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**Research  
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**Instituto  
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**CUBA IN ANGOLA**

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## INSTITUTE OF INTERAMERICAN STUDIES

### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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### JAY MALLIN, SR.

Jay Mallin is currently the News Director of Radio Martí, a service of the Voice of America created by Congress and charged with broadcasting to Cuba. Mr. Mallin was a foreign correspondent for various publications for more than 30 years. He has covered conflicts in Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, El Salvador, Grenada, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic and, most recently, Angola. He is the author of nine books, most of which have military themes. Jay Mallin has lectured at the Pentagon, National Defense University, Fort Bragg, and the Air Force's Special Operations School. He was a Research Scientist at the Center for Advanced International Studies at the University of Miami for two years.



## CUBA IN ANGOLA

Jay Mallin, Sr.

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

later, additional anti-government guerrilla warfare broke out in the northern provinces. This involved the more moderate Union of the Peoples of Angola (UPA).

The rebellion was ruthlessly suppressed by the Portuguese, and it has been estimated that 20,000 black Africans died in the fighting. Nevertheless, the revolt smoldered on as the MPLA shifted its activities to the country's eastern sector, continuing its guerrilla campaign from bases in neighboring Zambia.

In 1966, the UPA split into the pro-western, socialist National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the also pro-western National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). UNITA moved its guerrilla operations into the south-central region. The rebels conducted standard guerrilla warfare – ambushes and hit-and-run attacks – and these persistent efforts tied down a sizeable Portuguese force. Estimates are that in the late 1960s half of Portugal's national budget was being spent on its forces in Africa. Campaigns against the Portuguese were also under way in what later became the independent countries of Cape Verde Islands, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique.

As often occurs in such cases, young Portuguese officers came to resent the unrelieved bush-fighting and the inefficiency of the bureaucracy running the war from Lisbon. For years Portugal had been ruled by a dictator, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar. He died in 1970, but his successors continued the wars. In April 1974, however, young officers toppled the national government and installed a leftist regime that was willing to relinquish Portuguese West Africa (Angola), once an orderly succession rule could be insured.

Twice the three main liberation movements, the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA, formed coalitions and twice the coalitions collapsed. When the Portuguese finally withdrew in November 1975, they left a country divided by civil war, with the

- the Portuguese pulled out

In mid Nov.

- the first Cuban troops were there in October.

The failure of the coalition

UNITA and the FNLA pitted against the MPLA. The MPLA held the capital and its port. Through this port Cuban soldiers and Soviet arms and technicians entered the country in support of the MPLA. This assistance turned the tide in favor of the leftists. Although South African forces and American supplies were sent to aid UNITA and FMLA, the MPLA and its Cuban-Soviet allies overcame the opposition parties by February 1976.

The first contact between Cuban government officials and the leadership of guerrilla organizations fighting to end Portuguese colonialism in Angola is believed to have taken place in 1965. The renown Ernesto "Che" Guevara and other Cuban officials met with Agostinho Neto, political leader of the MPLA, and his military commander-in-chief somewhere in present-day Zaire or in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville).<sup>1</sup> About two hundred Cuban troops led by Guevara were at the time involved in providing support to anti-government guerrillas fighting against Premier Moises Tshombe in Zaire.

Within a few months of this meeting Cuban troops began to train MPLA guerrillas both in Cuba and in the Congo. Cuban ships delivered weapons to the MPLA through Brazzaville and continued to do so for over ten years. In 1966, Neto and other MPLA officials visited Cuba and from that time on maintained contact with the Cuban government. Angolan Communists were provided a haven in Cuba. Some were given scholarships to attend Cuban schools.

The final assault to take over Angola came after the military coup d'etat in Portugal in 1974. The new Portuguese government invited the principal guerrilla organizations fighting for the liberation of Angola to participate in the formation of a transition government until the final withdrawal of Portuguese forces from that country.

The three guerrilla organizations clashed, however, in a bloody civil war. Zambia was offering support to UNITA, led by Jonas Savimbi. This group had also



received aid from the People's Republic of China. The FNLA, led by Holden Roberto, was receiving aid from Zaire, North Korea, and the People's Republic of China. The FNLA was also receiving assistance from the United States. It had managed to take a large territory in the northeast and set up a capital at Carmona.

South African troops had entered the southern part of Angola in August 1975 and were giving assistance to UNITA and the FNLA. They supplied weapons and assisted in the organization of a military force headed by Daniel Chipenda, a former member of the MPLA who had defected to the FNLA.

