

THE CUBAN SOUTH AFRICAN CLASH

By
Pierre van der Walt circa 2008

IN THE BEGINNING

*On 26 October 1975 the first **Cuban** soldier to die on African soil, **one of six to die that day, was killed at Luimbale, Huambo province, Angola, by Combat Group Foxbat**, a fighting force consisting of a battalion of **Unita soldiers** and a **squadron of South African armoured cars**, led by career officers of the South African Defence Force in disguise during a **war that was not taking place**.*

* * *

How did it happen that Cuba first clashed with South Africans in Angola during a **secret war**? Especially since in excess of 10,000 kilometers of Atlantic Ocean and the equator separate the closest shorelines of these two countries.

How did it happen that these first secret clashes escalated into a full-scale war?

A war which, at the time, played host to the **biggest tank battle since World War II**? A war during which more artillery shells dropped on the combatants in a battle than were dropped on South African forces at Dellville Wood in 1916. A war which saw Cubans and South Africans kill each other on territory foreign to both over a period of 4,625 days; twelve years, eight months and two days.

* * *

4.1 From the Frying Pan into the Fire

To find answers to these questions, we must first examine how Cuba was drawn into the Angolan conflict. When the Marxist regime of Fidel Castro officially took to power on 16 February 1959, revolutionary spirits were high. High on Cloud 9 of revolutionary success **Castro and Guevara aspired to extend the Cuban Marxist Revolution to other parts of the world** they wanted to change. Their first attempts were in Latin America and Cuba quite heavily involved itself in stoking the fires of revolution in that part of the world. Africa did not escape this. Castro said: 'The **blood of Africa flows freely through our veins. Most of our ancestors came from Africa as slaves**.'¹ He thus felt compelled to extend his revolution to the turbulent shores of the Dark Continent.

To achieve this, **Guevara toured Africa** – spitting the fire and brimstone of revolution to the receptive audience of African nationalists straining against the yoke of colonialism. Perhaps unwittingly Guevara lay the foundations for Cuban involvement in subsequent African conflicts. More to the point. During his 1965 travels Guevara met **Dr Agostino Neto in Brazzaville, Congo**. At the time Cuba was training soldiers in the Congo. Guevara agreed with Neto to **train MPLA** (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) recruits. Consequently ninety MPLA recruits were sent to Angola for training.² At the same time Cuba commenced shipping **provisions to the MPLA via Ponte Noire** - effectively hooking Cuba into potential MPLA conflicts.³

During the period 1968 – 1970 Cuba suffered considerable economic setbacks which resulted in considerable **Cuban reliance on Russian aid**. Being dependant on Russian aid forced Cuba to toe the line of Russian foreign policy, but that included assistance to the MPLA, as Russia had been providing the MPLA with weaponry virtually from its inception.⁴

Holden Roberto's FNLA (Frente Nacional de de Libertação de Angola) received considerable military **assistance from the Red Chinese**. Neto was worried that the FNLA would overshadow the MPLA and approached the Cubans during March 1975 to match Chinese assistance to the FNLA. The **Portuguese** were faltering after the **fall of the Caetano regime** and the decision that the colonies would gain independence. The Portuguese therefore granted permission for the **Cubans to establish four MPLA training camps inside Angola** at Salazar (now Dalatando), Benguela, Henrique de Carvalho (now Saurimo) and Cabinda.⁵

This permission **opened the door for an influx of Cubans into Angola** and CIA operator John Stockwell later reported to the USA Subcommittee on Africa that: 'During the summer of 1975 there were approximately 260 Cubans advising the MPLA in Angola.'⁶

Anybody that has ever been in the military knows that it is virtually impossible for an instructor to stay out of the fight. Firstly because an instructor has a hard time letting his chickens stray from under the safety of his wings, and secondly because instructors want to see how their protégé's perform. Ignore not the desire of any true soldier or instructor to have a bite at the combat cherry in the hope that his political master will never cotton on. In Angola it was no different. By August 1975 the FNLA reported that the Cuban advisors were fighting alongside the MPLA.⁷

In view of the Cuban desire to expand the revolution, it does not seem that the Cuban advisors were restrained by Cuba - even during these early stages. This view is supported by Castro's later utterance of a statement to the effect that: 'Imperialists will not understand why Cuba is fighting in Angola. Unlike Imperialists Cuba does not seek oil, copper, diamonds or other raw materials. Cuba cannot remain passive while an African nation, a sister nation, is swallowed by Imperialism and brutal attacks by South Africa.'⁸

South Africa had been training ex-Angolan refugees of Bushmen extraction since September 1974, and a combat team from 2 SA Infantry Battalion was deployed in the Calueque, Ruacana, Beacon 5½ triangle on 10 August 1975⁹ – coinciding roughly with the FNLA reports of Cuban combat participation.

For Cuba and South Africa to lock horns the stage was set, the actors were hired and on location. Only the script remained unwritten.

But that was soon to change.

* * *

4.2 Operation Savannah - Face to Face for the First Time

By October 1975 there were approximately 3,000 Cubans assisting the MPLA forces. South Africa heeded Unita's call for assistance and secretly launched Operation Savannah.

The first shots fired in anger during Operation Savannah were discharged on 4 October 1975 between Norton de Matos and Luimbale by Combat Group Foxbat under command of Commandant (Lieutenant-Colonel in current SANDF lingo) Eddie Webb. It discharged a Land-Rover mounted AA gun at an MPLA reconnaissance aircraft and soon drew return fire. No Cubans were involved in this scrap.

On 26 October 1975 Combat Group Foxbat had made it to Luimbale, east central Angola, and situated about 185 kilometers east of the coastal city Lobito. The town was occupied by a FAPLA (MPLA's armed forces and the acronym for Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola) consisting of three armoured cars, two tanks and 250 infantrymen. Cmdt. Webb ordered three troops (12) of armoured cars backed by a number of infantrymen to take the town.

The Eland 90 armoured cars, painted green not to resemble their brown South African origins, parked in a semi-circle on high ground outside the town and fired two shells into it. The FAPLA armour responded by charging the Foxbat contingent. The little Eland's South African crews acquitted themselves with distinction and the enemy armour was destroyed – the closest at a range of no more than 75 yards! The FAPLA armour destroyed had Cuban crews – six of whom died during the charge.¹⁰ The Unita infantry then stormed Luimbale and took it.

An interesting fact is that when these armoured cars were first donated by South Africa to Unita, they were to be crewed by Unita troops. Towards the end of September 1975 it was realized that the Unita troops would not master the equipment timeously and permission was granted for South African crews to man the cars.¹¹ This proved a fateful decision, as it was these white South African armoured car crews whom the journalist and Reuters correspondent, Fred Bridgland, stumbled into during a visit to the Unita HQ at Silva Porto (now Kuito) in the central Angolan Bié province. This chance encounter led to Bridgland exposing to the world that the South African military was involved in the Angolan conflict.¹² Bridgland's exposure had grave consequences, such as the termination of USA aid to Unita and the ostracisation of South Africa. Be that as it may – Bridgland's exposure could not have been more inopportune or embarrassing to all involved.

* * *

The South African leadership elements assigned to both Combat Group Foxbat (central Angolan front) and Task Force Zulu (western Angolan front) initially experienced a great deal of combat lethargy from their Unita troops. Although this does not directly relate to the Cuban / South African conflict, one of the greatest

vignettes demonstrating this occurred at Cuvelai, when **Task Force Zulu's Battle Group Bravo** (later to become the supremely effective **32 Battalion**) under the command of the famous **Colonel Jan Breytenbach**, first **clashed with its supposed allies - Unita**.

As Bravo entered **Cuvelai** all the **town lights were on**. This surprising state of affairs raised suspicions, which were largely allayed when an **unarmed Unita lieutenant** stepped into the street to welcome Bravo and offered to lead them to his HQ in the old Portuguese military barracks (*quartel*). The next moment the town was **turned into darkness** as somebody threw its power switch. **Machine gun fire immediately erupted from buildings to the left of Col Breytenbach** and his group. Bravo's men dropped to ground and returned fire. One of the greatest problems of **night combat is to master accurate shooting as the natural tendency is to shoot high**. The inexperience of both groups showed as everybody shot high and soon the town's thatched roof buildings were ablaze. Nothing happened when Col Breytenbach gave the order to his men to go on the attack and clear the town. This infuriated Breytenbach and with the assistance of Cpl Nel, they bodily had to drag their troops two by two into attack positions!¹³

The Cuban officers suffered the same fate. Although the **Cuban officers were brave to the extent that they fought until death, it could not be said of their FAPLA cronies**. As the regularity of contacts between the Cuban led FAPLA forces trapped between Combat Group Foxbat moving westwards towards Benguela and Lobito, and those fleeing ahead of Task Force Zulu streaking northwards to the same towns, increased, the extent of the Cuban involvement and problems became increasingly clear. Reports to Combat Group Foxbat mentioned that the **Cuban officers were shooting down FAPLA troops when these evacuated defensive positions before the Cuban order** to do so was given.¹⁴

During November 1975 near Cacula (for Foxbat) and Catengue for (Task Force Zulu) that actual Cuban participation in battles became evident and changed the nature of the clashes somewhat. After Task Force Zulu occupied a deserted **Catengue**, Cmdt Breytenbach sent Capt Jack Dippenaar's B-Company to safeguard the north-western approaches to the town on 2 November 1975. Barely out of town the combat team came under artillery bombardment. It soon transpired that the combat team had run into a well-prepared ambush consisting of anti-tank positions armed with RPG-7's and recoilless guns supported by mortars and about four BM-21 122mm multiple rocket launchers. After a prolonged battle which required committing reinforcements the ambushers were eventually forced to abandon their positions and flee. The Task Force came across a number of battle maps on which notes had been made in Spanish. Several radios were also captured and by intercepting messages on these it was determined that 70 Cubans had manned the sophisticated weaponry the artillery and the Stalin Organs (BM-21 Multiple Rocket Launcher).¹⁵

Battle Group Foxbat suffered much the same fate. On 4 November Cmdt Linford sent a combat team to **Cacula**. Just south of Cacula the patrol entered a well-laid ambush of which the fire lanes had been chopped open. It also contained several well-prepared concentrated small arms positions. The ambush contained a number of recoilless guns and mortars. All of these represented a much higher level of combat expertise than previously experienced, and represented a skills level previously unheard of amongst FAPLA forces. Even so the ambushers were quickly evicted from their positions, but the change in tactics did not escape the South African forces.

