

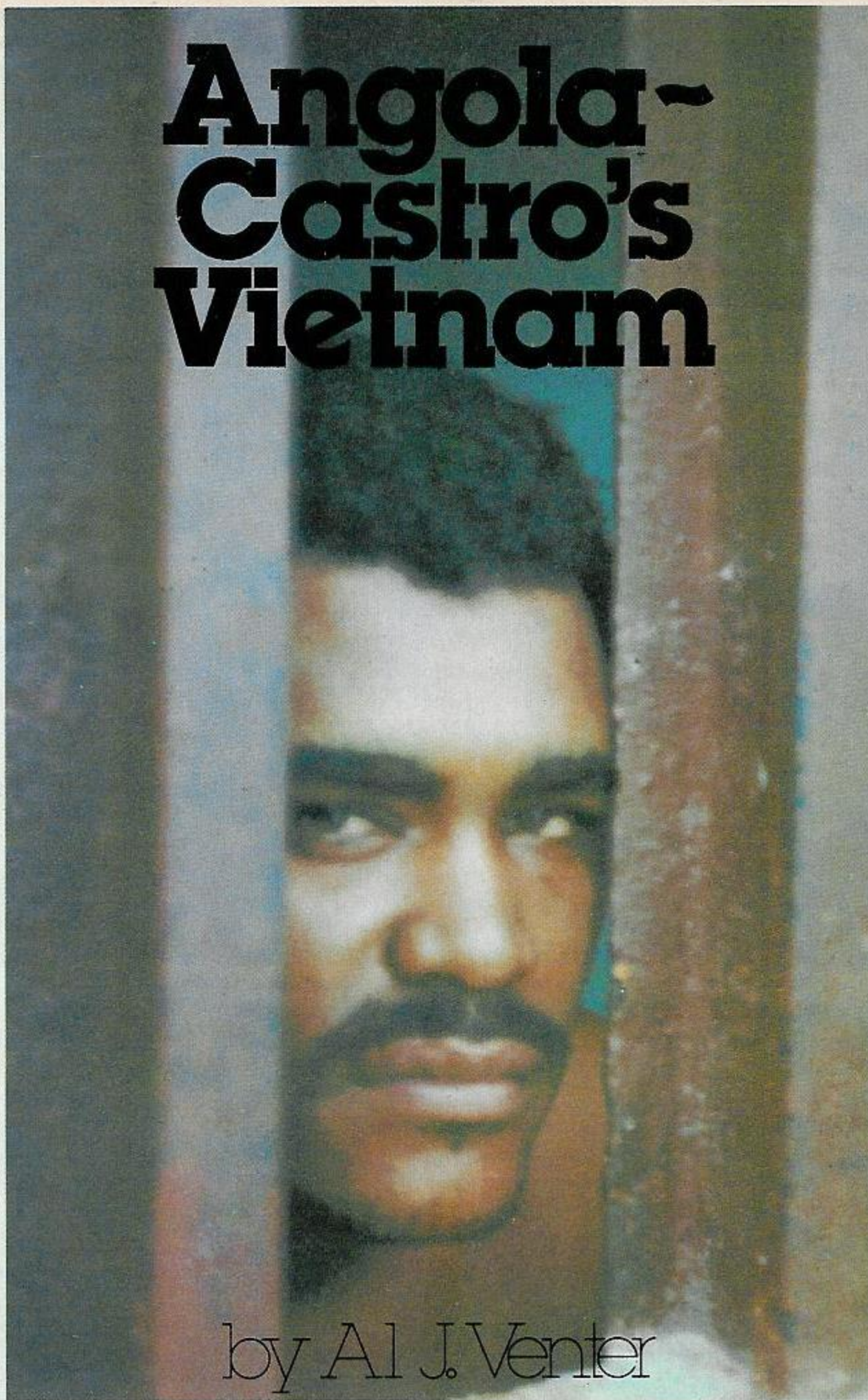
Angola has seen many myths shattered. The long propounded "invincibility" of the South African Army, for instance, did not exactly emerge from the campaign unscathed, even though comparatively few infantry were involved in actual hostilities and air force and mechanized units never entered the picture. Much of the actual fighting was left to specialist units such as the Parabats, No. 1 Reconnaissance Commando and armored car, SSB detachments.