Cuban Comandante Flavio Bravo and Agostinho Neto met in Brazzaville in May 1975 and worked out plans for substantial Cuban military assistance to the MPLA. The MPLA needed help from the Cubans in order to be able to capture power after the departure of the Portuguese. A second meeting is said to have taken place in August of 1976 between Comandante Raul Diaz Arguelles and Neto in Luanda. The struggle for power between the different guerrilla organizations had put the MPLA on the run. The MPLA requested Cuban military assistance as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the Soviets were waiting until the departure of the Portuguese before they intervened directly to provide assistance to their friends in the MPLA.

According to a press report, United States and Cuban officials held high-level talks in 1974 and 1975 in Washington and New York about the situation in Angola.<sup>2</sup> Assistant Secretary of State William Rogers made it clear to Cuban officials at a meeting that took place in November of 1975 that the United States firmly opposed Cuban military involvement in Angola. The meeting did not have any noticeable effect. The Cuban Government was already in the process of sending military advisers and training personnel. The Cubans set up four training bases for MPLA troops at Benguela, Saurimo, Cabinda, and Delatando. The Cubans were supporting

the MPLA effort to capture power upon the departure of the Portuguese, which had been scheduled for November 11.

Three Cuban ships with men and an assortment of weapons and other equipment arrived in Angola in early October. The Cuban merchant ship "Viet Nam Heroico" arrived on 4 October, and two more ships arrived within a week. But before the Cubans could establish their camps and train a large force of MPLA troops, the military situation grew worse for Cuba's allies. South African troops began to advance north toward the capital and the FNLA closed in from the north toward MPLA-held territory.

The Cuban government then decided to send a battalion of special forces (650 men) to Angola by air to support the MPLA and the Cuban troops that had arrived in October. The battalion was transported by air in thirteen days, starting on 7 November 1975. The Cubans used old Bristol Britannia turbo-prop airplanes, making refueling stops in Barbados, Guinea-Bissau, and the Congo before landing in Luanda. Preparations began for sending thousands of additional troops by sea and air. These would include at least one artillery regiment and a battalion of motorized troops.

The troops were carried in Cuban merchant ships, fishing boats, and an assortment of airplanes. The logistics, although fairly primitive, were effective enough to transfer large quantities of men and materials. Commercial airplanes and small cargo vessels were often overloaded in the effort to carry large numbers of troops quickly to Angola. Considering that Cuba had never been involved in an operation of this type, this was a creditable operation. But the key to success was the ambivalence and the lack of direction of the United States on the Angolan situation. Cuba would not have been able to intervene in Angola had the United States taken a strong stand and prevented Cuban troops from leaving their home island.



The Cuban forces entered combat almost from the time they arrived. War on several fronts at the same time was not easy. The Cubans suffered several major defeats including one at Catofe, where South African forces surprised them and caused a substantial number of casualties. The months of November and December 1975 were difficult ones. Mistakes were made and the Cuban losses included Diaz Arguelles, a veteran of the revolution in Cuba against Fulgencio Batista.

Cuban troop strength continued to increase. Members of the Cuban general staff were replaced by younger, junior officers and were sent to Angola to lead the battle. Comandantes Victor Cheug Colas, Leopoldo Cintras Frias, Abelardo Colome Ibarra, Raul Menendez Tomashevich, along with the Casas Regueiro brothers, and others participated in the fighting.

By the end of January 1976, between 6,000 and 7,000 troops were deployed in Angola. Cuban planes used the Azores, particularly Santa Maria Island, between 20 and 30 December 1975 as a refueling stop. Despite objections from the Portuguese government Cuban planes again used the Azores for the same purpose between 10 and 15 January 1976. The troops were transported in Soviet-manufactured IL-62 airplanes.

Cuban troops fought three campaigns in less than 12 months against the FNLA and UNITA guerrilla forces in the north and southeast and South African forces in the south. The Cubans also joined MPLA troops in a bloody campaign to defeat the Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC), led by Francisco Xavier Lubota.

In February 1976, the Cubans and the MPLA captured the last major strongholds of UNITA. UNITA fled to neighboring countries where they regrouped. They revived their guerrilla warfare against MPLA. White mercenaries – South African and Portuguese – frequently aided UNITA militarily.

and covert U.S. arms assistance was reportedly received as well. In 1977, UNITA initiated a series of guerrilla raids on urban areas in Angola. A rebellion that UNITA supported, however, was crushed.

