

## THE BATTLE OF THE TRUTH AND MARTIN BLANDINO'S BOOK (Part III and final)

As the dramatic combats developed in Cangamba we could see that the enemy intended more than an isolated action. First, we had to save the Cuban internationalists and the men of the 32nd Brigade FAPLA.

On August 7, in a handwritten letter I sent to those besieged, we promised they would be rescued at all costs.

The assault and landing brigade was sent from Cuba by air. If need be, all the available means would be used, that's why we urged them to resist as they did. Once the mission of crushing the assailing forces had been accomplished other measures had to be adopted to break up the enemy's strategic plans. In his historic research, Blandino reconstructs the enemy's intentions based on proofs and testimonies he collected:

"Not only Cangamba is under enemy fire, but also Munhango, Calapo, Tempue and Luena --villages located north of Cangumbe-- are being simultaneously attacked with artillery and mortar fire. Only Cangumbe has been seized; in the other places the enemy is repelled. The aggressor's strategic objective is to isolate the Moxico province and to prevent the arrival of reinforcements, then seize Luena, a city it intends to proclaim the capital of a so-called 'black republic' severed from Angola. After this, it would seek international recognition. But, at the moment, its purpose is to seize Cangamba and to capture or kill the Cuban advisors there. It is betting on the political, moral and psychological impact of such a blow."

"Division General Leopoldo Cintra Frias:

"Their plan is to seize the whole place, capturing the eighty-two Cubans there to try forcing Cuba to negotiate directly with UNITA, leaving the Angolan government out."

"General N'Dalu:

"Being aware of the Cuban presence there, UNITA resorts to a major force, many troops, to try to capture them and present them to the international press; that's why they make such efforts. We are extremely worried about that; if Cuban prisoners were exposed it would be bad for everything, for the struggle we're carrying forward and all. On the other hand, our people are suffering there, too."

"The testimony of Colonel Wambu --chief of Intelligence of FALA (Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola and a part of UNITA) during the Cangamba operation— is of great importance:

"The participation of the South African aviation is contemplated, above all, due to the Cuban presence. It can be considered the first confrontation between the joint South African and UNITA forces, and the forces of the Angolan State with the support it can get. The Cuban presence is of special strategic interest."

It is in Cangamba, after the enemy closes in from west and south, that the main blow is dealt with the 12th and 13th semi-regular brigades, two of its three most important units. Two other independent battalions and a special destiny company are also involved; three thousand men. The powerful concentration of forces counts on some fifty to sixty artillery and mortar pieces, seven 14.5 millimeters multiple antiaircraft systems known as "cuatrobocas", and portable antiaircraft rockets.

The abovementioned FALA colonel adds:

"Talking in classical terms, we have on the ground a brigade in an expanded disposition, since it's not only the three infantry battalions but considerably expanded troops. Although there are not South African ground troops, in terms of infantry the watchers and pointers for the air raids and the logistics and drivers, etc. bring the number of troops up to a battalion. We can speak of a conventional brigade of FALA troops, plus two battalions of command and services, and a combined battalion of men who support the logistics, artillery and air observation, in addition to liaison officers from the South African side, that is, officers from the intelligence services, the air force and other specialties."

"Lieutenant Colonel N'gongo (Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA):

"That same day the Western press starts reporting that Cangamba is under siege from some nine thousand men, therefore, sooner or later it will fall in UNITA hands."

The armored column that left Huambo, we add, reinforced Luena with enough forces to face any South African attack in that direction. This meant a remarkable progress. In order to go from Luanda, the Angolan capital to the West, towards Luena, capital of Moxico, it was imperative to move 687.5 miles by road, a distance similar to that between Havana City and Santiago de Cuba. The bridges had been destroyed by the UNITA gangs. The supplying caravans and the constructors of provisional passages to supply the populations had a hard time advancing along the road. The key places had to be protected. The armored column from Menongue was strongly reinforced --and the South front with her-- by the already mentioned fresh tank battalions sent from Cuba. We were stronger. But we would still have to wait four more years and endure the consequences of Konstantin's erratic strategies that cost the Angolans so many lives.

The Soviet advisor had arrived in the Peoples Republic of Angola at the end of 1982 as chief of his country's Military Mission. Once his tour of duty had been completed he returned to the USSR in 1985, but in 1987 he was back in the African country with a higher military rank. He was the strategist of the absurd offensives towards Jamba in the remote Angolan Southeast where Savimbi's hypothetical commanding post was located, while the UNITA bandits, with South African support, operated in municipalities close to Luanda, as I have said on previous occasions. However, the last of these offensives with the usual disastrous outcome led to the Cuito Cuanavale battle, which marked the beginning of the end of apartheid when the Angolan units, uselessly battered were falling back and the South African army clashed with the tank brigade, the BM-21s and the Cuban forces sent to defend the old NATO air base.