South Africa's withdrawal, as a result, has been grossly misrepresented. Once the order had come from Cape Town to pull back, this was accomplished in stages. When contact was made with the enemy, South African units would move further south and take up new positions, repeating the procedure once the combined Cuban-MPLA force reached them, and so it went on until the South West African border was reached. And let there be no mistake, the Cubans and their allies took heavy casualties during this period.

These moves, although hurried and usually passed on at the last moment, were orderly and systematic, even though, it is said, incredible quantities of ammunition were destroyed by the evacuating force. One report, which I have been unable to substantiate, indicates that in a single withdrawal the South Africans detonated as much as 40 tons of 9mm ammunition, which was probably one reason why locally-made pistol ammunition was in such short supply in South Africa for much of 1976.

Conversely, heroes emerged where there should have been none. If one is to judge by the way Cuban regulars strutted through the streets of Luanda after the South Africans had finally pulled back, one could only have gained the impression that each one of them had personally helped oust the "hated racists" as the Springboks were so often termed on Radio Luanda. Speak to them, even two years after the event, and just about

# Angola- Castro's Vietnam



by Al J. Venter

every one that was involved in the southern campaign against the Republic's forces claims that he had killed "a couple of South Africans." Considering that less than 30 South Africans were actually killed in action, over a period of several months (some of these as a result of contact with landmines), and the claim wears thin because there were an estimated 6000-8000 Cubans deployed on the southern front.

Bravado behind the lines is fine. In the line of fire, if Western military standards are applied, the average Cuban fared dismally.

While many Cubans who fought in Angola, broadly speaking, produced better results than their Portuguese conscript counterparts before them, the majority, with a few exceptions, were lightweights in the realm of military exploits. As snipers, some of them were

excellent shots. Technically, as a result of Soviet training, they were more than adequate when it came to handling sophisticated Russian artillery, but even here they lacked a certain fortitude to take as much punishment as they meted out. Once the South African gunners had found their range, there were occasions when Cuban units dropped everything and ran.

Still, Dr. Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, has unquestioningly earned the heartfelt gratitude of many black states for taking the initiative and allowing his forces to enter the Angolan fray, even though the gesture was the result of Soviet pressure.

He justified this decision to his Party Congress in Havana during 1976 on two grounds: the first, "to prevent the invasion of Angola by South Africa," and secondly, "as a moral duty." In revolutionary terms, his logic makes good sense, which is one of the reasons why Cuba remains the toast of Africa north of the Zambesi. Castro has had the satisfaction of winning for his nation a central position upon the world stage

and has seen Cuba's prestige in the Third World enormously increased.

At the same time, Cuba has achieved little materially from her Angolan adventure. The thaw in relations with the United States, which seemed to be going well during 1975, has been sharply reversed and the suspicions of Cuba's Latin American neighbors, which had begun to lose their exaggerated fear of the Caribbean Republic, have been aroused to fresh agitation. There is also the number of Cubans killed in Angola; without doubt nowhere near the 1500 dead claimed by Molicia, the Cabindan secessionist movements, but substantial, nevertheless, for a nation with a population not much bigger than that of Portugal. The regular Cuban Army is estimated to total about 90,000 with another 90,000 men in reserve.



The continued presence of Cuban *dragomans* in Angola has given the Luanda regime a much-needed breathing space in which to rebuild its political and administrative apparatus and refloat the economy, free from otherwise imperative distractions of a security nature and running the government on a hand-to-mouth basis. With Dr. Agostinho Neto's government threatened from both the Right and the Left, Cuban forces in attendance is comforting. The decision of the MPLA Government to open a military academy, to establish training centers for skilled workers, to restructure the school year: none of these reforms would have been possible without the political moratorium created by Castro's agents.

Paradoxically, therefore, the presence of Cubans in Angola is seen by some as a guarantee of security and stability. Even the American-owned Gulf Oil Company which has been reactivating its off-shore oil installations in Cabinda has reason to be thankful for the *Pax Cubana*, as it is phrased locally. Cuban experts have replaced many of the Portuguese who fled Angola before independence.