Although the odd dead Cuban had up to then pointed towards more than merely advisory involvement in the conflict, **these two battles provided the first tangible proof of active Cuban participation**. It was later discovered that the **Cuban Council of Ministers formally decided on 5 November 1975 to officially enter the Angolan war on the side of the MPLA**.¹⁶ Is it co-incidence that Cuban soldiers wholeheartedly entered the fray a few days earlier?

The **full force, effect and ruthlessness of Cuban participation** became evident on 23 November 1975. As **Combat Group Foxbat retreated from an ambush at Ebo**, Task Force Zulu's Battle Group Bravo was dispatched to take up position north of Santa Comba to cover Foxbat's retreat. Somehow Bravo's C-Company had been attached to Foxbat after the evacuation of Moçamedes. As **Foxbat retreated a Cuban ambush allowed the leading armoured vehicles to pass through the death acre and then opened up on the following infantry, C-Company**. **Eighty men were cut down by the Cubans**, who then mercilessly proceeded to **execute the helpless wounded**.

Details of the atrocity at Santa Comba were conveyed to his commander, Cmdt Jan Breytenbach, by Sgt Almarindo Marao who had crawled several kilometers through the bush to escape the massacre after having been shot through both legs.¹⁷

After Santa Comba the South Africans and the Cubans regularly battled each other for the remainder of Operation Savannah. One of the better known such subsequent clashes took place on 12 December 1975 at Bridge 14 on the Nhia river. It was here that the ex-Mozambican, Sgt Danny Roxo extracted a little revenge for Santa Comba by killing three Cubans and earned himself a Honoris Crux, and where Lt Louw van Vuuren did the same.

Sgt Roxo was sent to check whether **Bridge 14** was functional. Doing so Roxo encountered a Cuban on the far side of the bridge and killed him. Having done his job in establishing that the bridge was down, Roxo retreated but came under fire from Cuban and FAPLA soldiers that emerged from their hiding places – fully expecting to kill Roxo. Roxo returned fire from the hip and killed 11, four of whom were Cubans.¹⁸

Van Vuuren's Honoris Crux was earned in equally spectacular fashion. First he knocked a previously unseen Cuban mortar post out with his Eland 90. Then he **blew a truck carrying about 20 escaping Cubans** to smithereens and for good measure followed that up by **popping 11 Cubans** from amongst a number swarming over his **Eland with his Star 9mm pistol** through the partially opened hatch.¹⁹ Little wonder we called Van Vuuren 'Daan Kubaan'. Although the combat success at Bridge 14 boosted South African morale, it has a sad note to it. While recovering deserted enemy vehicles a small contingent of South African Technical Service Corps members drove too far past the Bridge 14 stronghold and were captured. Cpl J Terblanche, and troopers R Wilson, R Wiehan and G Danny. They were paraded in Luanda as proof of the South African involvement, but all were later returned to South Africa in terms of a POW exchange agreement.²⁰

Also at Bridge 14 the South African captured 122mm BM-21 multiple rocket launchers. So impressed were the South African commanders with the BM-21 that Armscor used one to develop a much improved version for the South African Army, called the Valkiri.

In retrospect and bar Bridge 14, none of the post Santa Comba scraps of Operation Savannah had any real significance or bearing on the outcome of the war.

By the end of January 1976 South Africa had withdrawn to a line just north of the border between South West Africa and Angola, while the Cuban military presence in Angola had escalated to between 11,000 and 15,000 men.

4.1.3 The Whole Truth in Perspective

There is no denying that the **quasi South African forces mainly consisting of Combat Group Foxtrot and Task Force Zulu wiped everything in their path aside** most of the time, and then also did so with virtual impunity. **Neither FAPLA, nor the Cubans could hold sway** before it during the first year of hostilities. Task Force **Zulu covered 3,159 kilometers in 33 days**, while it staged **14 deliberate attacks and fought 21 skirmishes. It killed a total of 210 enemy soldiers, wounded 96 and captured 56. One South African was killed and 20 were wounded, while seven South African soldiers were captured.**

The above is the partial, popular version. Reading through **Spies's Angola – Operation Savannah 1975 – 1976**, one finds that the South Africans **lost 35 South Africans and five Portuguese**. Add to that the **80 men from Task Force Zulu's C-Company lost near Santa Comba plus the uncounted Unita operatives killed in the process**, which Spies so conveniently omitted because they were not South African, and the **death toll ratio changes**. In the article *Battle of Death Road*, Robert Moss **mentions 2,000 Cuban dead** if the scores of Foxbat, X-Ray and Orange (both established in November 1975) during Operation Savannah are added to Task Force Zulu's.

Comparing the **number of South Africans who faced a ten times larger and better equipped bunch of Cubans**, both combatants with Angolan assistance, it is fair to say that the **South Africans whipped the Cuban's (and FAPLA's) arses** good and solid during Operation Savannah. Not only that. **All the South African objectives were achieved**, and the South African Defence Force learnt invaluable lessons from these first encounters with the Cubans. Particularly that the **Cubans were opponents to be respected** and that future **battles would not be walk-overs**.

The bulls had locked horns and the table was set for the spectacular.

4.2 THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM 1976 – 1983

Everybody needed some time to recover after Operation Savannah. FAPLA and its Cuban cohorts most of all. During this period the South Africa Defence Force concentrated on preventing **Swapo** from getting to big for its boots through incisive operations such as Reindeer (1978), Safraan and Rekestok (1979), Sceptic

and Klipkop (1980), Carnation and Protea (1981), Super and Meebos (1982), Phoenix and Askari (1983) and Boswilger (1985).

Although South African forces experienced some scraps with the Cuban advised and led FAPLA forces, nothing much came of any potential conflict between South African and Cuban forces during the period 1976 – 1983.²¹

In an article titled ‘Operation Askari – a Sub Commander’s Retrospective View of the Operation’ Brig Dick Lord describes this period of the war as follows:

‘By 1983 the war in SWA/Angola had developed a predictable cyclical pattern. The seasonal variations allowed **SWAPO to take up the offensive during the summer passage of the Inter-tropical Convergence zone (ITCZ) across Northern South West Africa, The ITCZ is that low pressure belt of unstable moist air**, that traverses southwards to the latitude of Rehoboth during late October and November and returns northwards across Owamboland in late January through to April. The **passage of this belt gives rise to the phenomenon of the "small rains" before Christmas and the "big rains" from February to April**.

The **rainy season gave mobility to the SWAPO insurgents. It supplied the water they required for their trek to the south. The foliage on the trees and bushes provided concealment from the security forces. The very heavy rains washed out the tracks they had left, making follow-up difficult and they criss-crossed the full shonas to increase the difficulties of the trackers**. Therefore, the SWAPO insurgency, usually commenced in late January of every New Year and continued until the end of April, or early May, when the water started to dry up.

The **onset of the dry season** brought about a **change in the tactical situation, SWAPO withdrew its forces to bases in Angola for the so-called "rehearsals"** - the regrouping and refraining of their members, prior to the next year's incursion. With **SWAPO concentrated in bases, it became cost-effective for the SADF/SWATF to launch offensive operations into Angolan territory during the dry winter months**. The mobility of vehicles in the torrential rains of summer was always considered a restricting factor,

For many years, up to the spring of 1983, this had been the pattern of the conduct of the war, A summer incursion by SWAPO PLAN and a semi-conventional/conventional offensive by Security forces into Angola during the winter,

The military results of these activities were overwhelmingly in the favour of the security forces, as can be deduced from the following table of Operational losses:

YEAR	SWAPO LOSSES	SADF LOSSES	RATIO
1981	1,494	61	24,5 : 1
1982	1,280	77	16,6 : 1
1983	913	96	9,5 : 1

The **economic and socio-political effects on South West Africa and the SADF were however appreciable**. To counter an insurgency requires the deployment of a large number of forces, in the **ratio of about 1 insurgent to 8 security force personnel**. The direct cost factor is therefore considerable, as is the insidious effect of keeping able-bodied men out of the economic work force. An additional factor was the **war weariness of the population**. The war had become so predictable that it was difficult to foresee how this process of violence could be halted.²²

4.3 THE RUDE AWAKENING

4.3.1 Operation Askari - Touch and Go

Something was required to break the deadlock and the SADF decided to launch a semi-conventional operation using conventional arms against **Swapo PLAN (People’s Liberation Army of Namibia)**. The SADF also gained information that **Swapo was planning a full scale infiltration for early 1984**.²³ The timing of the **operation, Askari**, was set to commence **just after the ‘little rains’** in mid-December 1983,

while PLAN insurgents were still massed in their training bases before the start of their 1984 insurgency campaign.²⁴

Operation Askari was launched on 6 December 1983 in the small rains period. Although Operation Askari was **aimed at cutting PLAN communication and logistic lines** and through the attacks on PLAN, to **demoralize FAPLA** to such an extent that it withdrew from the area and therefore denied PLAN use of FAPLA logistics.²⁵

The plan against PLAN did **not go according to plan**. Four mechanised combat groups of 500 men each, namely X-Ray, Echo-Victor, Victor and Delta-Fox²⁶ were tasked to respectively attack Cahama, Mulondo, Caiundo and Cuvelai.²⁷ A fifth component comprising of 32 Battalion with the code-name Combat Team Tango was created to disrupt Swapo's intended infiltration into Ovamboland and the Kaokoland. As all 32 Battalion operations this also proved quite interesting but falls outside the scope of the SADF clash with the Cubans.