Even so, the guerrillas gained control of an extensive area in southern Angola. The following year a government offensive against the guerrillas failed to dislodge them from the areas they controlled. Sympathetic to South Africa and vice-versa, UNITA allowed South African forces to maintain bases in its territory for raids against nationalist guerrillas in Namibia, also known as South-West Africa. By the early 1980s, UNITA guerrillas had extended their control to central and southeast Angola. This was the area of the Ovimbundu tribe of which UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi is a member. Political and military matters in Africa are often determined along tribal lines. The guerrillas won the support of Great Britain, France, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and a number of African nations, while the MPLA continued to be backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba. The protracted warfare destroyed much of Angola's economy and displaced one-sixth of its people, who were forced to become refugees in neighboring Zaire, Zambia, and the Congo.

Over the past few years there have been offensives – or drives, if one prefers – by all the parties involved in Angola. The South African Defense Force, which in 1975, 1977, 1979, and 1980 had entered Angola, again crossed the Namibian border in August 1981 to strike at SWAPO bases in Angola. SWAPO is the black movement which seeks independence for Namibia.

South African aircraft destroyed radar stations and Soviet missile sites, and three task forces of motorized troops drove over 90 miles into Angola. Towns were taken; some 1,000 guerrillas and government troops were killed. Substantial quantities of Soviet tanks, weapons, and other equipment were captured. Ten South Africans died in the drive.

UNITA soon launched an offensive of its own. Savimbi's troops struck into Moxico Province, capturing Lupire on 19 September and other towns in later weeks. The rebels were operating 200 miles inside Angola.

In August 1985, the government launched drives against the rebel-held towns of Cazombo in the northeast and Mavinga in the southeast. Four motorized infantry brigades headed for Cazombo; five brigades moved against Mavinga. The offensive was supported by Soviet-made MIGs, helicopters, and fighter-bombers of the Angolan Air Force.

Savimbi knew that he lacked sufficient strength to retain both towns. His forces, therefore, abandoned Cazombo, which they had held for 22 months.

In mid-September, South Africa launched another invasion of Angola. The South Africans said they were in pursuit of SWAPO guerrillas again. The Angolan government, however, charged that the South Africans were actually fighting its troops involved in the drives against Savimbi. The government produced the body of a South African medical orderly killed near Cazombo. The South African Air Force was said to be providing air support for the rebels. On 7 October, Savimbi claimed full control of Mavinga and defeat of the government forces, who were now reportedly retreating under counter-attack and in disarray.

The Cuban forces have been successful in keeping the MPLA in power but have been unable to defeat the UNITA guerrillas. Without the support of Cuban troops and military advisers from the Soviet Union and East Germany, the Angolan government would not have been able to retain power. The total number of Cuban combat troops and technical and support personnel has reportedly reached as high as 36,000 at times in the past 10 years. In 1985, Castro stated that to date over 200,000 Cubans had served in Angola. During the Third Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, in February of 1986, several Cuban generals sporting Angolan combat decorations sat among the 1,790 delegates.



Casualties in Angola have been relatively high in relation to the size of the Cuban population. In addition to combat losses, tropical diseases have also taken their toll, not only on the troops serving in Angola but also back in Cuba where previously unheard of diseases imported from Africa have caused problems in agriculture, animal husbandry, and in the general population (ie, AIDS, dengue, conjunctivities or red eye, rare strains of VD, and African swine fever, to mention only a few).

Much of the heaviest fighting took place between 1975 and 1978, when the MPLA was able to consolidate its hold over the Angolan capital and most of the national territory with the support of Cuban troops. By March of 1977, the MPLA and Cuban forces had stabilized their military control enough for Fidel Castro to visit Angola (and several other African countries) and brag about the victory. But two months later, in May of 1977, a coup was attempted against Agostinho Neto by Nito Alves and Jose Van Dunem with the support of several army units. The bloody uprising was defeated, with Cuban troops playing an important role. Heavy fighting took place again in Cabinda Province in June of 1977 against FLEC guerrillas, who were routed. In July, about 4,000 more Cuban troops arrived to provide additional support for the MPLA.

Despite the additional Cuban troops, UNITA was able to launch a military offensive in December 1977 against the government. The next year, in April and June, Cuban-supported military offensives were carried out against UNITA, but the guerrilla units led by Savimbi had by then been able to consolidate their forces in tribal lands of people who supported UNITA.

The relationship of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, FAR*) with the MPLA began in the early 1960s. At that time, the FAR provided instructors to the MPLA, which was operating in Brazzaville, Congo.

