

[What was Cuba seeking in Africa?](#)



In all missions of Cuba in Africa, 385,908 Cuban combatants fulfil their internationalist duty. Of them, 2,398 lost their lives.

One warm morning of October 1983, a group of young men gather in front of the Military Committee office in the municipality of Plaza de la Revolución, in the city of Havana. The reason for the presence of these young men, most of them still fresh-faced, is to leave for Angola as volunteers.

The aspiring internationalists combatants have been arriving to this place since the early hours of the morning. The waiting hours would pass by among jokes and stories and comments on the episodes of heroism and combats born from their juvenile imagination and their desire to match the deeds of their fathers and grandfathers.

As the opening hours approach, officials and employees start to arrive, amazed by the large crowd. One officer, who is also an official of this Committee, greets those waiting outside and asks them to form a line, to which the boys quickly comply by lining along the sidewalk.

The echoes of the heroic defense of Cangamba have been the spark, even though the details were still

What was Cuba seeking in Africa?

Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.fidelcastro.cu>)

unknown, but the stories told about it surpass those of the legend of the 300 Spartans of the Battle of the Thermopylae.

CANGAMBA

From August 2 to August 10, 1983 all the positions defended by Cuban internationalist combatants and the People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) in the town of Cangamba were surrounded and attacked.

The 32nd Brigade of Light Artillery (BIL) of the FAPLA and a group of Cuban advisors were deployed in this locality of the province of Moxico..

The number of FAPLA forces were 818 soldiers, many of them with very little combat training. Cuban internationalist advisors were 82. Once the attacks started in Cangamba on August 2, 1983, the Cuban headquarters sent reinforcements, which increased the number of Cubans in Cangamba to 184 troops. In total, there were 18 pieces of artillery and small-caliber mortars and 36 GRD-1P installations with little ammunition.

On the South African side, even though there was no artillery deployed in the territory, there were experts on artillery, intelligence and scorers for aviation, which could be estimated to be the size of a contingent. There were also small units of the Buffalo Battalion, which already had experience in joint actions with the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which had over 3,000 troops.

The Cuban troops suffered 18 casualties and 27 wounded. FAPLA, on their part, had 60 casualties and 177 wounded. Shelters suffered damages or destruction in 85% of them. A total of 401 tails of grenade mortars were counted scattered all over the territory and around 1,300 fragments of projectile and GRAD-1P rockets. It is estimated that no less than 1,500 artillery projectiles hit the positions defended by the Cubans.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

While the aspiring internationalists wait, they talk about Kifangondo and the bravery shown by Cubans and Angolans, the dramatic withdrawal of the enemy troops who, days before, described this venture as a piece of cake with the phrase "breakfast in Caxito, lunch in Cacucaco and dinner in Luanda," but they only bit the dust of defeat instead.

Kifangondo, Cangamba and Cuito Cuanavale would go down in history as "unforgettable instances of Cubans' patriotic sensitivity," the success of Cuito Cuanavale, which would be a turning point in the history of Africa because it marks the end of the odious Apartheid regime, is still a few years away. These three combats fought by Cuban internationalists, volunteer soldiers from the country of Martí and Fidel, fill with pride the new generations that hope to contribute to "repay the debt with Africa."

Teachers, medical doctors, builders, engineers and hundreds of thousands of Cubans have worked as internationalists in Africa. On May 23, 1963, a plane of Cubana de Aviación Airlines with 29 doctors, four dentists, 14 nurses and seven health technicians departed for Algeria.

This was the beginning of Cuba's internationalist missions in Africa in the history of the Cuban Revolution, a collaboration that has never ceased over the years and that have contributed to save thousands of lives, to teach how to write and read, to build, to plant, to defend with their own blood the independence of the continent. In turn, over 34,000 Africans have graduated from middle-level technician and higher education in the last few decades and other thousands of young African people are currently studying in Cuba. 1

INTERNATIONALIST MILITARY MISSIONS

What was Cuba seeking in Africa?

Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.fidelcastro.cu>)

A Cuban military contingent integrated by 865 troops and their equipment, arrived in the African nation between October 21 and October 29, 1963 to help the budding People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, following the arrival of health professionals.

Cuba sent 746 troops to meet the request of the Syrian government in the wake of the failure of the offensive launched by Egypt and Syria on October 6, 1973; an attempt to recover the territories occupied by Israel during the Six Day War in June 1967. The Cuban troops composed the Tank Battalion, which later integrated the 47 Cuba-Syria Tank Brigade.

In Angola, Carlota Operation spanned from August 1975 to May 1991, when the last group of combatants left Angola. It was the response of the Cuban government to the request for assistance made by the historical leader of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) Agostinho Neto in the wake of the aggression of the South African Apartheid Regime and its internal and external allies to prevent Angola from earning its independence, overthrow MPLA and occupy the country.

In total, 337,033 military troops and around 50,000 civil collaborators took part in the mission in Angola. A Cuban military contingent was deployed in the territory of Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo, with the mission of supporting the Cuban troops defending Cabinda, Angola, if necessary.

“The peoples of Cuba and Angola are brothers in all senses and for that reason we will always be by each other's side (...) In the good times, in the bad times, and forever. We will carry with us the indestructible friendship of this great people and the remains of our fallen ones!”².

Known under the code name of Operación Baraguá, it started in January 1978 with the internationalist military mission in Ethiopia, where the first military troops arrived to fight against the armed forces from Somalia, who first attacked on June 1977. The mission lasted until September 1989 and 41,730 military men took part in it.

In all these missions, 385,908 Cuban combatants took part, of which 2,398 lost their life in the fulfillment of their internationalist duties.

Cubans took nothing from Africa, which had been plundered over and over by the colonial powers. Cubans went to Africa at the request of their peoples to fulfill what we considered a sacred duty. The thousands of combatants who fought in Africa were not looking for personal gain or glory, they were moved by the desire to be useful, to fulfill their duty with the Revolution, to live up to the time they lived in.

THE GLORY OF WHAT WE HAVE LIVED

It may be hard to understand now, after all these years and in the light of the current times, that young men in the prime of their youth and vitality were willing to give their all, including their lives, for people living thousands of kilometers away from them, to abandon the safety of their houses to face homesickness, diseases, fatigue and death.

What made possible such acts of selflessness? Those young men, who have now become gray-haired were not present in the Sierra Maestra, in Playa Girón nor were they born during the days of the Missile Crises nor the Literacy Campaign. Those young men standing in line in front of the Military Committee office in Plaza de la Revolución and all over the country in 1983 and in the following years, are not fanatics or lambs following a doctrine, they are boys and girls born under the Revolution, moved by the deepest conviction that this is a duty; proud of those fighting and giving their lives in African lands and they just want to do as much. They do not want to be left behind.

This journalist is there too and he witnesses their tears, and he cries too, when they are rejected because they do not make it through the admission process. Logically, not all them can make the cut

What was Cuba seeking in Africa?

Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.fidelcastro.cu>)

and there is not consolation for those left out, not even the promise of other missions, nor the call to fulfill their daily duty with the country. We all want to go meet history.

1 Agency of Cuban News.

2 Speech by Army General Raúl Castro Ruz on december 10, 1977.

SOURCE: CUBA DEFENSA

Author:

- [Capote, Raúl Antonio](#)

Source:

Periódico Granma
05/06/2019

Source URL: <http://www.fidelcastro.cu/en/articles/what-was-cuba-seeking-africa>