At that decisive moment, the President of Angola fully supported our viewpoints. As soon as the last shots were heard in the distant bulwark, over 30 thousand Angolan troops and 40 thousand Cuban internationalist combatants advanced along the Angolan Southwest towards the South African lines on the Namibian border. They marched with their well-trained chiefs and officers who had accumulated experience in the struggle. A great number of tanks, antiaircraft rocket artillery together with other weapons and the corresponding personnel were sent from Cuba.

With a relatively small number of MiG-23 aircrafts and the audacity of our pilots, we became the masters of the air, even though they were not that many when compared with the number of South African fighter planes. The USSR still existed. It was a country that showed its solidarity with Cuba. Gorbachev had become the top leader of the Party and State. I sent him a personal message urgently asking him to provide 12 additional

MiG-23 fighter planes. He gave a positive response.

In a matter of weeks, we had built an advanced airstrip to the Southwest of Angola, over 125 miles from

the place where the most important defense line in the area had been. Our main problem was the shortage of additional fuel tanks for the MiGs. It was practically impossible that anyone would give us a few more. Anyway, the South African barracks in the frontline were within our reach and, except for distant fighter planes, they had hardly any antiaircraft weapons. The few additional tanks would enable us to strike on the racists as far as Windhoek, the capital of Namibia.

Nevertheless, South Africa had seven nuclear weapons supplied by the Reagan administration. Based on certain information, we had guessed that they might have them. Thus, we placed explosive charges in the levee of an important water reservoir inside Angola built by the Portuguese colonialists almost on the Namibian border, near the main positions occupied by the South African army in that country. The Cuban and Angolan troops were conveniently deployed in case those weapons were eventually used to strike them. Nothing could beat the selfless heroism of the internationalist combatants determined to put an end to apartheid.

South Africa failed to withstand the challenge and negotiated after the first blows dealt in that direction, still inside the Angolan territory. For months the Yankees, the racists, the Angolans, the Soviets and the Cubans sat at the same table. And there was Konstantin, with the ones advocating our cause. I had already met him and had tried to prevent his feeling humiliated by our discrepancies and our successes. He was undoubtedly influential with the military command of the glorious Soviet Army. His mistakes had an important bearing on our country's decision to prevent the racists from intervening in Angola and to rectify the political mistakes made by the Soviet leadership in 1976.

In an act of generosity towards a man who had been our adversary in strategic matters, we decided to present him with the "Che Guevara" Order. He apparently received it with satisfaction. His worst mistake was not what he had done before, but what he did later. The USSR had disappeared and Konstantin made opportunistic statements slandering Cuba, which had been so generous to him. The professional military of Cangamba, who advocated the absurd initiatives he proposed and invented the useless offensives towards remote Jamba, had been conquered by the enemy's anti-Cuban ideology. Not many of his patriotic countrymen will defend him.

Konstantin was his war name. One day I mentioned his real name, with no last names; it was the one I remembered then. I don't want to bring it up again.

Savimbi remained loyal to his adventurous and mercenary spirit. Initially, he was at the service of the Portuguese colonialists; later, of the South African racists, and eventually, he was directly at the service of the Yankee imperialists. When the apartheid system was removed by the very South African people and the stunning blow it received in Angola, the Yankees put him under the protection of Mobutu, who had amassed a \$40 billion fortune from plundering Zaire. Europe surely knows this story well. Savimbi collected diamonds in the Center and North of Angola for himself and UNITA. He thus continued his brutal war against the Angolans. But the Cubans were no longer there; once their mission had been duly fulfilled, they had rigorously observed their gradual withdrawal schedule.

The FAPLA, by then a brave and experienced armed force, crushed Savimbi's pro-Yankee army supported by Mobutu. Then UNITA had no option but to abandon the revolt. The Angolan nation could preserve its independence and integrity.

It is necessary that young revolutionary internationalists, with deep feelings and willing to act, put on record for history the actions carried out by the Cuban people. The FAR are for our Party an unassailable bulwark, a Mambi Army which this time was not, and never will be disarmed.

**Fidel Castro Ruz**

**October 14, 2008**

**11:36 a.m.**

**Date:**

14/10/2008

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**Source URL:** <http://www.comandanteenjefe.biz/en/articulos/battle-truth-and-martin-blandinos-book-part-iii-and-final>