Later the assistance was expanded to include material. In November 1975, the MPLA came to power in Angola. By June of that year, the first 200 Cuban instructors had already been sent there. By February 1976, the number of Cubans in Angola had jumped to 9,000, and this included combat units. Today the Cubans number 33,200 men, including support troops.

The FAR uses Soviet doctrine in Angola, and has adopted it to local conditions. The structure of command of the Cuban forces in Angola is as follows: The headquarters is the *Missao Internacionalistas de Cubanos en Angola, MICA*. Under the MICA are the Cuban army and air force units and the advisors and instructors. The army is divided into regiments. The advisors and instructors work with the Angolan army, air force, and navy. The Cubans have complete autonomy over their own forces; the Angolans have absolutely nothing to say about them.

The Cuban units in Angola are as follows: 19 motorized infantry regiments -- seven of these have tanks; two anti-aircraft brigades; and one medium artillery regiment. There are 1,000 advisors and instructors. The instructors are attached to training units. The advisors are attached to combat units and help command them down to the brigade level. The advisors participate in combat. There are 4,000 Cubans in support services. There are 1,000 Cubans in their air force in Angola.

The Cubans in Angola maintain four basic defense lines stretching across the country. The lower one is of course the one bordering on the UNITA free territory. The next one is roughly along the Benguela railway. The third line is around Luanda, and the fourth line is in the north, developed as a result of UNITA guerrilla actions in that area. The first line, which extends eastward to Cuito Cuanavale, has been used three times as the base for offensives. All have failed to dislodge UNITA from its territory.

The training given the average Cuban is considered by experts to be fair. Much better training is given to the specialized services -- air, tanks, and so forth.

The Cubans are gaining a great deal of combat experience from Angola. Their adventure in this country is providing them with a number of military advantages. One, they are testing their command and control structures. Two, they are evaluating Soviet equipment. Three, they are gaining experience in counter-revolutionary tactics. Four, they are adapting tactics and doctrines. Five, they are evaluating and practicing air defense. Six, they are obtaining practical experience for their pilots.

The FAR is involved in advisory roles, defensive roles, offensive roles, and social action. Until 1980, the Cubans participated primarily in offensive actions. Since then, however, they have gone more into defensive modes, so that the FAPLA – the Angolan Army – can gain more experience in offensive tactics. The Cubans advise the Angolan forces in combat and logistics. Some Soviet advisors are now working at the brigade level, and indeed in a recent offensive UNITA took out several Russians who were actually in the front lines, manning tanks. The Cubans maintain the more sophisticated equipment. The Cubans give intelligence and propaganda advice.

Today 18,500 Cubans are in defensive roles. They protect key infrastructures: rail lines, oil wells, strategic towns, and important industrial areas such as those in Luanda. They also maintain the early warning systems and the air defense equipment and missiles. In the oil-rich Cabinda enclave there are 6,000 Cubans. The number was recently increased from 3,500 men. The Cubans serve as escorts on logistic routes, and in the area of Luanda and other main urban areas they fulfill counter-insurgency roles. In their offensive roles they do reconnaissance. They have a reaction force along the southern defensive line, the line that borders on the UNITA territory. The Cubans conduct counter-insurgency operations against UNITA, they provide close air support for the Angolan air force, FAPA. The Cuban artillery and tank units support the FAPLA.



Since 1985 the Cubans have become more involved in directly countering UNITA. This apparently is because the FAPLA has failed to do a good job. Another reason is that the Cubans, in defensive roles day in day out, month after month, face a horrendous morale problem, and certainly their officers would rather see at least some combat.

The social work done by the Cuban troops includes medical aid, construction of bridges and roads, and emergency assistance in famine areas. There are 7,000 Cuban civilians in Angola who teach, construct, do health work, help with forestry, the sugar crop and other agriculture, and are also involved in communications.

There has been friction between the MPLA and the Cubans. The Angolan army resents the Cubans having better food – even better than the population, portions of which often are close to starving. In addition, the Cubans are taking diamonds and wood without payment. Some top MPLA people, according to intelligence reports, have become fed up with the Cubans.

Captain Antonio Luis Francisco Mango of the general staff of the FAPLA's 16th Brigade, who recently deserted, stated: "Concerning the presence of the Cubans in Angola, the Angolan people feel oppressed. They feel oppressed because of the role the Cubans play in Angola. Initially we thought they were coming here under the banner of proletarian internationalism, but over time we discovered that their mission has nothing to do with helping the Angolan people. Their mission is to occupy our country."<sup>43</sup>

In addition to military advantages, the benefits to the Cubans are several. First, maintaining a relatively large force in Angola keeps unemployment low in Cuba. Second, the Soviets pay the logistical cost of stationing the Cubans there. In addition, according to intelligence sources, the Cubans in Angola receive more advanced arms from the Soviet Union than even the weapons sent by Moscow

directly to Cuba. (Angola also reportedly gives some 43 million dollars monthly to help pay for the Cubans.)

