

CUBA IN ANGOLA

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The small aircraft swept down and landed on the dirt strip. It was night and the only lighting was provided by fires burning along the sides of the strip to mark it for the pilot.

The few passengers disembarked, and the plane immediately took off again. The African dawn was beginning to break. A sitting plane would be a sitting duck for enemy aircraft.

The passengers were taken in hand by soldiers wearing overcoats – a necessity in the cold nights. Customs forms were filled out; baggage was inspected.

This was the international entry point into the Free Territory of Angola.

Soon the arrivals boarded a truck for a two-hour ride over dirt paths to the village of Jamba, capital of the territory.

Contrary to most foreign perceptions, Angola is not a country with a guerrilla problem. Rather, it is a divided country, much as Korea is. The larger portion is controlled by a leftist government supported by Cuban troops. The southeastern quarter is controlled by the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), an anti-communist movement led by Jonas Savimbi. In the grey areas between the two jurisdictions, civil war is fought as Savimbi's guerrillas try to expand the UNITA area and as the government and the Cubans fight back and launch occasional offensives.

The Portuguese colonies in Africa were not immune to the wave of independence which swept that continent following World War II. In what was then known as Portuguese West Africa, in February of 1961 the marxist-oriented Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) launched a revolt against the colonial government headquartered in the capital of Luanda. About a month