Far from being demoralized by the SADF attacks FAPLA joined the fray enthusiastically at Cuvelai on 3 January 1984. Assisted by two Cuban battalions and a company of T-54 tanks, FAPLA's 11th Brigade attacked the Battle Group Delta-Fox when it moved against SWAPO's headquarters outside Cuvelai.²⁸ Since Battle Group Delta-Fox was outnumbered roughly six to one²⁹, 61 Mechanised Battalion was rushed under battle conditions from Cahama to Cuvelai to assist the citizen force troops conducting the attack on Cuvelai.³⁰

Three days of bitter fighting ensued, but eventually the **South Africans had knocked out all 12 the T-54 with 90mm Ratel Armoured Personnel Carriers**.³¹ The **Cuban/FAPLA attack was warded off** and they suffered the loss of 324 men. **Documents and maps captured at Cuvelai proved conclusively that the Russians had also entered the Angolan war** and that Russian officers were commanding all the forces opposing the South Africans down to company level.³² The **SADF also suffered its heaviest losses** of the operation at Cuvelai – **21 men left that battlefield in body bags**³³ and 32 men lost their lives during the operation.³⁴

4.3.2 Surprisingly Successful

Although Operation Askari did not achieve most of its tactical objectives, it achieved its strategic objective. **Operation Askari stopped PLAN's 1984 offensive** in its tracks and increased the death ratio from its 1983 level of 9,5:1 to 23:1 for 1984. The operation proved to be a **watershed in the course of the Border War**. PLAN capability was reduced to the point where it no longer posed a major military threat, but having **prevented the SADF from achieving most of its micro objectives FAPLA grew in stature and replaced SWAPO as South Africa's main enemy**.³⁵ Large quantities of materiel was captured, including an AGS-17 30mm air cooled automatic grenade launcher and a complete SAM-9 surface to air missile defence system.³⁶

4.4 THUNDER BEFORE THE STORM 1987

4.4.1 Gathering of the Clouds

By **December 1985 it was obvious that the communists were becoming extremely serious about the Angolan** situation. The **highest ranking officer ever to be deployed outside Russia/Afghanistan, General, Konstantin Shaganovitch, a counter insurgency expert with extensive Afghan experience** was appointed as **supreme commander of all communist forces in Angola**.³⁷

Shaganovitch was backed by a force of **950 Soviet officers and 2,000 East Germans**³⁸, while the **Cuban force was increased to approximately 45,000 men**.³⁹ Apart from the **Regular FAPLA army of 20,000, SWAPO also fielded around 4,000 guerillas and the ANC (African National Congress) 900**.

In early **1986 FAPLA equipment consisted of 4 Ilyushin-76 transport aircraft**⁴⁰, **30 Mig-23' fighter bombers, 8 Su-22 ground attack planes, 33 Mig-24's, 27 Mi-24 (Hind) helicopters**⁴¹, **27 Allouettes, 68 Mi-8'and Mi-17 helicopters, 150 T-34 tanks, 350 T-55 tanks, 50 PT-76 amphibious tanks, plus the usual contingent of BTR-60 armoured personnel carriers, BMP-1 infantry combat vehicles, BM-14 and 21 multiple rocket launchers, M-46 field artillery, SA-8 and 13 surface to air missile systems**.⁴²

What is generally not mentioned is that during the **latter stages of the war FAPLA also deployed an incredible array of battlefield anti-aircraft radar** – probably the most complete and extensive such deployment that had ever occurred anywhere in the world up to then.

During March 1987 Recce teams operating deep inside Angola provided intelligence of massive **FAPLA military build-up** in the 3rd and 6th Military Regions, and obvious preparations for a **major maximum effort offensive against the UNITA strongholds in south-eastern Angola.**

4.4.2 Lightning Strikes Thrice - Death and Destruction on the Lomba

On the Lomba - 47 Brigade's Annihilation

South Africa decided to assist UNITA through the deployment of some artillery south of the Lomba river plus the detachment of South African officers led by Col Bert Sachse and Cmdt Les Rudman to assist it with an anti-tank plan to counter the FAPLA offensive. Col Fred Oelschig was the overall commander of these liaison teams.⁴³

During June 1987 Colonel's Harris, Oelsig and Piet Muller decided that the FAPLA offensive against UNITA was too big to be handled by the forces on the ground and they designed a plan to better counter the threat.

The politicians back in Pretoria killed '**Three Colonel Plan**', but curiously approved a thrust into the region that the Portuguese had long ago named **Terras do fim Mundo** or 'Land at the End of the Earth'.

This secretive northward thrust would take place along the eastern **bank** of the Cuito river. Its objective was to **halt the FAPLA advance and to strengthen UNITA's** power base in the area and it was handicapped by the **typical Botha regime idiotic political instruction** that the objective should be fully achieved without any loss of men or materiel.⁴⁴

During July 1987 32 Battalion's Cmdt Robbie Hartsliet received orders to stop the 10,000 strong FAPLA force before it reached the UNITA positions at Mavinga. In the mean time the FAPLA columns were harassed by UNITA. During the period May to 13 July FAPLA losses amounted to 635 killed including 20 Cubans, 212 wounded, 133 captured, while 2 tanks, 2 BMP-1's, 19 trucks, 2 SA-14/16 portable missile systems were either captured or destroyed.⁴⁵

On 14 August 1987 General Shaganovitch flung eight Soviet led, Cuban/FAPLA brigades (8, 13, 16, 21, 25, 47, 59, 66) into the offensive – some of which were assigned special tasks such as convoy, base and bridge protection.⁴⁶

A bit more than two weeks later a grim discovery was made. Sgt Piet Fourie of the 32 Battalion Recce's was calling in G-5 shells on the advance units of FAPLA's 21 Brigade. This incidentally was the **first time the world-beating G-5 guns were used in battle.**

Above **him**, a South African Airforce Bosbok reconnaissance plane piloted by Lt Glynn with Cmdt Johan du Randt as observer circled at about 1,000m providing artillery reconnaissance. At one stage Lt Glynn reported to Cmdt Hougaard that an RPG-7 had been launched at the plane and missed. Hougaard was perturbed as the plane was too far south of the advancing units to be exposed to the limited range RPG-7 missiles.

Sgt Fourie however witnessed the incident and recognized the weapon used as a proper long-range ground-to-air missile. Three missiles soared skyward in quick succession and the Bosbok plunged to earth. The South Africans were not only taken by surprise that FAPLA had succeeded to transport the heavy long-range missile systems and their ungainly platforms across hundreds of kilometers into the area, but very concerned when it was discovered that these missiles actually were the highly regarded SA-8's.⁴⁷

Limited as it was, the downed plane would expose South Africa's participation in the hostilities. Urgent orders were scrambled to recover it before the enemy did. UNITA troops found it in a marsh south of the Lomba river. They recovered the entire plane and the two dead aviators during the course of the night. Dawn of 3 September 1987 found no traces of a shot-down plane.⁴⁸

The downing of the Bosbok resulted in a re-appraisal of the situation near the Lomba. Former 32 Battalion OC, Col Deon Ferreira, was plucked from a joint staff course at Hoedspruit and flown to Rundu. He was to command a fighting force that would be known as 20 SA Brigade and he had to create it from what was available on the ground. His orders were to stop the FAPLA advance. His operation would be called 'Moduler'.⁴⁹

Under cover of the darkness of the night of 5 September 1987 Col Ferreira, code name 'Falcon', was flown into the battle zone with a Puma C-330. While absorbing the news of new South African casualties and the never before encountered chemical warfare threat, Ferreira re-organised the forces under his command and gave the order that FAPLA's 21 Brigade would not be permitted to cross the Lomba river.

Radio intercepts mentioned that 21 Brigade had fired a chemical shell at the South Africa forces, but the wind turned at the critical moment and blew the gasses across 21 Brigade's own men.⁵⁰

In the meantime 21 Brigade halted its advance on the Lomba and waited for 47 Brigade to join it for their advance upon Mavinga.

This changed on 9 September 1987 when 900 infantrymen from 21 Brigade crossed the Lomba at one point. **Cmdt Robbie Hartsliet (32 Battalion)** engaged the two infantry battalions that had crossed the river and eventually chased them back across the Lomba. Another team deployed a TMM mobile bridge across the river somewhat distant on 10 September. As what was thought to be the first FAPLA BRDM crossed the mobile bridge, **32 Battalion's Maj Hannes Nortmann** successfully employed the brand new and then still secret South African ZT-3 anti-tank missile system installed on his Ratel for the first time in the war. Shortly thereafter he knocked out three T-54 tanks.

These intermittent clashes continued as 21 Brigade probed up and down along the river. Soviet officers were directing the 21 Brigade artillery support.⁵¹

On 20 September 1987 Col Ferreira became the first South African commander to use the new **Gharra** as the soldiers called it, **Remote Piloted Vehicle (RPV) in combat**. This RPV could be described as a small radio controlled airplane with surveillance cameras resembling a large toy plane. The FAPLA radar was so good that it **picked these minute craft up on radar and 17 SA-8 missiles fired at it before it was shot down**. Each missile costing more than the RPV and these **firing exposed the SA-8 sites to the South Africans who proceeded to destroy to with G-5 fire**.

An even better joke was that the UNITA troops who stumbled onto the wreckage expressed concern about the absence of a pilot! Col Oelsich pulled a fast one and implored UNITA to continue searching for the RPV's very **small Japanese pilot** as his capture would become a very sensitive political issue!⁵²

On 22 September 1987 the South Africans intercepted a message that FAPLA was about to shell the South Africans with chemicals. The South African soldiers had no chemical warfare experience and very limited training given on the battlefield since the 5 September intelligence. Col Ferreira therefore withdrew his forces upwind.

Shortly after that 21 Brigade launched the heaviest artillery and air attack on the evacuated South African positions that had been encountered up to that point in the war.⁵³ It lasted four hours.⁵⁴ After the bombardment radio intercepts indicated that 21 Brigade believed that the South Africans had fled and prepared to cross the Lomba.

To counter this Col Ferreira ordered Cmdt Hartsliet and his 32 Battalion back into position. They did this as 21 Brigade began crossing the river over a TMM. Cmdt Hartsliet waited for FAPLA to cross and enter the open flood plain along the river before he called in a bombardment by **G-5's Valkiri MRL's and heavy (120mm) mortars**.

The **ZT-3's** under his command simultaneously began taking out the enemy advance group's tanks. Chaos erupted in the FAPLA ranks as each and everybody tried to make it back across the TMM first – but a well-placed **155m shell from a G-5 gun** destroyed it before their very eyes.