A more disconcerting note is sounded by reports that the Cuban secret police, the *Direccion General de Inteligencia* (DGI) have played an important role in setting up an Angolan-style security force

**MPLA troops, trained by Cubans, pass in review. Most can't fight any better than they can march.**

modelled on the Soviet KGB. One hard piece of evidence in this regard is that Igor Ivanovich Uvarov, a *Tass* "correspondent" who has been active in the Angolan capital and who is also a leading member of the Soviet Military Intelligence, has been instrumental in this direction.

Despite the recent attention of the world's Press, Cuban assistance to Africa is nothing new. Early contacts were set up shortly after Castro achieved power in Cuba when Guido Sanchez, a Cuban diplomat in London, first arrived in Nkrumah's Ghana to make contact with some of the anti-Portuguese revolutionaries there. It was probably then that South Africa first entered the picture, for *Osagyefo* Nkrumah was obsessed at overthrowing the Pretoria regime by force.

The Cuban "revolutionary connection" is explained by Castro's and the late Che Guevara's early interest in promoting revolution in Latin America.

More than a decade ago, Guevara went to Africa in search of revolution. He spent three months in Algiers in 1965, where he consolidated ties with the Portuguese exiles, and he later fought for a while in the Congo with left-wing terrorists in their attempt to topple President Mobutu's regime. Che soon returned to the Caribbean, "completely disillusioned with revolutionary prospects in Africa," he told one of his aides. Meanwhile the Cuban government has

continued to maintain a foothold on the continent.

For much of this time Havana was particularly interested in the former insurgency leader in Portuguese Guinea (now Guine-Bissau), the late Amilcar Cabral who was assassinated by one of his own men. While Cabral's theories on guerrilla warfare differed from Guevara's, the two men kept in close contact and eventually Cuban "commandos" were sent to fight alongside PAIGC forces in the steamy tropical enclave on the northwest coast of Africa.

At the time of the Lisbon *coup d'etat* there were approximately 200 Cuban "military advisors" with the PAIGC movement. One of these men, Rodrigues Miralta, was recently promoted to the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party.

Aid was also provided to Agostinho Neto's MPLA through offices in what was then known as Congo Brazzaville; one of the main MPLA staging camps at Dolisie was manned by Cubans.

In the rest of Africa, Cubans have been equally active. There are still Cubans in Guine-Bissau. Cuban agents have also been reported to be closely connected to Libya's revolutionary leader Moamar al Gaddafi and linked with his protege "Carlos" Ramirez Sanchez, code name "The Jackal." Early 1976, Soviet transports ferried almost 1000 Cuban troops, pilots and technicians into the giant Russian military complex at Berbera







**"Russian "Stalin's Organ," such as one pictured above, provide Cuban/MPLA troops with massive shock power.**

Somalia, a major Soviet base on the western flank of the Indian Ocean.

After the Somalians threw out the Russians, the USSR allied itself with the Marxist regime in Ethiopia. After inserting over 15,000 Cuban troops and a billion dollars worth of weapons and equipment, the Somalians were driven out of Ethiopia. *(As we go to press the Cuban expeditionary force is preparing to assist the Ethiopians in liquidating the Eritrean guerrilla movement in Northern Ethiopia. Many observers believe that the next objective of Castro's "Foreign Legion" may well be Rhodesia. —Eds.)*

More recent reports talk about the entry of "several hundred" Cubans into Mozambique. What their role will be, no one is prepared to say at this stage; obviously, they will be used in some "revolutionary" context at some stage or another, no doubt against the Rhodesians.

The Soviet influence in most things that Cubans abroad do is always manifest, and to those who know the man Castro, this development is surprising. He is totally under Soviet domination which is uncharacteristic for a man who led his ragged army to fight a war of liberation against "oppression and injustice."

To understand the nature of the Moscow-Havana relationship, it is

essential to examine its evolution over the past decade.

In 1967, Castro sustained a desolate defeat of his grand strategy of violent revolution when Che Guevara failed in Bolivia to show that Cuba could create "Many Vietnams" within South America.

Castro's incendiarism was so counter-productive, and his own economic mess such a mounting 450-million dollar-a-year burden to the Russians, that they decided to tether him. Oil deliveries to Cuba began mysteriously to fall behind. Sugar mills, factories, highway traffic ground to a halt.

