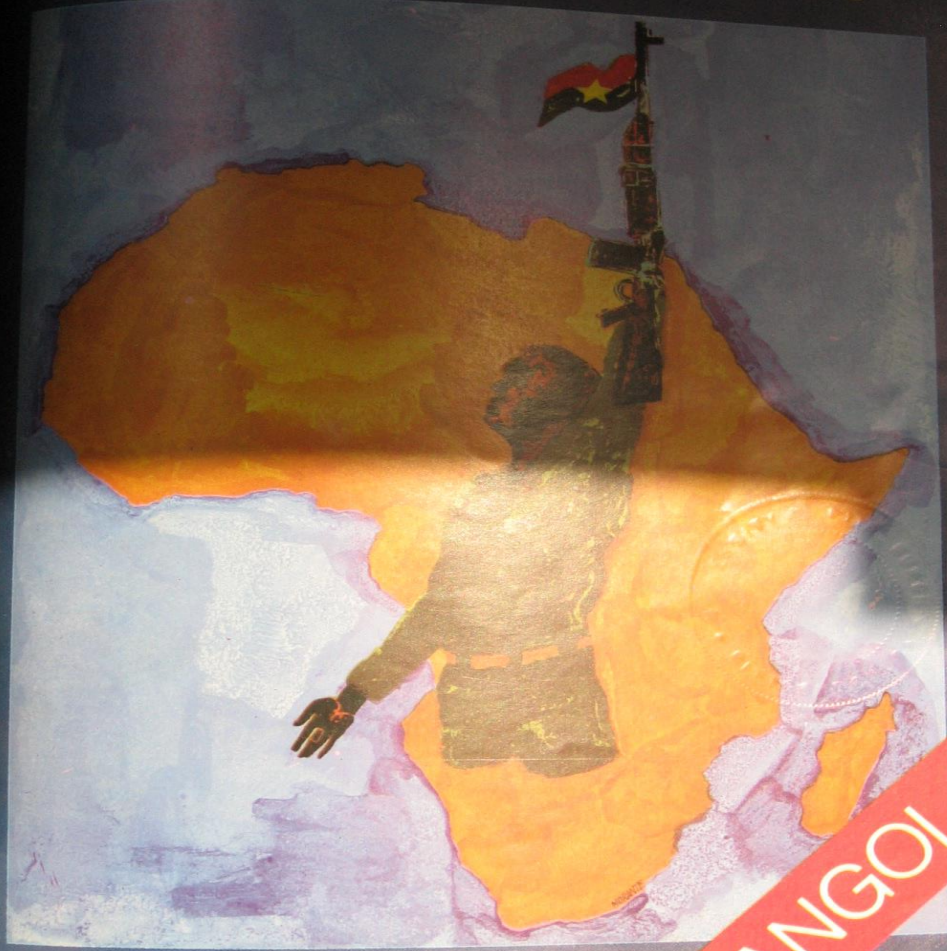


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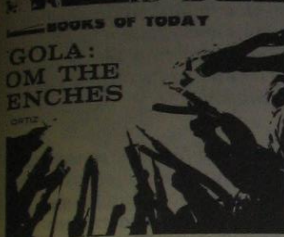
ANGOLA

EN EL MEDIO OR  
DLE-EAST



TO U.S. MARINES,  
WE ARE NOT  
YOUR TARGET.

われわれは米軍の標的ではない。  
PEOPLE OF NAGO  
1984



## CONTENTS

### 2 TO THE READER

#### • AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

3 MOROCCO: ROOTS OF THE REPRESSION  
Fernando Nápoles Tapia

14 WASHINGTON'S PROXY: ISRAELI ARMS IN CENTRAL AMERICA  
Clarence Lusane

#### • LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

23 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NICARAGUA AND FOR  
PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

30 THEY CAN SHOOT US BUT THEY'LL NEVER STOP THE PEOPLE'S  
STRUGGLE  
A special interview with Raúl Fernando Sendic

#### • ASIA

35 UNITED STATES, JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA: A TRIPARTITE  
MILITARY ALLIANCE  
Korean Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee

#### • BOOKS OF TODAY

44 ANGOLA: FROM THE TRENCHES  
José M. Ortiz

#### • AN OVERVIEW

51 WORLD CAPITALIST ECONOMY: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES  
Eugenio Espinosa

58 WASHINGTON'S BLACKMAIL OF UNESCO  
Roberto Alvarez Quiñones

61 TRICONTINENTAL ON THE MARCH

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## BOOKS OF TODAY

# ANGOLA: FROM THE TRENCHES

JOSE M. ORTIZ



*Angola: From the Trenches*, edited by José Martí Publishers, is a chunk of the history of the Angola liberation movement. It is a straight-forward account, with small planes of light and shadow but no touching-up.