At about that point in time Cmdt Hartsliet launched an attack with his **Casspir and Ratel armoured infantry combat vehicles**. Machine gun and **20mm HE fire** from the vehicles poured relentlessly into the hapless Cuban and Angolan soldiers as they disbelievingly careened through the mud in full flight – hysterically crying not to be killed.⁵³ But on their heels was 32 Battalion - the very **32 Battalion that had grown from Operation Savannah's Task Force Zulu Battle Group Bravo**, of which many C-Company members had been murdered cold-bloodedly twelve years before by the Cubans north of Santa Comba. And it had orders to for **once and all end the Cuban/Angolan offensive on the banks of the Lomba**.

A superficial count in the marsh, estimated at no better than 50% correct, **revealed 300 dead 21 Brigade Cubans and Angolans. 20 SA Brigade suffered one man slightly wounded**.⁵⁵

* * *

Since the 20 SA Brigade only had orders to stop the FAPLA advance at the Lomba, it could not cross it to push 21 Brigade back. So, 20 SA Brigade remained between the Lomba and Mavinga rivers west of Mavinga town.

The 21 Brigade remained north of the Lomba and east of the Cunzumbia river. The 59 Brigade sat west of the Cuzizi river on the northern banks of the Lomba. Approximately 20km separated it from 21 Brigade to its east.

Soon after the first Battle on the Lomba, 47 Brigade's Tactical Armour Group appeared on the south of Lomba about 50km west of Col Ferreira's HQ. Col Ferreira needed to prevent 59 and 47 Brigades from

linking up on both sides of the Lomba,⁵⁶ as 47 Brigade would provide 59 Brigade with the cover to jump the river – making it virtually impossible for 20 SA Brigade to prevent 21 Brigade from also crossing the river and continuing its advance towards Mavinga.

Col Ferreira instructed Cmdt Hartslielief to engage 47 Brigade with Combat Group Bravo. This engagement took place on the southern side of the Lomba flood plain between the confluences of the Cunzumbia and Cuzizi rivers from the north. Hartslielief engaged 47 Brigade with his Casspirs and 20mm Ratels but soon found himself moving through earthworks and trenches of an old UNITA base FAPLA was defending.

To cut a long story short. Combat Group Bravo soon found itself under unexpected attack from T-54 and T-55 tanks coming in from the west which they had believed 10km further west. As the engagement began a T-55 knocked out the Ratel of Lt Alves and everybody inside.

This proved to be the turning point of the battle. Reconnaissance Commando operator, Stuart Sterzel remember it as follows: 'Up to that point in time the fight could have gone either way. Lt Alves's Ratel was running before the T-55 but could not get away. It had to duck and dive around trees while the tank just plough through them in hot pursuit. The Ratel could not dare to stop to engage, because the tank would then take it out immediately. Lt Alves was screaming into his radio for somebody to come to his aid while the tank chased him around the battlefield. We were all trying to find out where the hell he actually was. Everybody was looking and many guys stopped fighting just to find him and provide some help. In desperation Robbie Hartslielief actually jumped from his vehicle and ran around the battleground to find the Ratel. It was a scene from hell.

Then the Ratel got stuck. Over the radios we followed the events as Lt Alves described it. The Cuban tank commander drove his tank up to the Ratel and slowly circled to its front. Then he moved his tank until its barrel almost touched the Ratel driver's window. Slowly he back off a few yards. Inside the Ratel the crew waited for death. They knew that if they moved the tank would fire. They hoped for mercy or the opportunity to surrender. The Cuban moved his tank closer again ... and then its might gun bellowed.

That was cold-blooded murder and it ignited in everyone of us that had listened to it on the radio a wave of fury we had never before experienced. That turned the tide. From that moment on nothing and nobody would have been able to stop us venting our fury. At that moment Cuba lost the war.'

* * *

Due to the thick bush the tanks could not always bring their guns to bear and some tried to ram the Casspirs. Filled with fury and with the Cuban's element of surprise over, Combat Group Bravo gathered itself and launched into the Cubans with everything it had. The first T-54 fell to Hartslielief's Ratel 90. The Ratel Commanders invented a new trick straight from ancient aerial dogfight tactics. They would expose themselves to the tanks and as the tanks took up chase the Ratels would use their tighter turning circles to turn inside the tank's turning circle, come up behind it and then knock the tanks out. When a bunch of tanks arrived Combat Group Bravo disengaged. During the nocturnal recovery operation of the Ratels eight tanks ambushed 61 Mechanised Battalion, who then destroyed two of the tanks. The entire clash between 47 Brigade and Combat Group Bravo cost FAPLA 250-300 men, 5 tanks, a truck and a TMM bridging vehicle, while Bravo lost 8 men, a Ratel and 2 Casspirs. Four men were wounded.

One of the 20 SA Brigade wounded had a close shave. An AK-47 bullet had pieced his helmet and partially penetrated his skull. His comrades plucked the bullet out and he carried on fighting. He apparently suffered a bit of shock – not concussion!⁵⁷

* * *

Again everybody settled in on its side of the Lomba with 20 SA Brigade having strict political orders not to cross it. South African artillery pounded the Cuban/Angolan positions relentlessly.⁵⁸ The G-5's became so hot that on one occasion when an order came to stop firing, a breeched shell absorbed so much heat from the barrel that it cooked-off; destroying the gun, killing one gunner and badly wounding the 5 others.⁵⁹ FAPLA returned the compliments and on one occasion three South Africans had to be dug out from under the sand heaped on them during the bombardment.⁶⁰

While 21 Brigade eventually slacked its pressure on the defenders of the Lomba, 47 Brigade continued to be a threat as it advanced eastwards at a rate of about 1-2km per day under heavy South African artillery harassment. Ferreira prayed for back-up and permission to destroy it, but could do more than harass it in terms of his orders. Both sides lost men during these skirmishes. It was during this period that Col Ferreira imported a two-man psychological warfare team to keep 47 Brigade's men awake and under

psychological pressure. Col Ferreira used every trick in the book to contain 47 Brigade with his limited force and the extensive constraints he was subjected to. He had the South African Air Force drop fragmentation bombs with delayed fuses over the enemy. These bombs would lie between 47 Brigade's soldiers who would have to attempt defusing it or wait for it to explode. He used Gharra RPV's (Remote Piloted Vehicles – little radio controlled planes) to gather real time intelligence and harass enemy radar and aircraft.

The **Gharra caused some confusion**. Very often 47 Brigade radar would pick them up and fire all sorts of anti-aircraft weaponry at it. Sometimes even **Mig's would attempt attacking** it without any success as they would consistently **overshoot due to the tremendous speed disparity**.⁶¹ The decision to send 61 Mechanised Battalion to support 20 SA Brigade in the event of a final stand was eventually made. After a hard slog 61 Mech eventually reached its assembly point near Mavinga and commenced waiting.⁶²

By early October 1987 47 Brigade's strength had been reduced from its original 1,400 men to about 900. Supplies were running low and morale was dropping fast. Col Ferreira realized that the 47 Brigade commander would soon make the decision to disengage and flee, and after some intelligence gathering, decided to attack 47 Brigade. On 1 October a radio communication was picked up and deciphered. It ordered Commander Silva, who was leading 47 Brigade and personally still full of fight, to withdraw and ensure that none of the Russians in his brigade be captured against threat of a court martial. By then 59 Brigade had installed a TMM bridge supported by logs across the Lomba to facilitate 47 Brigade's retreat. By 2 October the first signs of 47 Brigade going into retreat mode were picked up by artillery observer, Maj Pierre Franken. He also noticed 59 Brigade on the other side of the Lomba moving tanks into position north of the TMM to cover 47 Brigade's retreat, while the TMM bridge position was such that 21 Brigade artillery on the east could also cover it's retreat. As the first 47 Brigade vehicles began rolling across the TMM bridge Franken called the G-5 guns in. Accurate fire knocked the second SA-9 ground-to-air missile system out on the TMM – blocking the escape. For the rest of the day an night artillery was brought down on anybody that attempted to restore the bridgehead⁶³

Despite the double jeopardy of 21 and 59 Brigade artillery cover for 47 Brigade, Cmdt Bok Smit's 61 Mech attacked on the morning of 3 October 1987. FAPLA artillery from both 47 Brigade (south of Lomba) and 59 Brigade (north of Lomba) commenced firing on the South Africans shortly thereafter. While the SAAF could not provide any air support **Mig's flew between 40 – 60 bombing sorties that day**. Often coming in as low as 25m to destroy the advancing South African combat vehicles. The South Africans could see the pilot's faces but never even bother firing on the planes as they were too busy fighting 47 Brigade on the ground. The FAPLA bombardment lasted uninterrupted until 18h20 that evening. When 61 Mech first made contact with 47 Brigade visibility, was limited to 15m maximum due to forest density. The gunners on both sides initially fired at each other's armoured vehicles at ranges of between 10-15m.⁶⁴

Very often the enemy vehicle was unseen and fire was directed at muzzle flashes. All this required tremendous courage from the South African cavalariasts as their **Ratels did not have the stabilized turrets** of the enemy tanks. This meant that a **Ratel had to stop to engage the enemy**, while the **Russian made tanks could engage the Ratels and fire while racing around at full speed**. The **Ratels have thin armour** and low pressure 90mm or small caliber (20mm) guns, while the Russian tanks sported thick armour and large calibre guns. Whereas the **tanks could take Ratels out with a single shot, even if poorly placed, it required up to 7 shots from a Ratel to put an enemy tank out of commission**. Even so the relatively small South African armoured component shot the living hell out of the much larger and superior 47 Brigade armoured force.⁶⁵ Another ex-Recce sums it up nicely: 'If you ever wanted to see what South African boys were made of back then, you should have been there. Facing a charging T-54 with a blazing gun from a stationary Ratel takes courage beyond belief. These 18-year old buys would sit there without budging and pump one shot after the other into the T-55 with their puny 90mm guns until they finally lucked. It was the most awesome display of bravery and armoured efficiency imaginable.'

