

= Alexandre Banza =

Lieutenant Colonel Alexandre Banza (1932 ? 12 April 1969) was a military officer and politician in the Central African Republic . Born in Carnot , Ubangi @-@ Shari , Banza served with the French Army during the First Indochina War before joining the Central African Republic armed forces . As commander of the Camp Kassaï military base in 1965 , Banza helped Jean @-@ Bédél Bokassa overthrow the government of President David Dacko . Bokassa rewarded Banza by appointing him as minister of state and minister of finance in the new government . Banza quickly established the new regime 's reputation abroad and forged diplomatic relations with other countries . In 1967 , Bokassa and his protégé had a major argument over the president 's extravagances . In April 1968 , Bokassa removed Banza as minister of finance . Recognizing Bokassa 's attempts to undermine him , Banza made a number of remarks highly critical of the president 's handling of the government . Bokassa responded by abolishing the minister of state position .

Banza soon decided to stage a coup d'état . He confided in a few military officers , who he hoped would support his attempt to gain power . One of his confidants , Jean @-@ Claude Mandaba , contacted the president and informed him of the date of the coup , 9 April 1969 . Hours before he was going to execute his bid for power , Banza was ambushed by Mandaba and taken directly to Bokassa . Bokassa nearly beat Banza to death before Mandaba suggested that Banza be put on trial for appearance 's sake . On 12 April , Banza presented his case to a military tribunal , which quickly sentenced him to death by firing squad . He was reportedly taken to an open field , where he was executed and buried in an unmarked grave . Alternate circumstances of Banza 's death have been reported in Time and Le Monde . In the aftermath of the failed coup , Banza 's family , mistress and close associates were all arrested and either sent to jail or deported . With Banza eliminated , Bokassa spent extravagantly and surrounded himself with adulators .

= = Early life and military career = =

Banza was born , the first of three sons , in the heart of Gbaya territory . In his twenties , he had served with the French army in the First Indochina War and had been stationed in Gabon , Morocco , Tunisia and other locations in colonial Africa . He had a similar military record to his future colleague Jean @-@ Bédél Bokassa , who had also served in the First Indochina War and had been stationed in Africa and Europe as a radio transmissions expert . Afterward , Banza returned to the Central African Republic , where he enlisted in the armed forces . Brian Titley , author of Dark Age : The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa described Banza as an " intelligent , ambitious , and unscrupulous " military officer .

= = Role in Saint @-@ Sylvestre coup d'état = =

= = = Background = = =

Central African Republic President David Dacko , Bokassa 's cousin , took over the country in 1960 , after winning a power struggle against Abel Goumba . Bokassa left the French army to join the Central African Republic army in 1962 . By 1965 , the country was in turmoil ? plagued by corruption and slow economic growth , while its borders were breached by rebels from neighboring countries . Dacko obtained financial aid from the People 's Republic of China , but in spite of this support , the country 's problems persisted . Bokassa , now commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the army , made plans to take over the government ; Dacko became aware of this , and countered by forming a gendarmerie headed by police chief Jean Izamo , who quickly became Dacko 's closest adviser .

Tensions between Dacko and Bokassa increased . In December 1965 , Dacko approved a budget increase for Izamo 's gendarmerie , but rejected the budget proposal for Bokassa 's army . At this point , Bokassa told friends he was annoyed by Dacko 's treatment and was " going for a coup d'état " . Dacko planned to replace Bokassa with Izamo as his personal military adviser , and wanted

to promote army officers loyal to the government , while demoting Bokassa and his close associates . Bokassa realized he had to act against Dacko quickly , and worried that his 500 @-@ man army would be no match for the gendarmerie and the presidential guard . He was also concerned the French would intervene to aid Dacko , as had occurred after the 23 February 1964 coup d 'état in Gabon against President Léon M 'ba . After receiving word of the coup from the country 's military chief of staff , Albert @-@ Bernard Bongo , officials in Paris sent paratroopers to Gabon and restored M 'ba to power in a matter of hours . Banza , who was then commander of the Camp Kassaï military base in northeast Bangui , offered Bokassa his support and persuaded the still @-@ worried commander @-@ in @-@ chief to carry out the coup . He helped Bokassa lay out the plans for the coup , proposed to take place on 31 December 1965 .