This is a brutally sincere and honest work. Its author says he jotted down these tales in the heat of battle, with bullets flying all around, and revised them when he could in the pauses between skirmishes. It is the book of a journalist, not a fiction writer. But it is worth pointing out that journalism — although we understand it to be one aspect of literature — has its own rules of style. One of these, and this is especially true for a war correspondent — is its sense of urgency, rapidity, the direct tone, the short phrase, like a point-blank shot. Hemingway could be cited as a master of this style.

Truthfulness is another cardinal rule for the war correspon-

dent, and Pepín Ortiz has been tremendously loyal to this principle in his book. He says what he sees. He says it simply, almost colloquially, with veracity — with that unretouched veracity of one who is telling a story right

from the trenches, and who knows that he must communicate, simply and ferociously. Communicate in order to be, at worst, quicker than the bullet which can impose silence through death.

José M. Ortiz García (Pepín) fought at Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs) in 1961 when Cuba repulsed the US-backed mercenaries and at the same time covered the historic battle as a war correspondent.

In 1967 he went to Vietnam to gain experience in wartime writing. He was a war correspondent in Angola in 1975, and was present from the first battles until the South African defeat.

In 1976 the 8th Congress of the International Organization of Journalists awarded him the OIJ's International Prize for his distinguished work in internationalist reporting. He is a journalist and holds a degree in Social Sciences. Currently he is editor-in-chief of our magazine.

## ANGOLA NAS TRINCHEIRAS



José M. Ortiz

# Lumumba's legacy and a decision that changed the course of African history

Angola's recent history brings to mind what occurred in the Congo (Leopoldville) when the Belgians (who were just as rapacious colonialists as the Portuguese) granted the country its "independence" on June 1, 1960. Of course, the two events differed somewhat, but the imperialist designs were essentially the same: to frustrate the true independence of a country recently freed from colonialism. The Belgian colonial legacy left Lumumba a country with millions of illiterates, and no technicians or professionals in any branch of the economy, education or health; a country rife with rivalries, enmity and tribal hostilities. And appalling poverty.



Patrice Lumumba was the unquestionable leader of the Congolese people. When, as prime minister, he formed his country's first government, he was forced to make concessions to people without scruples, to people who were



traders of independence, selfish and ambitious. He was forced to allow each province to organize its own government, with the corresponding bureaucratic bodies. And he was, furthermore, obliged to accept the traitor Joseph Kasavubu as president.

It wasn't long before Belgium, on the bald pretext that the Congolese were inept at self-government, landed troops in the Congo. Lumumba called for unity as he denounced the landing. He called for UN help to expel the invaders and reestablish his country's integrity. But what happened was just the opposite.

The imperialist "divide and conquer" policy was put into effect once again in that country. The rich and dissident province of Katanga, penetrated by imperialism, received military support under the very nose of the UN.

By the time Lumumba turned to Guinea, Ghana, Mali and other countries for aid it was too late.

US imperialism and NATO had been quick to take open advantage of the conjuncture. On January 17, 1961, with the complicity of troops bearing the blue flags of the UN, they deposed, arrested and murdered Patrice Lumumba. At that time the young Cuban Revolution was defending itself with arms against the direct attacks of the yankee imperialists.

Lumumba left a letter, which was published posthumously. The letter was written to his wife, Pauline. But in light of the events in Angola, it takes on new relevance. The letter states:

<sup>1</sup> KATANGA. Congolese province nearly 500,000 sq. kms. in size. It makes up one-fourth of the territory of the Congo, now known as Zaire. It possesses 70% of the world's production of radium, enough copper reserves for 65 years of extraction, half of the world's cobalt reserves and most of its germanium. Plus gold, silver, zinc and cadmium mines. It is administered by the Union Minière company, which has US, French, English and Belgian interests.