Between 14h00 and 15h00 the tide turned in favour of 61 Mech. The most northerly of 47 Brigade's three battalions broke and began running for the Lomba shortly after 14h00. As the battalion's entered the floodplain Maj Franken directed the artillery and multiple rocket launchers against the fleeing vehicles and who were scythed down dozens at a time. Then 47's second battalion also broke and the whole scenario repeated itself. By then Franken directed fire so well and the G-5 gunners responded so effectively that tanks charging across the floodplain could be taken out with 2-3 shots without fail. Cmdt Smit's Ratels also got stuck into the fleeing masses. Mortars, rockets, and shells smashed into the running men. At one stage

about a 100 enemy vehicles were dispersed all over the floodplain grassland. Some burning, some intact but abandoned. Some tankers tried to race their tanks through the Lomba and got stuck. In their panic the fleeing 47 Brigade tankers tried to create a bridgehead by rushing their tanks into the river, while others then tried to race across the stuck vehicles – but to no avail. They were being picked off like flies.⁶⁶

Around 16h00 Commander Silva’s remaining battalion made a desperate effort to recover some of the intact vehicles abandoned on the floodplain, but again Franken called the G-5’s in and accurate shelling by the artillery destroyed this battalion. An hour later every enemy tank south of the Lomba had been destroyed and the battlefield lay littered by 127 enemy vehicles – many fully functional, even still idling, but abandoned by their crews.

FAPLA soldiers were shooting their own wounded where they lay as they could not evacuate them. Why they not simply left them to the mercy of the South Africans and their brilliant medical capability remains a **mystery.** Upon seeing that Col Ferreira gave the order to cease the hostilities and spare the remainder of 47 Brigade – which then fled across the river to safety.

Despite the **Russian/Cuban/Angolan forces’ 4:1 superiority in numbers, its total air superiority and extensive arsenal only one SADF soldier died in the final battle on the Lomba. UNITA had lost around 1,000 men during the entire 5 month long 1987 FAPLA campaign.**⁶⁷

*Of even **greater historical importance than the defeat of the communist alliance on the Lomba river is the fact that it was the first and only time since 1942 (midway through World War II) that a Soviet led advance had been halted and turned in pitched, conventional battle – and this by a much smaller military force lacking air superiority! This incredible achievement represents the ultimate definition of the fighting capability of the South African soldier during the 1980’s.***

The Spoils of War – A Jackpot

The annihilation and destruction of 47 Brigade resulted in the capture of some interesting booty:

WEAPONRY	DESTROYED	CAPTURED
BM-21 122mm Multiple Rocket Launchers		2
BMP-1 Armoured Infantry Combat Vehicle		4
BTR-60 Armoured Personnel Carrier	11	11
BTR-60 PU SA-8 Command Vehicles		2
BTS-4 Armoured Recovery Vehicles	1	1
D-30 122mm Guns	1	2
Flat Face Air Defence Radars		1
SA-8 Launcher Vehicle	1	1
SA-8 Logistic Vehicle		1
T-54 Tanks	3	12
T-55 Tanks	2	1
TMM Mobile Bridges	2	
Trucks	40	45
ZU-23-2 23mm AA Guns	2	4

As can be seen - amongst the **abandoned FAPLA equipment** was a SA-8 missile system complete with extra missiles, BTR-60 fire control command vehicle and **even the manuals in Russian.** It was the first time a western power had captured one of these systems. UNITA entered into a wrangle over the SA-8 with Cmdt Piet Hougaard, but the South African Air Force eventually simply drove off with the system - much to the chagrin of Savimbi who had promised it to the Yanks.⁶⁸

The taking of BTR-60 armoured personnel carriers provided some good laughs. It was shut from the inside and every now and then an empty meat tin would be ejected through a port that would be slammed shut immediately afterwards. Eventually a FAPLA officer with a full stomach stepped out and surrendered. He obviously wanted to enter imprisonment with a full stomach!⁶⁹

In another instance Cmdt van der Westhuizen entered a BTR-60 to drive it off after only noticing some clothing on the driver’s seat during his preliminary inspection. As he dropped down onto the driver’s seat it came alive under him. In fright Cmdt van der Westhuizen launched himself from the vehicle – exiting like a rocket through the hatch. It transpired that the wounded driver had fallen asleep in the vehicle!⁷⁰

Apart from the losses on the Lomba, the campaign had cost FAPLA in total a loss of 15 aircraft, 61 tanks, 78 artillery pieces, 4 sophisticated missile systems, 280 trucks. Personnel losses amounted to 3,627 killed and 10,000 wounded.⁷¹

Total South African losses for the operation amounted to 25 killed and 42 wounded. Materiel losses consisted of a Bosbok spotter plane, 4 Ratels armoured infantry combat vehicles, 2 Casspir armoured personnel carriers, a Withings tank recovery vehicle and a Rinkhals ambulance plus UNITA's abovementioned losses.⁷²

* * *

No army can lose this amount of materiel and men and remain an efficient fighting force. All that remained of communist alliance's fighting capability was formidable artillery capability and air superiority. The rest had been destroyed on the Lomba – even the spirit of its soldiers as subsequent events would prove. The battle on the Lomba effectively ended the war, because never again would the communist alliance in Angola have offensive capability. Shaganovitch's forces withdrew to Cuito Canavale.

With the war over and the enemy destroyed, most South African special forces operators expected the wise approach to be adopted; to maintain a military presence and harass the enemy while the politicians tied up the loose ends. The bridge at Cuito was damaged to the point where it could only be crossed on foot. All that was required was to ensure that it was not rebuilt. But it was not to be.

4.5 THUNDER AND LIGHTNING - 1988

4.5.1 Operation Hooper – Tentative Engagements in the Chambinga Forest

The powers that be knew that the enemy had been defeated and that the war was over, but a decision to push FAPLA across the Cuito and deprive it of a bridgehead for a 1988 offensive with fresh troops was taken and code-named: Operation Hooper. This decision surprised the men on the ground. It was obvious that Shaganovitch's forces were spent. Unless Shaganovitch could find troops with any fighting spirit left and replace the three tank battalions destroyed with more and better tanks that would not be routed by the South Africans again, he posed no threat. So little of a military threat Shaganovitch's forces posed, that South Africa was prepared to place inexperienced troops on the battlefield. Why it did not then simply maintain the status quo remains inexplicable to this day, but it may very well be because it underestimated the communist alliance's artillery strength and the value of air superiority. Was it a matter of perceiving a window of opportunity to build reputations?

Preceding the operation came a UN Security Council demand that South Africa withdrew from Angola. South Africa refused and insisted that it would only do so when Soviet and Cuban presence in Angola did not threaten South African security any longer.

South Africa did not take Operation Hooper seriously. That is obvious from the fact that the Operation from the outset suffered the burden of logistical incompetence and inattention. Spares, ammunition, fuel – all failed to arrive. In some cases (such as G-5 barrels) South Africa had no spares left!⁷⁸ In the meantime FAPLA had organized three roughly north-south defensive lines east of Cuito Canavale. The first defensive line cut through the Chambinga forest and high ground and consisted of 21, 25 and 59 Brigades.

About 10km behind it on the lower ground of the floodplain east of the Cuito river 16 Brigade (re-inforced) with its Tactical Tank Group consisting of at least 10 tanks, 66 Brigade with and 25 tanks of the 3rd Tank Battalion formed the second defensive line. This defensive line was separated from the first by an open grassland called the *Anhara Lipanda* and it was landmined.⁷⁹

The third defensive line, again about 10km behind the second defensive line, consisted of 13 Brigade, an Cuban Army Battallion and the Divisional Air Defence Brigade. This defensive line was situated just east of the Cuito river with the Tumpo Triangle between it and the second defensive line. This triangle was formed by the Cuito river on the west, the Dala river on the north and the Tumpo river on the south.

This triangle is a defenders paradise. Rivers on three sides offered great protection against land attacks. It fell under the FAPLA air umbrella, whilst no South African aircraft had enough fuel to stay

there for longer than 120 seconds, while having to brave pursuing aircraft and missiles as it turned home after this brief appearance with barely enough fuel to make the home runway. It was the most hostile environment any air force has ever had to operate in up to then and it was a given that any South African force attacking the defences at Cuito Canavale would do so without air cover – suicidal in modern warfare.⁸⁰ And, attackers are limited to a few channels of approaches, all of which culminate in a necessary push across flat, exposed ground of the Anhara Lipande first and the Tumpo Triangle after that.

* * *

On 2 January 1988 the South Africans launched a massively under strength first attack on 21 Brigade. Psychological warfare was again employed by the South Africans. Illumination flares kept 21 Brigade awake at night and its soldiers feeling exposed, groundshout teams pounded them with propaganda and power saws were used to cut down trees, make noise and threaten an attack. Pamphlets were also dropped on the orders of the shrinks – but these pen pushers never took into account that most FAPLA soldiers were illiterate!⁸¹ Orders were received to withdraw and the South Africans did so.

* * *

On 13 January 1988 South Africa assembled the Middelburg based 4 South African Infantry Battalion, 61 Mech and UNITA's 3rd Regular Battalion for a second attack against Cuito bridgehead. 4-SAI was the most formidable South African combat group assembled since World War II. Amongst others it consisted of a 1,000 mounted infantrymen and 22 Olifant 105mm tanks.⁸²

The attack was launched and South Africans soon found themselves facing Soviet backed, Cubans fighting in the very front lines; with all T-55 tanks manned by Cuban crews. The South Africans easily broke through the first defensive line and just before last light chased 21 Brigade from the Chaminga high ground and forest. At this point in time 61Mech's attacking vehicles were intermingling with vehicles from 21 Brigade fleeing towards the Cuanavale river. It was obvious that Shaganovitch's men had no stomach to face the South Africans across the sights of a rifle.

In a humorous aside, naked FAPLA soldiers suddenly appeared amongst the South Africans – who were so stunned by the streakers that they failed to shoot them before they began fleeing when the surprised South Africans at last commenced training their guns on them. Apparently UNITA propaganda had given rise to the belief that FAPLA soldiers wishing to surrender had to take off their clothes to make their intentions clear to the attackers.⁸³

Dust interfered with visibility when illumination rounds were fired to take the battle into the night and 4-SAI was forced to consolidate and retreat to safe positions.⁸⁴

The South African forces had one man (who had accidentally shot himself) wounded with UNITA losing four men and 18 wounded, as opposed to the 150 deaths of the FAPLA/Cubans. But – 21 Brigade had not been destroyed and its soldiers were joining and re-inforcing FAPLA's second defensive line. A stalemate ensued under political orders – Pretoria was negotiating. During this period hepatitis, cerebral malaria and other disease decimated the South African combat group – including its commanders, Cmdt Jan Malan and Koos Liebenberg.⁸⁵

* * *

By February 1998 Shaganovitch had sent his unwilling infantry back to re-occupy their first line of defence. The South Africans again launched a massively under strength attack, but this time on 14 February against 59 Brigade in the center of the first defensive line. 61 Mech under the new command of Cmdt Mike Muller cut west towards the lone standing kopje on the *Anhara Lipande*.