As mentioned, keeping the troops occupied is a morale problem. Cubans are restricted from any contact with the local population. They are rarely, if ever, allowed to go outside Luanda on their own. In areas where UNITA has operated, there is serious friction between the locals and the Cubans, as the locals tend to support UNITA.

The Cubans mistrust the FAPLA for several reasons. The FAPLA performs poorly. Second, the Cubans suspect, and apparently rightly so, that the FAPLA – or at least some people in it – sympathizes with UNITA.

If there have been advantages for Cuba in its intervention in Angola, there have also been perhaps even greater disadvantages. Cuba involved itself in Angola during the heyday of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's interventionism in Latin America and Africa. It may well be that the Soviet Union encouraged the Cuban role. Today, 12 years later, Cuba is still heavily involved in Angola, and Angola has sometimes been referred to as Cuba's Vietnam. Cuban youths do not want to serve there, and evidently the officers are not too happy about going there either. Youths fleeing Cuba in rafts and small boats say when they reach the United States that they did not want to serve overseas. Cuban General Rafael del Pino, who in the mid-1970s commanded Cuba's air force in Angola and who defected to the United States in May 1987, stated:

"The people do not want to go to Angola. The people, the officers resist going to Angola. This is not only because we have converted ourselves into a mercenary army, but it is that our officers see that the problem is that neither the sons of the members of the Politburo or the sons of the principal leaders of the government go to Angola, do not go into military service."

Del Pino said that Cuban casualties in Angola (missing, wounded, and dead) totalled approximately 10,000. He reported that during three years 56,000 deserters from the Cuban armed forces had been "captured" (including repeaters).

There is an increasing Russian presence in Angola. This may be because the Cubans, like the Angolans, have not done well. The Russians are in advisory or command positions and have even participated in combat.

Brigadier Isidoro Huambo Chindondo, chief of military intelligence for UNITA, states:

The Cubans are responsible for atrocities against the local population. They are raping the women in Angola. They are destroying the food and the facilities for the local population. They are conducting roundup operations to get Angolan youngsters and to send them to the Island of Youth in Cuba. They are stealing in industrial facilities in Angola, like the big machines in factories. They are putting these in Antonovs and then flying them back to Havana. Cattle are also being flown to Havana. They are also putting the wood in Antonovs and flying it to Havana.<sup>1</sup>

Intelligence Chief Huambo provided information on the organization of the military arm of the MPLA, the FAPLA (Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola). At the top of the military structure is the Internationalist Committee. This is composed of two groups: one is made up of all military personnel, basically Cubans and Russians, and the second is made up of military representatives of the MPLA. Below it functions the National Council for Defense and Security, which is composed of representatives of the armed forces, the government, and the MPLA. Then there is the commander-in-chief and the Defense Ministry. Underneath this functions the general staff, which has representatives of the army, air force and navy. There are ten military regions, each governed by a regional military council.

The basic unit of the FAPLA is the brigade. Each consists of between 600 and 700 men. There are two types of brigades: light infantry and mechanized. The strength of the FAPLA is approximately 80,000 men. There is a militia (ODP) of about 60,000 men. There are some 2,500 men in the navy (MGPA) and 1,500 in the air force (FAPA). There are also lesser numbers in Special Forces. The navy is equipped primarily with Soviet-made patrol and fast attack craft. The air force has



Soviet-made Antonov transport planes, MiG-17, -21 and -23 fighter planes, and Mi8, -17 and -25 helicopters.

According to Brigadier Huambo, apart from the Cubans, there are the following foreign military personnel in Angola: 2,500 Soviets, 2,500 East Germans, 2,500 North Koreans, 3,500 men from Portugal. The Portuguese are said to be "Communists and mercenaries coming for money." (Other intelligence sources in the region place non-Angolan, non-Cuban military personnel at a lower figure: 3,250.) The commander of the Portuguese is Colonel Leitao Fernandez. The Soviet commander is identified as General Constantine Chacknovich. The East German commander is known only as General Von Status, and the Cuban commander is General Gustavo Freitas Ramirez.