My dear comrade: I'm writing you these words without even knowing when they will reach you or whether I will be alive when they do. During my entire struggle for our country's independence, I have never for one moment doubted the final victory of the sacred cause for which my comrades and I have dedicated our lives. But the Belgian colonialists and their Western allies, who have found direct and indirect, declared and undeclared support among high officials of the UN (that body in which we placed our trust when we asked for its assistance), never wanted what we did for our country: its right to an honorable life, unblemished dignity, unrestricted independence.

They corrupted some of our compatriots and bought others, distorted the truth and besmirched our independence. What else can I say? Dead or alive, free or imprisoned under the orders of colonialism, it's not my person that counts. What counts is the Congo and our poor people, with their independence transformed into a cage where they look in at us from outside with a certain benevolent compassion, with joy and pleasure. But my faith will remain unshaken.

I know, and I feel it from the bottom of my soul, that sooner or later my people will free themselves from their enemies, domestic and foreign; that they will rise up as one to say No to degrading and shameful colonialism, and to reconquer their dignity under a pure sun.

We are not alone. Africa, Asia and the free and liberated peoples in every corner of the

world are always at the side of the millions of Congolese who will not stop fighting until the day when there are no more colonizers or their mercenaries in our country.

I want you to tell my children, whom I may never see again, that the Congo has a beautiful future. The Congo expects them, like all Congolese, to carry out the sacred task of rebuilding our independence and our sovereignty; because without dignity there is no freedom, without justice there is no dignity, and without independence no one is free.

The brutality, the ferocity, the torture have never led me to ask for clemency, because I would rather die with my head held high, with my faith unswerving and with profound confidence in our country's destiny, than live in submission and in disdain of the principles which I hold sacred.

One day history will have its say, but it won't be the history that is taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations. It will be the history that is taught in the countries freed from colonialism and its puppets. Africa will write its own history, of glory and dignity, north and south of the Sahara.

Don't cry for me, comrade. I know that my country, which suffers so much, will know how to defend its independence and its freedom.

Long live the Congo!

Long live Africa!

Those were other times. Without doubt Patrice Lumumba's legacy has stayed in the minds of many. It was a living legacy. A decision that took this legacy into account was to change the course of African history.

The progressive people and countries of Africa have much reason to thank President Agostinho Neto for his courageous decision. At the most difficult moment, when shells were already falling in the streets of Luanda and the invasion of that African country was already a consummate fact, Agostinho Neto calmly asked for the necessary aid to stem the attack. He sought the aid of revolutionary countries, and he did not succumb. If he had not acted thus, he and thousands of his compatriots would have been murdered, and his country would have been submerged again in the ignominy of slavery. His decision changed the course of African history, of world history. Lumumba's legacy remains alive and well.

#### **PATRICE LUMUMBA: The Leader**

Patrice Lumumba, the indisputable African leader whose cowardly assassination had universal implications, was born in the tiny hamlet of Kasai, in Kate-Kombe, Congo, on July 2, 1925.

His father was from the Batetela tribe, which was known for its guerrilla struggle against the Belgian colonialists in the 1890s.

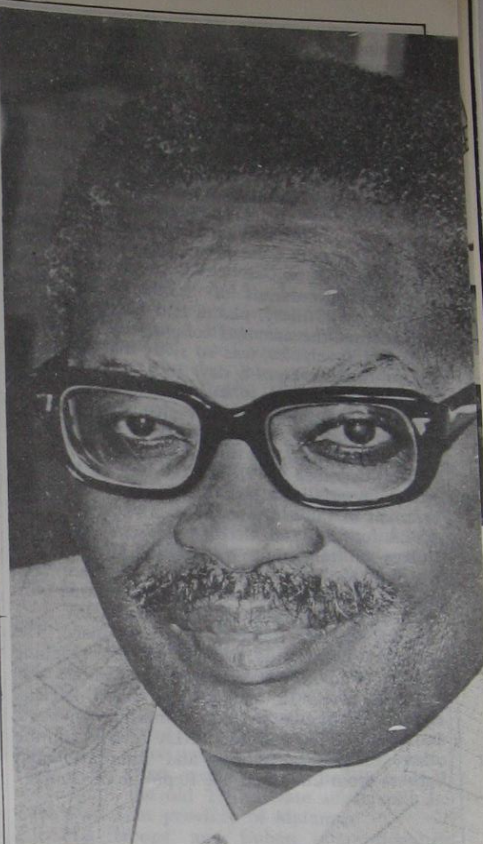
Lumumba studied in Catholic and Protestant missionary schools. Later, when he reached adulthood, he initiated his country's independence struggle and was given the highest position in the new government of the recently freed Belgian colony.