As it entered the grassland it swung south to rejoin 4-SAI. In the meantime 4-SAI, then commanded by Cmdt Cassie Schoeman, had done a similar manoeuvre inside the Chaminga forest and engaged 59 Brigade. Cubans began falling as the first engagements took place and the South Africans kept a fire belt ahead of their advance. They had to get in close with 59 Brigade to prevent the Mig's from bombing them. Balls of fire rushed through the bushes at the South African armour as it was engaged by the enemy's multiple rocket launchers and everything else that could be thrown at them. The BM-21 was soon dispatched and that was a sign for 59 Brigade infantry to break and run, but their tanks kept coming at the South Africans. It became even more obvious that if the South Africans could penetrate the minefields and get under the artillery cover, they would face no opposition from Shaganovitch's infantry.

The South African EW (electronic warfare) teams were ordered to jam enemy tank communications and succeeded admirably. Chaos ensued amongst the Cubans and the South African panzer quickly gained the upper hand. Corporal Griffiths, Troop Sergeant of 3 Troop, taking out two enemy tanks in a matter of minutes.⁸⁶

A little while later the Cubans counter-attacked half-heartedly but without much effect. One Cuban tank stalked Cmdt Muller's command vehicle – its Cuban commander standing in his hatch while firing his machine gun. Major Christ Terblanche's noticed this but could not engage the tank with his defective Ratel. He jumped out and charged the tank on foot to engage the Cuban, but could not get close enough due to heavy machine gun and infantry support fire. He then took refuge in a bush from where he shot the Cuban through the head from a distance.⁸⁷

When night broke the South Africans decided not to press their attack home. The men needed a rest and the equipment was in need of maintenance. South Africa had lost four men that far in Operation Hooper, but again the communist alliance's losses were high. Apart from the extensive range of equipment they lost, their casualties amounted to 520 men dead of which a considerable number were Cubans.⁸⁸

After this Castro appointed General Cintra Frias to implement the Cuban plan to hold Cuito Canavale,⁸⁹ while the South Africans withdrew to a point just east of the Cunzumba River's source.

4.5.2 All Hell Breaks Loose - Quito Canavale

During the battles on the Lomba and in the Chambinga forest soldiers from all the partners of the communist alliance fought the South Africans with tooth and nail with everything they had. It was not a case of South Africa against SWAPO or FAPLA. The ANC, SWAPO, FAPLA, Cubans and Russians (of which there were more in Angola than South Africans) were all ordered to keep the South Africans at bay. If Cuito Canavale fell, Frias would lose air superiority in south-western Angola and that would have led to a total defeat if South Africa decided to push into the Angolan heartland as it did in 1975.

Several light clashes followed. On 19 February the communist alliance succeeded in downing Major Ed Every's Mirage. The Cubans converged on the wreckage but the South African inspection patrol surprised them and called a ripple of 127mm rockets in on the Cubans. Two trucks were required to remove all the Cuban dead.

The South African field commanders were hamstrung by political orders. Frustrated during the standoff they had to watch how the communist alliance regrouped and expertly dug in along the east bank of the Quito River. Extensive anti-tank and anti-personnel mine fields were laid in front of the two successive defensive lines of the communist alliance's forces. Fields of fire were cleared and the artillery positioned on high ground in widely dispersed small groups with multiple fields of fire to frustrate retaliatory South African engagement. The fields of fire overlooked any possible South African line of advance across the *Anhara Lipinda*. The combination of M-46, D-30 artillery and BM-21 multiple rocket launchers were able to maintain a bombardment in the region of 750 shells per minute on any attacker entering the Tumpo Triangle – almost twice the ability of the Germans on the South Africans at Dellville Wood in World War I! This capability excluded the aerial, mortar or tank bombardment capabilities of the communist alliance or the effect of landmines!

Once Frias had used the respite to strengthen his defences the South Africans inexplicably again decided to attack. Commandant Mike Muller was ordered to execute a modern Charge of the Light Brigade with 61 Mech; consisting of only 20 Olifant tanks, a Ratel borne infantry company, a troop of four missile bearing Ratel ZT3 'pantserjagers' (tank hunters), a 120mm mortar troop, plus 800 men from UNITA's 3rd Regular Battalion. This force was augmented by 300 men from the famous 32 Battalion.

The ultimate purpose of the unnecessary attack would be drive the communist alliance from its Cuito stronghold, destroy the bridge, leave UNITA to occupy the area and then to withdraw. These remained the basic objectives throughout the entire Tumpo campaign.

4.5.3 Strike One – 25 February 1988

Muller chose to launch his attack from the south-east, roughly along the eastern side of a little track, which crossed the Chaminga River south west of the Chaminga forest high ground and lead in a north-westerly direction towards Cuito Canavale. Robbie Hartslief's 32 Battalion would initiate the attack a little to the west of the track, tie 25 Brigade up and permit 61 Mech to swing west once due east of the enemy defences. To the west of 32 Battalion UNITA's 4th Regular Battalion of about 600 men was tasked to execute a feint attack northwards along the eastern bank of the Cuito river. That was the theory.

On the evening of 24 February the South African combat group assembled 45km east of the enemy lines near the Cunzumbia river source, and used the cover of the moonless night to approach the jump off point for actual engagement. Major Tinus van Staden led 32 Battalion to within 600m south of the communist alliance's 25th Brigade positions. Dawn broke over the battlefield and the kilometer wide extended line of 32 combatants rushed forward to engage the enemy, but no resistance was offered. Frias's men had still regained their guts after the Lomba. The 25th Brigade was fleeing. 'Three-two' successfully engaged a fleeing truck with an RPG-7 and then the South Africans settled down in all-round defence positions near the evacuated enemy trench lines to await 61 Mech.

Around 07h00 the enemy's Mig-23 and Su-22's commenced their first bomb runs – the first of 56 such runs bombing runs that day. Bearing in mind that a Su-22 carries a heavier payload than most World War II bombers, the air bombardment was awesome, but marginally off target.

In the mean time Recces had led Muller's bareless Olifant tank and 61 Mech through the minefield to about 1,5km from the first enemy lines. Muller's force broke from the treelike in tactical formation but immediately ran into another minefield where a Soviet M-57 anti tank mine blasted the tracks of Muller's harmless command Olifant. Then all hell broke loose. The South African artillery dared not lay down a barrage, as it would expose them to the Mig-23 and Su-22's sharking the skies above the battlefield. The enemy artillery barrage claimed the life of Corporal Hendricks as he tried to engage a Mig with a SAM-7 to give the South African artillery a foot in the door, and a Withings tank recovery truck was blasted to shreds by a direct hit from an M-46 130mm shell. Things were not going the South African way and as Muller began withdrawing, another two Olifants lost their tracks. Muller called in pre-production, experimental versions of the innovative South African 'Plofadder' to open a line of attack through the minefield.

The Plofadder is a Buffel mounted mine clearing system consisting of explosive filled hoses that could be fired across or into a minefield and detonated. The blast and shock wave then detonates landmines, or dislodge and cats them aside – clearing a path through the minefield. The Plofadder hoses failed to detonate, and Lieutenant Louwtjie Louw led a team of assault pioneer engineers into the minefield while one of the heaviest bombardments in history thundered around them. Three hours later, at 11h30, they detonated the explosive hoses and the 17 remaining South African tanks poured through the minefield. For this bravery in action Lieutenant Louw and his entire team of assault pioneers were later awarded the Southern Cross medal.

As the tanks poured through the minefield to join 32 Battalion, the UNITA soldiers riding atop the Olifant tanks, fully expecting the communist alliance's 25th Brigade in the trenches, opened up fire on the 32 Battalion men in there – forcing a 32 Company commander to discharge a yellow smoke grenade identifying them as friendly forces. UNITA fire hit the helmet of a 32 Battalion lieutenant in the front of his helmet, but fortunately it ricocheted off. It was one of the few times 32 Battalion soldiers wore steel helmets. The smoke grenade pinpointed the exact South African presence for the enemy artillery. This was what the communist alliance was waiting for. The South Africans were packed in closer formation than at any previous point in time, they were on low, open ground surrounded by minefields, and they had marked their own presence in positions known to enemy gunners.

The FAPLA artillery volleyed and thundered. Using the full might of their artillery capabilities the communist alliance threw everything it possessed at the exposed South Africans. UNITA infantry were swept off the South African tanks. The bombardment forced 32 Battalion into the evacuated enemy trenches. Van Staden described it as follows: 'We were pinned down in the artillery bombardments for nine

hours that day. It was just bombs, bombs, bombs all day. I had a hell of a headache, and everyone else must have had as well. Especially from the D-30 shells passing overhead through the sound barrier. But the worst were the BM-21's which never seemed to stop firing. They went on and on ...At first it was terrifying, but there came a stage when the terror faded because you'd just got used to the constant noise. We took casualties, At one stage I was crouched with a signaller in a very narrow part of the trench line about two meters deep when a huge high explosive bomb landed and detonated just a meter from the lip of the trench... Although we were half-buried and our ears were ringing for weeks afterwards we weren't hurt... Bombs landed within three metres of soldiers out in the open and they were uninjured. A bomb would penetrate, and the compacted sand around it would force the explosion upwards. Within a metre, out in the open, it would get them... And if the enemy had our type of airburst shrapnel fragmentation bombs, I'm sure we would all have been wiped out.'

By **15h00 five of the Ratels had taken direct hits and 32 Battalion was also taking casualties.** All the ambulances and recovery vehicles were engaged moving the dead and wounded off the battlefield for medical attention. During the battle approximately **1,350 enemy shells had landed within 20 meters of South African vehicles or positions.** Countlessly more had landed marginally further from their objectives, but were therefore not counted by the forward observation teams.