"Sorry, we have trouble on the docks in Baku," Moscow explained. By mid-1968, Castro capitulated. He placed the DGI under a Soviet KGB general, who sits in an office next to the DGI chief in Havana. The general and his KGB subordinates approve the operational plans of all DGI divisions. Other KGB officers, sons of Spanish communists who fled to the Soviet Union after the Spanish Civil War, have become "Cubans" in the DGI.

The Soviets also imposed a "de-Fidelization" of the Cuban government and economy. Today, 7000 Russians sit in Cuban ministries and enterprises. The Cuban Communist Party has been remade in the Soviet image with a constitution modelled on the Soviet Union's 1936 Stalinist charter.

Castro's total surrender was revealed at the 1975 conference in Havana of 24 Latin American Communist Parties. Henceforth, the Castroists announced, all

Cuban help would be given only through the Moscow-approved parties.

"Revolutionaries must discipline themselves, abandon freelance activity, form a united front and resort to violence only under tutelage of the local Kremlin subsidiary," it was declared at the time.

Soviet control of the Cuban operations is virtually complete. In Cuba itself, Czech and Soviet instructors assist Castro's terrorists. Cuban experts joined the Palestinian training camps in Syria, tutoring terrorists from Japan, Germany, and Iran as well as Arabs. The graduates depart to wreak global havoc.

In the present phase, Cuban intervention in Angola was initially clandestine. The first mention of it to the Cuban people was made at the end of January, 1976, almost a year after the first entry.

The Cubans insist that they were not in any way involved in the war before "the South African invasion of 23 October 1975." However, there is much evidence to the contrary. One of the Cubans taken prisoner by the FNLA early in the war admitted that his unit had arrived in Brazzaville in August 1975, and that advance units were already serving militarily in Angola, having been sent to the front before he was.

According to Colin Legum<sup>2</sup> who handles the Cuban issue sympathetically, there is little doubt that Cubans were first brought to Brazzaville before July, 1975, and it is feasible therefore, that Cuban combat troops were later drafted in batches to Angola—their numbers





increasing dramatically from the first unofficial United States Intelligence estimates of 1,500 to 3,000 in the first week of February 1976.

Legum makes the point that the mobilization and transport of such large numbers of troops both by air and by sea, would require at least six weeks, so it is reasonable to assume that the Moscow-Havana agreement dates from at least May 1975.

"The evidence of the Cubans having spearheaded the fighting of the MPLA troops is overwhelming; this is hardly surprising in view of the sophisticated weapons that were used and which few MPLA troops had been trained to handle," says Legum. Making allowances for the Havana focus of the struggle in Angola, there is considerable justification for Castro's claim that "if it had not been for Cuba's assistance, South Africa would have swallowed up Angola."

More salient is the fact that while it was the Cubans who did the actual groundwork, the entire operation involving Cuba was launched at the command of the Soviet Union, "without a single Russian soldier being involved." This is a regular theme in Soviet disclaimers about their actual role in Angola,

**Russian T-55 tanks on parade. T-55 carries 100mm main gun, DShK 12.7mm M1938/46 heavy machine gun. Over 275 T-54s and T-55s are in Mozambique; may be used in Rhodesia by Cubans or terrorists.**

**Another Cuban prisoner in Angola. Many Cubans have been executed by FNLA and UNITA forces.**



and, to give the Kremlin leaders their dues, they pulled off the neatest political confidence trick of the past decade, beating the Americans, as it were, at their own game.

In his relations with the black states, Castro has regularly proclaimed that "African blood flows freely through our veins," which is probably one of the reasons why his forces are so readily accepted by the more radical front-line states. Whether Cubans will now be allowed to operate against the Rhodesians is another matter altogether, and although opinion is against such a move, I believe this possibility cannot be discounted in the medium-term future.

It is very unlikely that Zambia would permit Cuban soldiers to cross into Rhodesia. The Zambian government was critical of the MPLA's original decision to accept Cuban military assistance. President Kaunda—when referring to the massive shipments of Soviet weapons and Cuban men—warned of the "plundering tiger and its deadly cubs now coming through the back door."