As prime minister, and representing Congolese unity, he denounced the imperialist powers — especially the United States and Belgium, which continued exploiting his country's natural wealth. He was assassinated, along with his most faithful supporters, on January 17, 1961.

#### **The origins of the aggression**

Yankee imperialism's strategic plan to destroy the Angolan revolution was hatched from the moment the US and its allies realized that the MPLA and its leaders, headed by Agostinho Neto, were preparing to make a revolution.

The people's revolutionary vanguard had held firm until November 11. It had rejected the attempts to keep it out of the provisional government — attempts that ranged from creating



President Agostinho Neto.

divisions in its ranks, to the armed attacks against its members by the FNLA and UNITA.

When these attempts failed, imperialism had a last resort: a large-scale aggression to take over the country and destroy the revolutionary movement. Some of the events tied to this plan were closely linked to Nixon's June 19, 1974 meeting with [Portuguese General Antonio] Spínola, in which they spoke of the situation in Angola and the rest of the Portuguese colonies that were fighting for their independence. Months later, on September 14, Mobutu and Spínola met on Salt Island, Cape Verde.

They agreed that Zaire would annex the wealthy enclave of Cabinda, to allow the foreign capitalist consortia to continue their exploitation of the natural gas reserves in that Angolan

province. It was also agreed that a puppet government would be installed in Luanda that would serve the yankee imperialists and the colonialist interests in Africa. The president of what would be called a "federation" would be Mobutu, and Holden Roberto would be vice-president. This was imperialism's strategic plan; this was what the attack stemmed from.

The racist South African invasion of Angolan territory took place on August 23, 1975. The pretext: to "protect" the hydroelectric plants and facilities in Calueque and Ruacanã. Just two months later, on October 23, Angola was invaded by armored columns of South Africans, supported by artillery, planes and helicopters. The advance of the armored column, which counted 100 to 150 vehicles, was so swift that it covered 60 to 70 kilometers a day. In a short time the column was close to Luanda.<sup>2</sup> Mercenary and Zairian troops were simultaneously advancing on the Angolan capital, and were now only 25 kilometers away.

On November 5, 1975, in the face of this criminal imperialist attack, the revolutionary government of Cuba responded to a request by the MPLA for aid, and decided to send the first Cuban military unit to Angola. Meanwhile a handful of Cuban instructors who had been training the Angolans since October, along with soldiers from FAPLA, repulsed the enemy.

From then on fierce battles took place. The scene of battle was a high plateau reaching heights of up to 2,400 meters. On the one side were hundreds of mercenaries, South African and Zairian regulars, Chinese military advisers, and the UNITA and the FNLA forces. On the other, the FAPLA troops and internationalist fighters from Cuba and the Republic of Guinea.



In this way the Angolan people, organized into the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) under the leadership of their president, Agostinho Neto, made a significant historical contribution to the Revolution that has been unfolding in the oft-plundered continent of Africa.

The yankees and other interventionists and imperialists argued about the course of this speedy war, which the South African racists and the Zairians had almost won in the first stages. But they were stopped dead in their tracks at the very gates of the Angolan capital, and put to flight back to their own borders.

With the help of Cuba and the Soviet Union, this revolutionary and internationalist war changed the course of history on the African continent. In just 143 days South Africa and its allies were defeated. In just three and a half months one million square kilometers of Angolan territory — an area almost nine times the size of Cuba — was liberated. On March 27, 1976, Premier Vorster, who represented the white racist minority on the African continent, was forced to admit defeat. He announced to the world the total withdrawal of South African troops from Angolan territory.