Muller broke through the first line of FAPLA defences, and penetrated about a kilometer to the second defensive line – only to find that the **enemy had fled.** He was left with a predicament. The sun was setting, which not only meant that it was shining into his gunner's eyes, but if he pushed on with the attack, he would be moving into the eye of the storm – without any air or artillery support. The **South African artillery was still nullified by the communist alliance's unassailable dominance of the skies above the battlefield.**

As darkness approached on the evening of 25 February 1988, Muller obtained permission to **call the attack off and to pull back.** While doing so an M-46 shell ploughed into a **Kwêvoël ammunition truck, the mine resistant version of the Samil.** The explosion wracked the vehicle, but its driver, Sergeant Koekemoer, steered the truck away from the convoy as secondary explosions began ripping it to pieces. Once a safe distance from the convoy he dropped from the truck cabin into a foxhole as the vehicle disintegrated above him.

While the South Africans moved back to their assembly point, the FAPLA infantry used the termination of the threat to abandon their positions and cross to the west bank. By 17h13 South African forward observers had reported 779 FAPLA soldiers to have fled across the damaged bridge. This FAPLA withdrawal continued throughout the night and by first light none of the enemy occupied their forward positions. Mechanical problems prevented the South Africans from utilizing this golden opportunity to their best advantage.

As **32 Battalion moved back while covering the 61 Mech withdrawal, the end of human endurance showed its ugly face.** An artillery Captain who had spent the preceding three months' engagements non-stop at the combat contact points, many behind enemy lines, finally broke down and went into a state of battle fatigue. The **men had gone into battle with limited water supplies and the 16km retreat march after a day of indescribable tension** began taking its toll. An intelligence Major was just one of the men who became delirious with exhaustion and dehydration – unable to stand. The hardy 32 Battalion men, amongst the toughest in the world, began to **drop from dehydration.** Van Staden, against all regulations, gave his men permission to **drink the saline transfusion drips they carried as blood plasma substitutes.**

They all completed the 16km march back to the assembly point without further incident. Later that night as they sat resting their weary bodies, his men would whistle like the day's bombs and laugh. Relieved, their spirits unbroken. These men who had **faced the worst bombardment any South African fighting force had ever encountered.** When the battle was analyzed, it was determined that more bombs had exploded around them that single day in the Tumpo Triangle, than had been thrown at the brave South Africans over the entire five day period of the Battle of Dellville Wood, Somme, 1916.

Mike Muller summed it up: 'It was bloody hellish.'

On the day South Africa had three tanks and four combat vehicles damaged, while another two (a Ratel and the ammunition truck) were destroyed.

After the first Tumpo clash Frias re-organised his defences. 25 Brigade and the Cuban crewed 3 Tank Battalion were left in the bridgehead under the umbrella of the formidable artillery umbrella that had been created to cover the Tumpo Triangle. The rest of the force consisting of 8 Brigade, 13 Brigade, 59 Brigade and a Cuban infantry regiment were dug in on the west bank of the Cuito.

4.5.4. Strike Two – 29 February 1988

Four days later Commandant Mike Muller launched his second Tumpo attack behind the flailing chains of two mine rollers attached to the lead tanks. His attacking force was again under strength. Eleven Olifants, four Ratels, five G-5 guns and one 127mm Multiple Rocket Launcher were still awaiting spares. Even so the attack went ahead.

This time round he dropped down through the Chaminga forest high ground and then swung a little north along the southern bank of the Dala River, a tributary that joined the Canavale river about 4km north-east of its confluence with the Cuito.

The second Tumpo attack was planned as a night attack but then the system began failing Muller. The hardy Olifants had amazingly fought more than 800-hours without servicing. Muller's logistical problems were caused by SADF failure to provide Muller's mechanics with the equipment needed to effect proper maintenance on the tanks. Even the replacement engine and transmission units that did arrive were badly damaged and therefore useless. These units were too heavy to be flown in, and the rough passage by inexperienced transporter crews over hundreds of kilometers of the terrible terrain at the Land at the End of the Earth, proved their undoing. Five tanks broke down before engaging the enemy. Muller was now again faced with the problem of only 11 serviceable tanks – compounded by the arrival of daylight. Then, around 23h20 another tank dropped out. It was a precarious situation: *Ten green bottles were hanging on the wall ...*

Around 00h10 the night vision periscopes of five of Muller's 10 tanks, became faulty. *Five green bottles were hanging on the wall ...* With only five of the required 22 tanks available for a night operation, Muller decided to abandon the night attack and wait for daylight so as to be able to use these tanks in daylight, but this decision did little to improve his woes – even though it would offer him a force at least 45% of strength.

About 4km from north-east of the Cuito bridge the mine rollers began detonating mines around 07h30. This immediately drew very heavy fire from ZU-23 anti-aircraft batteries deployed in the anti-tank role, and 120mm mortars. The South African column was inside the minimum range of the excellent Soviet M-46 guns – the third best artillery piece in the world at the time. Despite this the South African advance proceeded satisfactory and it reached the tree line. During this approach they reached the first line of FAPLA defenses around 09h00 – only to find them abandoned. Frias's infantry were still too scared to engage the South Africans. Heavy exchanges of fire between the South African tanks and communist alliance artillery followed. Again the ZU-23 anti aircraft guns applied horizontally wiped the UNITA infantry off the South African tanks. The advance was halted around 10h43 at an abandoned enemy outpost. The UNITA men used the opportunity to dig in, but then a disturbingly quiet period ensued. Muller decided to forge ahead and made some good ground in very short leaps, 20 – 100m at a time. Around 12h00, with Muller's force more or less south of the Dala / Canavale confluence, the enemy at last responded with a dozen odd multi-barrelled ZU-23 guns.

The South Africans retaliated with fire belt action. By about 14h00 they had approached to within 3km of the Cuito bridge – an important objective of all South African attacks at Cuito Canavale. Muller answered enemy fire with 81mm mortars and the FAPLA resistance soon began to crumble. Then the first tank struck a mine. They had entered an extensive, high-density minefield. Another three tanks

detonated mines and the enemy was firing at them from three sides with B-10 82mm recoilless guns, 30mm AGS-17 grenade launchers. Sagger anti-tank missiles poured in from across the river.

Muller decided to withdraw 700m from the minefield, but even more disaster struck – another six Olifants conked in. Leaving him with only five questionable tanks from the original 22 of which two tank squadrons comprise. For almost three quarters of an hour a heavy firefight ensued. Although FAPLA's 25 Brigade took heavy casualties the attackers could not silence the ZU-23 guns or the 120mm mortars. In the absence of artillery support the South Africans were relegated to 81mm mortars. These were skillfully applied and a number of enemy positions were knocked out.

Muller then pulled back for an additional 2km. Around 14h30 Recce teams reported that enemy tanks were starting up and preparing to move. Muller was forced to withdraw even further to ensure that he would not be trapped.

Intelligence claimed 10 enemy tanks in the Tumpo. Muller could not rely on the artillery back-up, because the backbone of the South African military activity in Angola, the venerable G-5 guns unsurpassed in the world, had also reached the end of their service capabilities and were packing up one after the other. Dejectedly he requested permission to break the attack of in view of the enemy tank threat. It was granted at 17h00. A night attack was contemplated, but in view of the lack of tank support the idea was scrapped. Had enough tanks been available, such an attack would surely have been executed.

Upon Muller's arrival at the assembly point he was informed that an intelligence re-assessment claimed only two enemy tanks in the Tumpo Triangle. Muller was devastated. Had he been told that earlier he would have pushed on to claim the Tumpo Triangle and occupy the Cuito bridge.

4.5.5 Strike Three and Out - 23 March 1988

A great shake-up of the South African ground forces in Angola followed the second failed attack on the Tumpo. Commandant Gerhard Louw replaced Mike Muller. Citizen Force crews with fresh tanks replaced the fatigued 61 Mech. Citizen Force mechanized infantry battalions replaced 4-SAI and 19 Rocket Regiment joined the fray. The failed second attack spelled the end of Operation Hooper, and the new offensive was code-named Packer. For Packer Louw had at his disposal 82 SA Brigade consisting of two tank squadrons from Regiment President Steyn, and armoured car squadron from Regiment Moirivier, and the mechanized infantry regiments De La Rey and Groot Karoo. He also had a G-5 and a G-2 battery from Regiment Potchefstroom University, a 44 Parachute Brigade mortar team and a MRL troop from 19 Rocket Regiment. This was augmented by 2 troops from 7 Light AA Regiment, six 13 Field Engineer Regiment and 5 recce teams from 4 Reconnaissance Commando. UNITA provided four under strength infantry battalions – some with as little as 240 men.

Logistical problems continued to plague the South African field commander and insufficient time was available to bring the soldiers called up from their civilian occupations to the required level of combat readiness. These men were called up in a halting and piecemeal fashion due to political dictates and constraints and their integration into the combat machine proved a nightmare. It was clear from previous battles and debriefings that, amazingly, tanks were achieving the greatest success in terrain traditionally most unsuitable for tank warfare. Despite it having been obvious that any further assault on the Tumpo defences would require a proper tank assault, the Citizen Force call-up reflected past battlefield structures, rather than meet the battlefield requirements. Louw ended up an entire tank squadron short of what he would need for a proper tank assault.

At this point in time the communist alliance's 25 Brigade was deployed as the first line of defence in the Tumpo Triangle, more or less midway between the Dala and Tumpo Rivers. In front of them a solid minefield covered the entire line of advance between the two rivers. The defensive lines and approaches across the Tumpo were covered by ZU-23 guns, B-10 recoilless guns, and the impressive portable 122mm Grad-P multiple rocket launchers with their 10km range. Ten tanks were dug in hull-down to await the South African advance and these were augmented nine D-30 guns right behind the defenders. To their rear Tactical Group 2 consisting of 3 Tank Battalion formed the secondary line of defence and behind them,

right in the crook of the confluences of the Cuito, Canavale and Tumpo Rivers sat a battalion from 66 Brigade as final defensive line east of the rivers.

On the western banks of the rivers the defences started with 36 Brigade in the far north and 13 Brigade in the far south. The latter was backed by Cubans, while the Forward Command posted was protected by a Cuban tank regiment constantly being reinforced from Menongue. The rest of the communist alliance was dug in, in between. The linked defences on the west bank were formidable indeed and consisted of D-30 howitzers, M-46 guns, BM-21 and BM14 MRLs.