Huambo stated that in Angola there are also guerrillas from other areas of Africa. He identified these as 1,200 members of South Africa's African National Congress, 1,400 Katangese (Zaire) and 7,000 SWAPO guerrillas.

Facing the combined Angolan-Cuban-Soviet forces are the troops of UNITA. The military arm of the organization is the FALA (Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola). At the top is the high commander, General Jonas Savimbi. Below him functions the Strategic Operational Command (COPE), in charge of general strategic planning. Below the COPE is the EMG, the general staff, and under this function divisions and services.

Divisions include ground artillery units, anti-aircraft artillery, demolition units and communications units. The services include the SIMI (military intelligence), the military police, health units, logistic units, personnel units, and training units.

The UNITA military organization is divided into seven military-political fronts plus the liberated territory. The fronts are divided into zones. UNITA has a

spectrum of military forces ranging from local defense units to regular battalions. The defense forces are organized to protect villages. They are trained and armed and the protection of these villages is their sole responsibility. There are six battalions of these local defense groups. Each has about 300 men.

With additional training, these men are formed into mobile guerrilla units. There are 15 to 50 men in each unit.

After they are given further training, they become companies of what are called "compact guerrilla units." There are 150 men per unit. Brigadier Huambo said, "These are units that can cut off the logistic lines of the enemy, can surround deep targets, and can support local people when they transport material for the guerrillas."<sup>7</sup> The next step up is what UNITA calls semi-conventional forces. These consist of semi-regular battalions of about 600 men per unit. UNITA has 44 such battalions. The battalions are spread over the country and support the guerrillas.

There are four regular battalions and these are used only to protect the liberated territory. The battalions receive about six months of training. There are about 600 men in a regular battalion. The battalions have land rovers and other means of transportation as well as anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons. UNITA also has 16 platoons of Special Commandoes.

The UNITA forces total 65,000 men, of which 28,000 are regulars and 37,000 are guerrillas.

The charismatic leader of UNITA – party and military – is Jonas Malheiro Savimbi. Savimbi was born 3 August 1934 in Munhango, a small town on the Benguela railway. His father worked on the railway and it was from his father, Loth, that he inherited the faculties of determination and perserverance which would shape his own future and that of his country. Loth rose in 20 years from being a low-grade clerk on the railway to the first black station master.

It was from his grandfather that Jonas inherited his dislike of the Portuguese. Jonas once said, "My grandfather told me that although he had a big soul, it was in great pain because of the humiliation imposed upon him by the Portuguese."<sup>8</sup> His grandfather at one time had fought the Portuguese. It was also from his grandfather that Savimbi inherited and learned the use of the Ovimbundu language which stood him in good stead in the years ahead when he led the Ovimbundu in wars against the Portuguese and then the Luanda government and its Cuban allies.

Savimbi received his secondary education at a missionary school. Later he studied at a government fee school and earned his keep by working in the headmaster's kitchen and watching his dog. In 1958, he graduated at the top of his class from a senior secondary class in southwest Angola. To embark upon a medical career, he took a boat to Portugal for advanced studies. A sailor gave him books on Marxism and on Marcus Garvey, the early American black consciousness leader. Savimbi said: "After I read them I was really burning to join a freedom movement. On the ship I already knew that my studies would be a secondary matter for me."<sup>9</sup>

In the years that followed, Savimbi mixed plotting against the Portuguese with his studies. Savimbi travelled to Spain, France, and Switzerland. After his tour of Europe, he returned to Africa to attend an international student gathering in Kampala, Uganda. There were two small Angolan liberation movements operating in exile outside of that country: the MPLA, with its roots among the slum dwellers, intellectuals, and the Kimbundu people of the capital's hinterland; and the Union of the Angolan People (UPA), the forerunner of the FALPA, whose roots were among the northern Kikongu. Savimbi decided to join the UPA.

In February 1961, there was an UPA uprising in Luanda. Africans armed with clubs and knives attacked the capital's jails in an attempt to release political



prisoners. Fourteen Portuguese were killed but the colonial authorities bore down heavily on the rebels. In March of that year, Savimbi returned to Switzerland to prepare for examinations. By July, however, he decided to give up his medical studies. Savimbi alternated between Switzerland with his studies and Africa on political work. He was now studying law and international politics. He founded an Angolan student movement, the National Union of Angolan students (UNEA), which was funded by the UPA. He established youth and trade union wings and a medical service.

By 1963, nearly 30 countries had become independent in Africa. The Organization of African Union (OAU) was created in Addis Ababa 22 - 25 of May 1963. Savimbi attended and was given an influential position as chairman of a group of liberation movement representatives who advised on the formation of a committee which would coordinate fund-raising to support nationalist movements in those countries still under colonial rule.