This exploded many myths in Africa, among them, that of South African invincibility and the myth of the white mercenaries. It showed the world once again that what counts is not the weapons, but the people who wield them: their consciousness, their proletarian ideology. As Fidel Castro has said, "the victory in Angola was the twin sister of the victory at Girón [the Bay

<sup>2</sup> The whole world was glued to their tv sets or transistor radios, which were broadcasting the news about Angola. On November 27, 1975 the South African government, whose troops had penetrated into Angolan territory months earlier without any prior declaration of war, was forced by the circumstances to admit its military intervention in Angola.

The London BBC broadcast the following bulletin that day: "London. Official sources in Pretoria, the capital of South Africa, have confirmed that they sent South African military advisers and equipment into Angola, to assist two movements fighting there (the National Front and UNITA).

"Our correspondent says that South African army units are also protecting the Calueque hydroelectric station, are giving food and shelter to those who have been made homeless, and are pursuing guerrillas from the Southwest African People's Organization. One of the reports indicates that there are 150 South African soldiers with armored vehicles guarding the pumping station

"During a press conference the South African defense minister urged the western powers to intervene directly to keep the Russians out of Angola. He stated that Soviet and Cuban officers were heading the people's movement army units."

Angolan combatants patrol the streets of Luanda on Liberation Day.



of Pigs]. Angola was an African Girón for the yankee imperialists."

#### Luanda: November 1975

South Africa's war against Angola began silently.

The Portuguese had not yet left their soon-to-be former colony when the South African invaders began to unload their military equipment in the north and the south — in Carmona and Nova Lisboa. They were so sure of their victory that they had planned a pompous dinner in Luanda on November 11 to celebrate the success of the future imperialist federation.

When the first Cuban material aid and instructors — previously requested by President Neto — arrived in Angola at the beginning of October, regular Zairian units had already appeared north of Luanda. The South African threat was increasingly obvious. Since August South African troops had been making a show of strength in the south, where they had occupied Calueque and Ruacanã without encountering any resistance.<sup>3</sup> Since nothing happened, South Africa was able to use this part of African territory as a beachhead when, on October 23, it initiated its offensive to the north aimed at occupying Luanda. The Portuguese also

played a role in this, withdrawing from Cabinda ahead of schedule. It was a premeditated plan to turn Angola over to imperialist interests.

A study of the situation led the Cuban instructors to the conclusion that the students in the four schools that had been set up in Angola would have only a few days to acquire the indispensable theoretical knowledge. They were right: the trainees engaged in their first battle in Salazar (now renamed Ndalatando) after barely finishing their first firing practise. There were recruits who left the shooting range at the end of the practise session, climbed into trucks and headed toward the besieged Luanda.

On November 3, cadets of the FAPLA Training Center for Recruits in Benguela and their Cuban instructors entered into combat against the South Africans. Five days later, on November 8, regular troops from Zaire, backed by tanks, advanced on Cabinda. Angolans and Cubans repulsed the invaders there.

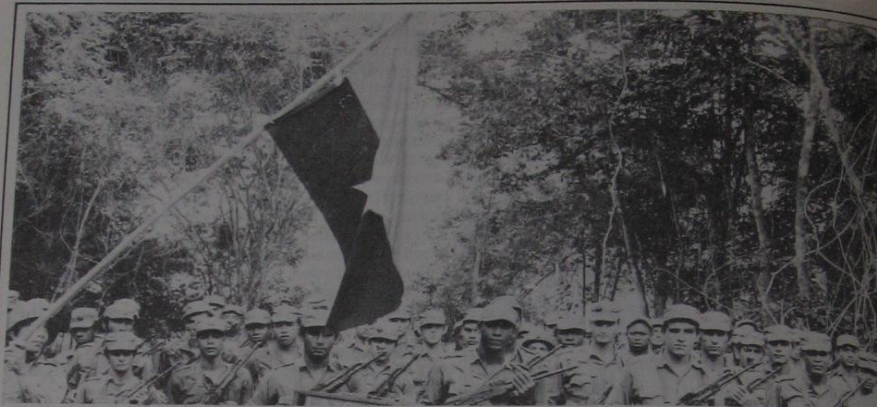
From November 8 to 10 the first members of a reinforced battalion of special troops from the Cuban Ministry of the Interior, supported by mortar squads of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and antitank equipment arrived at Luanda by air. They came in the old Britannia planes flown by intrepid Cuban pilots from Cubana de Aviación, who carried out 101 flights of this type between Havana and Angola. An artillery regiment of the FAR was on its way by boat. These trips were increased because of the urgency of the situation, until they came to form a large convoy of merchant ships bringing enough men and arms to win the war. Thus began Operation Carlota. It was named after an Afro-Cuban slave woman who, on November 5, 1843 — 132 years earlier — had died in a slave uprising at the old Triumvirate sugar mill in Cuba's western province of Matanzas.