President Machel would also be reluctant to accept the risks involved in allowing Cuban forces to freely infiltrate into Rhodesia across his border. Mozam-



bique remains economically linked with South Africa, despite the measures taken since independence, so the country may be vulnerable to pressures from Pretoria. In addition, Frelimo has always accepted the principle that "freedom must be won by the people themselves—not by outsiders," and President Machel would therefore be unsympathetic towards a massive influx of foreign troops which do not, incidentally, include Tanzanian soldiers. Mozambique's position has been clearly stated by President Machel: "The Zimbabweans will defeat Ian Smith without Cuban participation."

The use of Cuban troops inside Rhodesia would also lead to further Western and South African support for the illegal regime. Henry Kissinger made the comment, for what it is worth, in 1976 that America's reaction to possible Cuban involvement in the rest of southern Africa should "not be deduced from what we did in Angola."

The British government is known to have been involved in extensive behind-the-scenes diplomacy in an attempt to ensure that Cuban soldiers are not deployed in what technically remains a British colony. South Africa is clearly reluctant to become embroiled in fighting inside Rhodesia—particularly after its Angolan debacle—but the presence of Cuban troops could lead to additional South African support for the Smith regime.

"Don't think about the Cubans in relation to Rhodesia," one of the southern African presidents recently remarked, "think about them in relation to Namibia (South West Africa)."

The MPLA's victory certainly represented a great boost to Swapo's morale, and already this movement has established training camps inside Angola. It is therefore likely that some Cuban

**Cuban instructors, foreground, with MPLA recruits at training camp near Luanda.**



**SOLDIER OF FORTUNE**



**Cuban tank commander in Angola. Latest intell sources in Washington estimate 50,000 Cubans in Africa, 26,000 in Angola.**

instructors are training Swapo "freedom fighters." A Swapo representative met Castro in Moscow during 1976 and the question of additional assistance was no doubt raised.

"If, as a result of the racists' intention to maintain their occupation over part of Angolan territory, the war extends to Namibia," Castro warned during 1976, then "the responsibility will be that of South Africa." The Cubans have certainly not ruled out the possibility of fielding troops inside South West Africa. And Swapo officials, when questioned about the possibility, have replied that no decision has yet been reached. But Cuban involvement in South West Africa would involve facing South African armed forces

on their own territory, a much less attractive proposition than in Angola.

So, at least for the foreseeable future, Cuban assistance to Swapo is likely to be confined to the training camps within Angola.

For the time being, the Cubans remain in Angola, but even this exercise has its problems. Anti-Cuban rebel forces led by Dr. Jonas Savimbi are still active in the southern regions of this vast land and Unita guerrillas are hitting as and when the opportunities arise.

There is also word that Holden Roberto's FNLA movement is likely to start operations along a new front along the northern Angolan border with Zaire.

In Northern Angola, over the last six months, Cuba has also unleashed a reign of terror against the civilian populace in order to stamp out resistance to the Marxist government. According to observers in London more than 70,000 civilians have died at the hands of the MPLA and their Cuban allies.

Armored units consisting of Russian and APC's manned by Cubans, with helicopter support have attacked villages at dawn and shot the inhabitants as they tried to escape. MIG's napalm forest areas to force out refugees so they maybe slaughtered. Thousands of children between the ages of 10 and 17 are being flown to Havana for "education." Any parents who oppose the Cubans and MPLA are liable to be shot. The bewildered parents speculate that their children maybe used as cheap labor on Cuban sugar plantations.

To date, over one million refugees have fled from their residences to seek shelter in the northern bush. One villager told how a column of 6,000 refugees had been ambushed by Cubans and the mpla troop near Sao Salvador. The refu-

(continued on page 64)

**MPLA troops at Luanda airport armed with Russian PPSH 1941 submachine guns.**





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(continued from page 33)

gees were crossing a road when they were hit by helicopter gunships which killed 125.

Observers who have spent time with Savimbi forces report that as a result of Unita's efforts, Cuban morale appears to be flagging. "The constant tension along roads which could be paved with landmines, the worry about ambushes, the sneak attacks on lonely Cuban outposts have taken their toll," one states.

Many Cuban reservists have been called up from the sugar cane fields, told they were going to Angola to build roads, and when they arrived in Angola, much to their amazement were issued AK-47s and sent to the bush. The Cubans have a language problem, have little or no idea why they are risking their lives in a foreign country. Because of the primitive road network, pay has been late and they have often suffered food shortages.