= = = Execution of the coup = = =

Early in the evening of 31 December 1965 , Dacko left the Palais de la Renaissance to visit one of his minister 's plantations southwest of the capital . At 22 : 30 WAT (UTC 21 : 30) , Captain Banza gave orders to his officers to begin the coup ; one of his subordinates was to subdue the security guard in the presidential palace , while the other was to take control of Radio @-@ Bangui to prevent communication between Dacko and his followers . Bokassa called Izamo at his headquarters , asking him to come to Camp de Roux to sign some papers that needed his immediate attention . Izamo , who was at a New Year 's Eve celebration with friends , reluctantly agreed and traveled in his wife 's car to the camp . Upon arrival , he was confronted by Banza and Bokassa , who informed him of the coup in progress . After announcing his refusal to support the coup , Izamo was overpowered and locked in a cellar .

Shortly after midnight , in the first minutes of 1 January 1966 , Bokassa and Banza organized their troops and told them of their plan to take over the government . Bokassa claimed that Dacko had resigned from the presidency and given the position to his close adviser Izamo . He then told the soldiers that they had to act now to prevent the gendarmerie from taking over the Central African Republic army . He then asked the soldiers if they would support his course of action ; the men who refused were thrown in jail . At 00 : 30 WAT , Banza , Bokassa and their supporters left Camp de Roux to take over the capital . They encountered little resistance and were able to take Bangui in a matter of hours . Bokassa and Banza then rushed to the Palais de la Renaissance , where they tried to arrest Dacko , who was not there . Bokassa began to panic , as he believed the president had been warned of the coup in advance , and immediately ordered his soldiers to search for Dacko in the countryside until he was found .

Dacko was not aware of the events taking place in the capital . After leaving his minister 's plantation near midnight , he headed to Simon Samba 's house to ask the Aka Pgymy leader to conduct a year @-@ end ritual . After an hour at Samba 's house , he was informed of the coup in Bangui . He was arrested by a few of Bokassa 's men as he entered Pétévo Junction , on the western border of the capital . Dacko was escorted to the presidential palace , where Bokassa hugged the president and told him , " I tried to warn you ? but now it 's too late " . President Dacko was then taken to Ngaragba Prison in east Bangui at around 02 : 00 WAT . In a move that he thought would boost his popularity in the country , Bokassa ordered prison director Otto Sacher to release all prisoners in the jail . Bokassa then took Dacko to Camp Kassaï at 03 : 20 WAT , where the president was forced by Banza to resign from office . Banza wanted to kill Dacko , but Bokassa would not allow it , believing that Dacko had not yet outlived his usefulness . Later , Bokassa 's officers announced on Radio @-@ Bangui that the Dacko government had been toppled and Bokassa had taken over control . Meanwhile , Banza took over administrative centers , where politicians , diplomats and other high @-@ level officials were celebrating the coming of the New Year .

= = Minister in the Bokassa government = =

Banza was appointed minister of finance and minister of state in the new government . The regime

first secured diplomatic recognition from President François Tombalbaye of neighboring Chad , whom Bokassa met in Bouca , Ouham . After Bokassa reciprocated by meeting Tombalbaye on 2 April 1966 along the southern border of Chad at Fort Archambault , the two decided to help one another if either was in danger of losing power . Soon after , other African countries began to diplomatically recognize the new government . At first , the French government was reluctant to support the Bokassa regime , so Banza went to Paris to meet with French officials to convince them that the coup was necessary to save the country from turmoil . Bokassa met with Prime Minister Georges Pompidou on 7 July 1966 , but the French remained noncommittal in offering their support . After Bokassa threatened to withdraw from the franc monetary zone , French President Charles de Gaulle decided to make an official visit to the Central African Republic on 17 November 1966 . To the new government , this visit meant that the French had accepted the new changes in the country .

As a minister of finance , Banza directed much of his energy and time into lifting the country out of bankruptcy . Banza was also successful in his efforts to build the government 's reputation abroad , all the while establishing himself as a respected and well @-@ liked leader . Many believed that the natural @-@ born leader would not remain as Bokassa 's right @-@ hand man for much longer . After Banza was promoted from Captain to Lieutenant Colonel in 1965 , Bokassa realized that his greatest political threat wasn 't from the remaining group of Dacko supporters , but from Banza himself .