In the end his attack on the Tumpo reflected somewhat of a combination of the first two attacks on the Tumpo. Regiment Groot Karoo and 32 Battalion had to execute diversionary movements very much along the line of movement followed by 32 Battalion during the first attack on the Tumpo, while Louw would largely attack along the same lines Muller did during the second Tumpo attack.

Louw's force also ran into a minefield. While the southern column moved reasonably effortlessly due to the mine roller, Louw's northern column did not have one available and immediately ran into trouble when a **tank lost its tracks**. The Plofadders were employed, but once again they had to be detonated manually under BM-21 rocket fire.

Behind the mine roller tank Louw then moved his tanks in single file through the gap in the minefield – drawing heavy fire – and organized his two tank squadrons into combat formation, but they soon ran into trouble. **Three Olifants were disabled by mines** – including the mine roller tank. They recovered one tank but two were left behind under strict orders from Colonel Fouché not to destroy them. A short period of misdirection during the approach, plus the time spent waiting to clear minefields and the subsequent struggle to free some of their stricken fellows had resulted in **fuel supplies running low**. Commandant Louw decided to break the attack off and obtained the necessary permission to do so.

During the withdrawal another **tank threw its tracks** and were left behind for later recovery. The **order not to destroy the damaged Olifants proved a mistake**. They were never recovered and none of the plans to destroy them could be implemented.

The communist alliance made much of the captured tanks and used it to claim that they had won the war.

5. Conclusion

*Why South Africa attacked Frias's forces at Cuito Canavale is not clear. There **was no need for the last three battles at the Tumpo**.*

Did the **South African failure to drive the communist alliance from their defences at Cuito Canavale cost them the war**? Did the communist alliance capture of three South African tanks and the destruction of a few other South African vehicles at Cuito Canavale win them the war? The soldiers of the day know that it actually is a **silly question**, but for those that will in future be exposed to communist or Marxist propaganda it probably requires answering.

*On sheer number comparison over the almost **thirteen years of clashes** between the South Africans and the Cubans, there is no way that a Cuban victory can be constructed even by the naïve or optimistic. The communist alliance had lost its will to fight, its men and its tanks. After the Lomba it did not have sufficient remaining capability to threaten the South African Defence Force.*

Military doctrine has it that one requires a 7:1 superiority to route a dug in enemy. South Africa repeatedly **attacked the defences at Cuito with numerically vastly inferior forces** because its military leaders **confused the offensive inability of the Soviet forces with defensive inability**. The **only price they fortunately paid for it was that they failed to overrun the enemy defences at Cuito**; by then **strategically insignificant** in South Africa's further political or military objectives.

It may mostly justifiably be construed that a military force which fails to achieve its battle objectives had lost the battle, but to equate that as having lost the war, amounts to stretching the imagination a bit. It is a fact that the South African Defence Force failed in its objectives at Cuito and that the National Party government of fat cat cowards in Pretoria had developed a greater appetite for saving their own bacon and pensions at the expense of the men who had under compulsion protected their royal Parliementarian lifestyle, than for the best interest of a strong and favourable political settlement.

But Cuito only represents the sole significant military setback suffered by the SADF in 18 years – not a war lost. Some researchers base their views on the claims of the communists and some foreign documents – but the SADF version is omitted as it is apparently not available. Since SADF records have apparently been destroyed by its SANDF successors, consider the following:

- The communist alliance had been pushed back to Cuito Canavale after virtual total annihilation on the Lomba and at Cuito prepared truly excellent defensive positions having rushed hardware from the Middle-Eastern theatre (which led to their reversals in that region). You do not win a war defending positions on retreat – especially if you had lost all offensive capability;
- On every one of the rare occasions that the infantry of the two fighting forces met during the Tumpo clashes, those of the communist alliance were pushed back by heavy fighting. Their positions were penetrated, while the South Africans not once turned under infantry or armour pressure;
- Never did the communist alliance even attempt to take the offence. Even under some of the best artillery cover and air superiority in military history, it only parried what was thrown at it by us;
- The video and visual material (and there were lots of it), showing what really happened at Cuito Canavale, is not obtainable from our new government or current military any longer. It is said to have been destroyed. Why was the visual proof of the military success they propagate destroyed?

----- Original Message -----

From: Andre Degeorges

To: Pierre van der Walt

Sent: Tuesday, December 09, 2008 2:36 PM

Subject: Re:PIERRE - & A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

Pierre - I agree with your observations. It is under Reagan that the many feel the Free Market Trickle Down Economics process accelerated. I am not sure but it happened - yes - cheap products at WALMART but now less and less people to buy them since we lost over 530,000 jobs alone in November.

ON ANGLOA FROM MY LAST EMAIL Please give me the facts in brief:

I always heard that at the last minute with you guys seeing the lights of Luanda - Carter pulled the plug and you guys were told to back off. I heard that the CIA and State disagreed on the issue and that the CIA wanted you to take the place. I was also told a number of times that the reason Carter pulled the plug is that the USA did not want to be seen associated with the Apartheid regime. **ANDRE - DURING OUR FIRST INCURSION INTO ANGOLA I WAS FINISHING SCHOOL. I DO NOT HAVE FIRST HAND INFO ON THAT. WHAT I HAVE BEEN TOLD BY GUYS WHO HAD NO REASON TO LIE TO ME (INCLUDING MY OWN 1977 PLATOON COMMANDER WHO RECEIVED OUR HIGHEST BRAVERY AWARD FOR ACT AT BRIDGE 14) BUT WHO WERE NOT INFORMED ON POLITICAL LEVEL BEARS OUT WHAT I HAVE READ. AT THAT POINT IN TIME 1975 - 1976 WE WERE SECRETLY IN THAT WAR AS ADVISORS TO HELP UNITA (SAVIMBI) AND FAPLA (HOLDEN ROBERTO). IT CONSISTED OF TWO COMBAT GROUPS, ABOUT 8 ARMoured CARS ETC. I CAN EMPHATICALLY SAY WITHOUT ANY FEAR OF CONTRADICTION THAT THE RSA HAS NEVER HAD ANY INTENTIONS OF OCCUPYING AND/OR HOLDING ANGOLA. OUR SOLE INITIAL INTEREST WAS TO HAVE A SYMPATHETIC ANTI COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT THERE THAT OWED US ENOUGH NOT TO HARBOUR SWAPO. YES, THIS INITIAL COMBAT FORCE ASSISTED UNITA AND FAPLA TO OCCUPY GROUND AND CAME VERY CLOSE TO LUANDA. NEITHER THE CIA NOR THE US GOVERNMENT HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH WHAT HAPPENED ON THE GOUND (BEHIND THE SCENES ON POLITICAL LEVEL PERHAPS) BUT IT DID NOT AT THE TIME AFFECT THE OPERATIONS. WHEN HOLDEN ROBERTOS FORCES STOOD WITH RSA ADVISORS ONLY AT THE GATES OF LUANDA HE WANTED TO CONDUCT A SPECIFIC TYPE OF ATTACK THE BOERS WARNED HIM AGAINST. HIS EGO GOT THE BETTER OF HIM AND HE LAUNCHED AN ATTACK THAT FAILED AND EFFECTIVELY DESTROYED FAPLA AS AN ANGOLAN MILITARY OR POLITICAL POWER. WHEN THAT HAPPENED THE BOER ADVISORS HAD NOTHING LEFT TO DO AND TURNED HOME. YOU CAN SEARCH ON THE INTERENT FOR OPERATIONA SAVANNAH AND YOU WILL SEE THAT ALL SADF OBJECTIVES WERE ACHIEVED. WE NEVER HAD A BOER**

FORCE AS SUCH STANDING AT THE GATES OF LUANDA. YOU CAN READ THIS IN THAT SUMMARY I SENT YOU.

Personally - I'd have to think the USA did not want RSA to control this oil/diamond rich nation and that they cut a deal with dos Santos as they have with many Marxists in Africa - put in a small puppet "politburo" that enriches itself while the multinationals get what they want and the masses live in poverty. **WE WANTED THE SAME PUPPETS THERE AS THE US WANTED. EVEN ZAIRE AT THE TIME WANTED IT SO. WE NEVER WANTED TO BE THERE. WE JUST COULD NOT ADMINISTER, CONTROL AND DEVELOPE THE RSA, NAMIBA AND ANGOLA WITH THE NUMBERS WE HAD.**

Please correct any of my impressions that are incorrect!

Pierre - enjoy the bush - life is short and that's why guys like you and me got into this hunting conservation field. Family is number one - that's why I came back to the USA - as my parents are in their 90s. If they were in RSA - I'd be there. I tell Mom - my house I am moving into - that's my "hunting/fishing lodge" - as long as you are here - your "House is my Home". You should get you children to spend as much time with the grandparents as possible - gives them a reason to keep living!

Siempre, miu casa es zu casa! **GRACIAS SENOR**

Merry Christmas & Good Hunting

Andre

----- Original Message -----

From: Pierre van der Walt

To: Andre Degeorges

Sent: Tuesday, December 09, 2008 2:05 AM

Subject: When Americans No Longer Own America

Andre

Very interesting. Do I understand it correctly that this can be interpreted as a dissenting voice about the George Soros open society concept?

I find it strange that America turns to liberalism (Democrats) when they need conservatism. What I found more interesting though is that it appears to be conservatives (Reagan / Bush) who seemingly stand accused of having introduced open society concepts. Now that confuses the hell out of me. I do however think that a nation deserves whomsoever they vote into power and America deserves its problems. Like the rest of the world I feel that the greed of the American middleclass is just as bad as that of the captains of big industry. Every American seemingly wanted to live a glitter life and the politicians obliged by letting goods come into the USA cheaply so that Mr & Mrs Living It Up To The Jones's could have it all. These people will have to make some choices, and I think that choice for the commoners of the entire world is that we should take back power from government and accept the increased effort and responsibility burden it will place on us. We will however within ten years live better lives.

I am taking the family to Botswana for a few days. We are gonna pitch camp on the banks of the Limpopo, fish, walk in the veldt and just take time off from civilization. When we return we will go see my Dad who had a heart attack and some stents implants three weeks ago.

To you Merry Christmas and an Exciting and Rewarding 2009.

Pierre