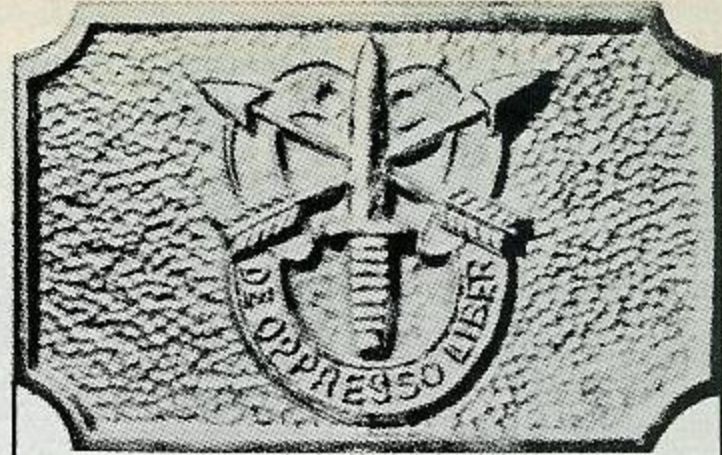
Savimbi's Intelligence sources have indicated that, like the Portuguese before them, the average Cuban is only interested in "getting out of Africa and safely home again." He claims that a number of Cubans have defected and have joined his rag-tag army.

Savimbi's friend found the enigmatic black leader in the twilight world of the Lungue Bungwe River almost exactly where he had been prior to Portugal's April revolt when he was leading his forces against Lisbon's army in Africa. Following Unita's evacuation of its joint Unita-FNLA capital of Huamba, in February 1976, these forces were obliged to take to the bush. Defeated by Castro's troops, whose tanks smashed through the last Unita strongholds, Savimbi and his men retreated in confusion to the South West African border.

Savimbi was offered a radio by the South African authorities at about this stage but he never returned to pick it up, I was told by a reliable source. The result was that it took months to bring some order to his fragmented force.

To find Savimbi today, one must follow Unita guides from the Zambian border through a seemingly endless labyrinth leading to the 1,200-meter Bie Plateau. This is forest country, crisscrossed by innumerable streams; "traditionally Savimbi's", my informant told me. In this vast region, where the Angilan population, there are 15,000 soldiers who have resumed guerrilla activities and are elusive as ever.

Savimbi loves the forest and knows its secrets. "He is constantly on the move, his Kalashnikov slung across his shoulder, carefully choosing a point at the forest edge where he and his men will emerge to disrupt the convoys passing between Luso and Silva Porto on the Benguela railway line. Apparently Savimbi is in good spirits—in fact he has seldom been so happy.



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“For,” as Savimbi himself says, “beyond the ideologies, Angola is one country and some day the same nationalism will unite them all.”

Savimbi, according to the Frenchman, has only one policy at the moment: “Kill the Cubans! Kill them all!” Unita policy is not geared against the MPLA who are even allowed to pass when groups are encountered on the road. The prime target remains “Castro’s imperialist agents.”

Savimbi apparently spends much time poring over his maps of Angola, spreading them out on his camp tables and marking them with arrows. All Unita operational maps are divided into three areas.

Said Savimbi: “The West is under the direction of Secretary General Miguel Puna; the center is controlled by Commandant-General Chiwale, and the East, my area, stretches to the Zambian frontier.” His face becomes animated when he talks of Unita’s victories, of the defeats and the communication and

supply problems which are very real in any guerrilla warfare.

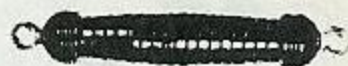
Savimbi confesses that in the beginning, despite heavier losses, the MPLA did have the upper hand, “but they have never succeeded in winning over the population.” Since then, Unita elements have remained on the attack; their morale is up and they now seek out and destroy ambushes; they patrol routes and harass the Cubans along what is termed the “Cuban Boulevard.” The object, basically, is to “foster a sense of insecurity in the built-up areas and blow up railway lines. There are even occasional attacks in Huambo itself.”

At present Savimbi has no forthright declaration to make, no message to put across to the world at large. His immediate problems are those of the “People’s War”; of food and medical supplies and adequate arms and ammunition for his fighters.

