was ultimately fined and received a suspended sentence for his involvement in the incident, which was framed as a violation of anti-mercenary legislation.

Post-pardon, Mann returned to the UK and attempted to reintegrate into civilian life. His story was notably dramatized in 2006 in the TV movie "Coup!", written by John Fortune, which further cemented his status as a figure of fascination and controversy. Throughout his life, Mann was married three times and fathered nine children, a personal narrative woven into the broader tapestry of his tumultuous public life.

His passing, reported to have occurred while exercising in a gym, marks the conclusion of a life that encapsulated the highs and lows of mercenary warfare and the geopolitical intrigues that often underpin such endeavours. As the world reflects on Mann's legacy, it remains a stark reminder of the complex interplay between politics and private ambition in the sometimes dark alleys of global power struggles.

**Reference Map:**

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/09/simon-mann-mercenary-behind-failed-wonga-coup-dies-aged-72)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/09/simon-mann-mercenary-behind-failed-wonga-coup-dies-aged-72)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/09/simon-mann-mercenary-behind-failed-wonga-coup-dies-aged-72> - Please view link - unable to able to access data