In 1964, Savimbi travelled to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, North Korea, North Vietnam, and China in search of support. The eastern Europeans displayed little interest in helping him. The Chinese were more receptive and promised to train some of Savimbi's men and to distribute \$1,000.00 from the Chinese embassy of Brazzaville to those of his supporters who were there. Savimbi continued his studies in Switzerland and returned again in 1965 to China to arrange for guerrilla training for his first recruits. The Chinese gave Savimbi \$15,000.00 - the first donation received by UNITA for its party funds.

In July of 1965, Savimbi completed final examinations in Lausanne for his degree in legal and political sciences. He returned to China for additional training and he also welcomed there a group of 11 men chosen as UNITA's first guerrilla commanders. Savimbi knew the fight had to be fought right in Angola. He wrote,

"George Washington could not have freed the British colonies of America by fighting from a base of exile against an army superior in numbers and equipment."<sup>10</sup>

In March 1966, UNITA was born at a meeting in the town of Muangai, 250 kilometers inside Angola from the border with Zambia. Attending the meeting were 67 village chiefs and other delegates. A constitution was adopted which called upon UNITA to educate "all Angolans living outside the country to the idea that real independence for Angola will only be achieved through an armed struggle waged against the Portuguese colonial power inside the country."<sup>11</sup> Savimbi, who was still abroad, had had a hand in writing the constitution.

In October 1966, Savimbi crossed into Angola, setting foot on his native soil for the first time since he had set sail for Portugal eight years earlier. There were 50,000 Portuguese soldiers in Angola. Savimbi and what were called his Chinese Eleven had only knives, machete-like *pangas* and one Soviet pistol. The first attack by UNITA was launched on 4 December 1966 against Cassamba, a small outpost protected by several hundred Portuguese soldiers. Savimbi later admitted that the attack was "a failure, it was a disaster."<sup>12</sup> He said:

It was the first time we had come under real fire, and the bullets had several colors - red, yellow, blue. We were really in a mess. One of our men was killed and we had to leave him. Two were wounded. We took them with us. We were all lying flat and had to crawl out through the (barbed) wire.<sup>13</sup>

The war was on and would continue until the Portuguese were finally driven from Angola.

Savimbi had been taught Maoist guerrilla warfare tactics in China. He learned in Angola, however, that every guerrilla commander must adapt tactics to the conditions in the country in which he is fighting. Of what he had been taught in China, Savimbi later said: "Real war was very different. It was just luck that UNITA did not die in that first attack, because half the commanders trained in China took part in it."<sup>14</sup>



Savimbi had studied Mao Tse Tung's *Selected Military Writings*. He also on one occasion engaged in an argument with Ernesto "Che" Guevara on guerrilla tactics. The two warriors met in January 1964 at a conference of African liberation movements held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Guevara argued in a speech that the Congo, huge and rich in minerals and agricultural products, was the key to revolution in central and southern Africa. It would be a major breakthrough if the Congo could be removed from imperialist control by a combined effort of African nationalists, Guevara stated. Savimbi responded that that would be a big mistake if the liberation movements were crushed while making a joint endeavor in the Congo. Who would be left to continue the struggle?

Savimbi and Guevara met privately and exchanged ideas for five hours. Savimbi argued against one of the principles that Guevara had expounded during the conference: establishment by guerrillas of fixed base camps. This was contrary to Mao's principle of avoiding set bases. Savimbi also disagreed with Guevara's thesis that the working class had to be the vanguard of any liberation struggle. In Angola, the people who mattered were the peasants, 90% of the population.

Guevara, in his major contribution to guerrilla literature, the book *Guerrilla Warfare*, had written, "There must always be preserved a strong base of operations and the strengthening of it must continue during the course of the war."<sup>15</sup> This is precisely what Savimbi has done. He has established the Free Territory and over the years expanded it. It is, fundamentally, his base of operations.

Savimbi's guerrillas have moved out from the Free Territory, and as the enemy has pulled back, or limited his operations, the liberated territory has grown. Savimbi told this writer:

The tactics that we use are general, classic guerrilla tactics. We may change them here and there, but also this type of war is a combination of a military war, a political war, information, economic war, and so forth. So it is not one-side tactics.<sup>16</sup>



The territory, because of its size, has become much more than merely a base for military operations. Within it functions a social and governmental system. There are elementary and upper-grade schools, first-aid stations, and hospitals. There are machine shops that do military and civilian work. There is a rudimentary postal system. No money, however, of any kind is used. Food and consumer goods are distributed according to necessity. An UNITA officer comments: "Fighting the war is only one aspect of the struggle. Victory will go to those who prove they are best capable of ruling Angola."