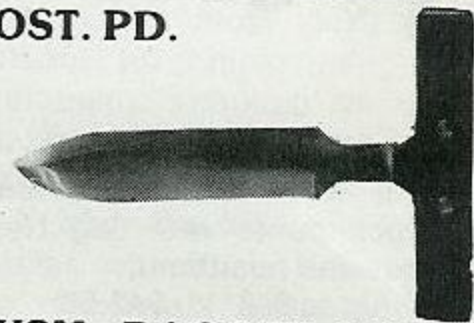
The Cubans, in attempting to destroy Dr. Savimbi and his UNITA forces, face a multitude of problems. The area in which UNITA operates is huge. Because of the rugged terrain and jungle, in most areas fields of fire are limited to 25 yards. The few roads, mostly unpaved, become impassable during the rainy season. Off the road, the terrain and bush preclude movement of wheeled or tracked vehicles. Safe areas for the guerrillas abound because of the terrain and avail-

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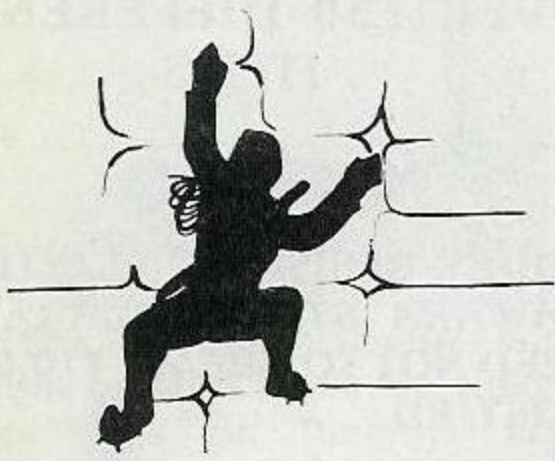
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ability of overhead cover. the guerrillas can block motorized columns almost indefinitely with mines.

And a racial discrimination problem exists. Problems between the black MPLA troops and the Cuban mercenaries began in early 1976 when the Cubans began shooting MPLA officers who deserted when the South African artillery opened up. Cuban troops receive better food, clothing, shelter and equipment; Cubans go out on few operations, and therefore, their black allies are taking 90 percent of the casualties. When the Cubans do participate in operations, Cuban units remain in the rear, primarily providing support. Consequently, whole squads and platoons of MPLA soldiers have deserted to the UNITA forces.

Also there have been reports of Cuban technicians treating black farmers in a condescending and imperious manner. Some blacks have suggested the Cubans are developing a "colonialist mentality."

Cuban casualties continue to grow. No one but Castro and high Cuban leaders know how many Cuban troops have been KIA. European sources estimate that up to 8,000 Cubans have been killed. For instance, in one two-week period in January, UNITA forces claimed to have killed 98 Cubans. In March, a spokesman for the Cabindan Enclave Liberation Front (FLEC) claimed it executed 139 Cuban soldiers after the MPLA refused to release several thousand of its own prisoners. Several thousand wounded Cuban troops have been evacuated to communist bloc countries for treatment in order to minimize the possibility of an adverse reaction in Cuba. To date the bearded Cuban dictator has officially reported only three Cubans KIA since they began operations in Angola.

Western intelligence sources estimate there are 23,000 Cubans in Angola, of whom 4,000 to 5,000 are technical advisors.

More than one authority on Africa agrees that the turn of events in Angola could well result in the Cubans finding themselves in the same circumstances that the United States found itself in Vietnam, with the Cubans in the place of the American G.I. Time will tell.

1. Al J. Venter, *Portugal's Guerrilla War* (Capetown: John Malherbe, 1973).
2. Colin Legum and Tony Hodges, *After Angola—The War over Southern Angola* (London: Rex Collings, 1976).



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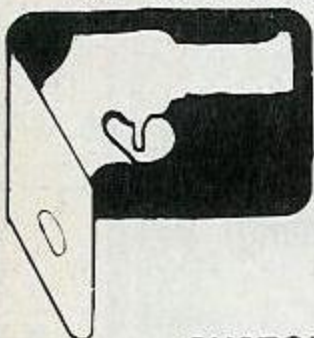
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