Two years later , the two had a major argument over the country 's budget , as Banza adamantly opposed Bokassa 's extravagant spending . Bokassa moved to Camp de Roux , where he felt he could safely run the government without having to worry about Banza 's thirst for power . In the meantime , Banza tried to obtain a support base within the army , spending much of his time in the company of soldiers . Bokassa recognized what his minister was doing , so he sent military units most sympathetic to Banza to the country 's border and brought his own army supporters as close to the capital as possible . In September 1967 , he took a special trip to Paris , where he asked for protection from French troops . Two months later , the government deployed 80 paratroopers to Bangui .

On 13 April 1968 , in another one of his frequent cabinet reshuffles , Bokassa demoted Banza to minister of health , but let him remain in his position as minister of state . Cognizant of the president 's intentions , Banza increased his vocalization of dissenting political views . A year later , after Banza made a number of remarks highly critical of Bokassa and his management of the economy , the president , perceiving an immediate threat to his power , removed him as his minister of state .

= = = 1969 coup plot = = =

Banza revealed his intention to stage a coup to Lieutenant Jean @-@ Claude Mandaba , the commanding officer of Camp Kassaï , who he looked to for support . Mandaba went along with the plan , but his allegiance remained with Bokassa . When Banza contacted his co @-@ conspirators on 8 April 1969 , informing them that they would execute the coup the following day , Mandaba immediately phoned Bokassa and informed him of the plan . When Banza entered Camp Kassaï on 9 April 1969 , he was ambushed by Mandaba and his soldiers . The men had to break Banza 's arms before they could overpower and throw him into the trunk of a Mercedes and take him directly to Bokassa . At his house in Berengo , Bokassa beat Banza nearly to death before Mandaba suggested that Banza be put on trial for appearance 's sake .

On 12 April , Banza presented his case before a military tribunal at Camp de Roux , where he admitted to his plan , but stated that he had not planned to kill Bokassa . He was sentenced to death by firing squad , taken to an open field behind Camp Kassaï , executed and buried in an unmarked grave . The circumstances of Banza 's death have been disputed . The American newsmagazine , Time , reported that Banza " was dragged before a Cabinet meeting where Bokassa slashed him with a razor . Guards then beat Banza until his back was broken , dragged him through the streets of Bangui and finally shot him . " The French daily evening newspaper Le Monde reported that Banza was killed in circumstances " so revolting that it still makes one 's flesh creep " :

Two versions concerning the end circumstances of his death differ on one minor detail . Did Bokassa tie him to a pillar before personally carving him with a knife that he had previously used for stirring his coffee in the gold @-@ and @-@ midnight blue Sèvres coffee set , or was the murder committed on the cabinet table with the help of other persons ? Late that afternoon , soldiers dragged a still identifiable corpse , with the spinal column smashed , from barrack to barrack to serve as an example .

= = Aftermath of coup = =

A few days later , Bokassa had Banza 's wife and their nine children arrested and deported to Berbérati and then Birao . They were released on 6 May 1971 . Banza 's mistress , Julienne Kombo , who entered the Palais de la Renaissance crying hysterically after her lover 's death , was arrested and jailed until 24 June 1972 . Banza 's father was sent to jail , where he died of hunger and exhaustion on 24 April 1970 . Banza 's two younger brothers , Beuoane and Gouboulo , were dismissed from the gendarmerie in July and sent to Ngaragba Prison . In August 1971 , they were taken from the prison , never to be seen again .

Bokassa also hunted down Banza 's close associates , such as Joseph Kallot , Faustin Marigot and Polycarpe Gbaguili . Kallot and Marigot died in prison in June 1969 and April 1971 , respectively . With the exception of Gbaguili , who remained in prison until the downfall of the Bokassa regime on 20 September 1979 , the other associates were released months after their arrest . Gbaguili served as a witness in Bokassa 's criminal trials for treason , murder , cannibalism and embezzlement during the 1980s , explaining in detail the numerous crimes and human rights violations the former dictator had completed .

By eliminating his dangerous rival , Bokassa demonstrated his ability to deal ruthlessly with dissidents and political opponents . He started to rule more arbitrarily after the Banza affair , giving himself control of various ministerial positions and the army . In one instance , he promoted Second Lieutenant François Bozizé , the future president of the Central African Republic , to General after he beat a Frenchman who showed disrespect for the president . According to Brian Titley , author of *Dark Age : The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa* , he surrounded himself with " sycophants , who were all too willing to nurture his growing delusions of grandeur " ; with no one to stop him , he also spent money with reckless abandon .