To help maintain the Free Territory, UNITA has received some assistance from the United States. Most important are the surface-to-air Stinger missiles, a fine equalizer in view of the fact that UNITA has no air power. South Africa, too, provides assistance, although the extent and nature of this is largely wrapped in military secrecy. There appears little doubt that South Africa, as in the past, would not permit the Angolans-Cubans-Russians to overrun the Free Territory.

Because of its geographical location and accidents of history, Angola is now of considerable strategic importance on the stage of world conflicts. Angola has over 1,000 miles of coastline on the South Atlantic, and running into the ports are several cross-country railroads. This makes Angola a significant outlet for the raw materials of Central African nations, including minerals, diamonds, and agricultural products. Recently NATO extended southward its contingency planning to a line running west from Luanda.

The United States has refused to grant diplomatic recognition to Angola as long as Cuban troops remain in that country. Nevertheless, the United States has over the years participated a number of times in negotiations aimed at removal of those forces.

In June 1978, the deputy chief of the U.S. mission to the United Nations, David McHenry, travelled to Angola for discussions. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, visited Angola in April 1981. In September of the same year, U.S. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, conferred in New York with Angolan Foreign Minister Paulo Jorge, and additional talks were held at the United Nations between the two countries. Chester Crocker and Paulo Jorge met in Paris in January 1982. Further talks were held that year in Paris and Luanda between U.S. and Angolan officials. Twice in 1987 Crocker visited Luanda, and he also had talks with Angolan officials in Washington, Brazzaville, and Brussels.

On 28 September 1978, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 435 calling for "the withdrawal of South Africa's illegal administration from Namibia and the transfer of power to the people of Namibia." Angolan leader Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who had succeeded Neto after his death in 1979, indicated willingness to negotiate withdrawal of the Cubans once Resolution 435 was implemented. Ever since, there has been an Angolan-Namibian linkage in all negotiations.

In a speech in Harare, Zimbabwe in September 1986 at a summit conference of the Non-Aligned nations, Cuba's Fidel Castro tossed in a new issue. He stated that Cuban troops would not leave Angola until apartheid was ended in South Africa. This statement apparently surprised the Angolans, and it does not now appear to be a serious issue in negotiations.

Angola won its independence from Portugal; in the subsequent internal struggles a Marxist party gained control. The Cubans and Russians provided support, and the door was opened for Angola to be thrust into the East-West conflict. The emergence of white-controlled South Africa as a regional power and its rule over Namibia added another dimension to the struggle for Angola.

Angola is today one of the three places in the world where U.S.-supported forces are at war with Soviet-supported forces. Savimbi states:

—If the Russians do control and consolidate in Angola, they will have an ideal base from where to operate — to control central Africa, which is Zambia, Zaire; eastern Africa: Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi; (then) move to Namibia and South Africa.<sup>17</sup>

Since World War II, the communists have in various parts of the world utilized guerrilla warfare as a means to try to seize power. Now, in Angola, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan, this type of warfare is being used against them. Says Savimbi:

—What we want for our country, first, a true independence. And we fought for that. We fought for 15 years against Portuguese colonialists to get a true independence. (We want) a country which will decide whom will be our friend, and not have imposed upon us a friendship, as it is today. And more than that, we believe that our people have suffered a lot, during colonial domination, during this war against the Russians, the Cubans. The Angolans, they need to rest. They need to rest in order to look after their own interests. Our people work very well on agriculture. They need only peace. They need only seeds. They need only tools. And they will produce food for themselves, and it is our priority number one.<sup>18</sup>



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Details of the early Cuban military involvement in Angola are from *The Evolution of the Cuban Military: 1492-1986* by Rafael Fermoselle, Miami, Fla., 1987.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. and Cubans Discussed Links in Talks in 1975," *The New York Times*, 29 March 1977.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with the writer in Jamba, May 1987.

<sup>4</sup>Interview with Radio Martí, June 1987

<sup>5</sup>Briefing for the writer in Jamba, May 1987.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>*Jonas Savimbi - A Key to Africa* by Fred Bridgland, New York, 1987.

<sup>9</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>14</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>15</sup>*La Guerra de Guerrillas* by Ernesto Guevara, Havana, 1960.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with the writer in Jamba, May 1987.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.