FAPLA troops and Cuban internationalist combatants quickly organized a line of defense to contain the aggressors. The South Africans advanced from the south and the Zairians, FNLA and mercenaries from the north. *Radio Zaire* issued its first threatening proclamation, and Holden Roberto himself announced defiantly that he would be in Luanda on November 6. He didn't make it, but the situation grew worse in the following days: the 7th, 8th, 9th... On the 10th the situation was grave. Those defending the capital had only a battery of two 120 mm. mortars, one of them without ammunition.

"Once the other one ran out of ammunition", the Cubans said, "there was nothing left to do but throw the mortars at the heads of the enemy. We couldn't lose the capital."

The invaders made an air surveillance that day and those defending the capital decided to change all the artillery positions that same night. It was a decision that saved the situation,

<sup>3</sup> The first aid from Cuba included 480 military specialists who were to set up four training centers for the FAPLA in Ndalatando, Benguela, Saurimo and Cabinda; organize 16 infantry battalions, plus 25 mortar and anti-aircraft batteries; a medical brigade; 115 vehicles, and communications equipment.



because the next day when the enemy forces renewed their softening up barrage they found nothing in the old artillery positions.

It was then that the Soviet aid arrived: the anxiously awaited BM-21s. Now everything began to change radically. When the rockets went into action the capital was saved. Enemy casualties were tremendous. The FNLA officially revealed that their casualties were more than 345, not counting those of the Zairians. It was under these conditions that Angolan independence was proclaimed in Luanda on November 11. The old Portuguese colony now had all the appearance of a State, but most of its territory was in the hands of the imperialists.

I arrived in Luanda with the first contingents of special troops which had been sent urgently from Havana to contain the multiple aggression by the South African racists, Zairians and the UNITA and FNLA bands. The Angolan capital was extremely tense.

FAPLA troop trucks were passing through the streets on the way to the garrisons. Few vehicles besides military ones travelled on the broad avenues going in and out of this African capital.

The spacious palm-lined sea road, which leads to the port, appeared completely deserted. Only a few curious onlookers ventured out at night. The only indication that the country was at war was an occasional accidental burst from the modern G-3 rifles wielded by the improvised soldiers of the homeland, or real encounters with members of the FNLA or Zairian troops, who were still hiding out in various spots.

The businesses that opened their doors announced liquidation sales at rock-bottom prices, as though the world were coming to an end. Many of these stores belonged to Portuguese who, upon witnessing the events, ac-

celerated their decision to leave. They were already packing their suitcases to abandon the country after investing their *escudos* in the merchandise on sale. The poor, who generally did not have access to these stores, took advantage of the close-out sales to buy the cheap goods. There were many Angolans who had family members fighting at the front, and had no plans to leave. They had faith in the future of the Revolution.

In another part of the city, far from the business section, lines of all kinds of military vehicles were entering the old Grafanil camp and the paratroopers field, from which troops were being sent to their assigned posts.

The military airport was a boiling pot. People arrived, were immediately given their supplies, and departed for various fronts. There were long, strong hugs as those who'd made the long journey from the Caribbean together said their good-bys and took off in different directions. Many would never see each other again. There were, of course, different kinds of missions. This produced envy — in the positive sense of the word — for those who had the honor of heading toward the front lines. But, in the final analysis, all were here to complete the mission entrusted to them with a great sense of duty. And they fulfilled their duty.

In this whirlpool, without any time to lose — because every minute was decisive in those times — the MPLA military and people were given basic training in the use of infantry arms. This was Luanda in November 1975. The 140s thundered as their shells landed nearby at the entrances to the capital. The FNLA and Zairian mercenaries were only 25 kilometers away, but they were driven back. ●