

BOOK REVIEWS

A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989

(Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, under the SUN PRESS imprint, 2015, 207 pp.
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Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet and Vladimir Shubin

André Wessels

Department of History, University of the Free State

wesselsa@ufs.ac.za

The war that broke out in the north of South-West Africa (today Namibia) in 1966, that escalated from about 1973, and from 1975 onwards spilled over into Angola, had far-reaching consequences for the whole of southern Africa. This conflict, which dragged on until 1989, has been referred to as (from a South African point of view) the Border War, and sometimes also as the Bush War. It can also be regarded as the Namibian War of Independence, albeit that it became intertwined with the civil war in Angola. It formed part of the Great Liberation Struggle in southern Africa, which lasted from 1961 (when guerrillas first became active in Angola, then still a Portuguese colony) until 2002 (when Jonas Savimbi was killed in Angola).

Although a number of books were published on this conflict in the years immediately after Namibia became independent in 1990, there has been a prolific output of books on the war “up north” and “on the border” (mostly from a South African point of view), dealing with, inter alia, special operations, unit/regimental histories and the (sometimes very personal) reminiscences of ordinary soldiers (and generals) who were involved. Very few of these books are of a scholarly nature, but those members of the general public who are keen on military history, do not really care.

From an academic point of view, it is always good to see a new book that is based on solid research, on the shelves. This holds true of *A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989*, edited by Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet (who died before the book was published) and Vladimir Shubin, with Gert van der Westhuizen, Hedelberto López Blanch and Gennady Shubin as co-editors. Other contributors are Phil Eidelberg, Klaus Storkmann, Ulrich van der Heyden and Tienie du Plessis (the latter who also died before the book was published). Already from these names it is clear that in this publication the war in Angola is seen from different points of view, including that of the Republic of Cuba, the former Soviet Union (now Russia) and the former East Germany (DDR).

A very important aspect of the book is thus the fact that it indeed does not primarily look at the war in Angola from a South African (Defence Force) perspective, but also gives a voice to participants “on the other side” – see in this regard especially the emphasis that is placed on the role of the Cubans and Russians. This is further emphasised by the inclusion of many (probably never before published) photographs from Cuban and Russian archives, etc. depicting the war as seen through the lenses of Cuban and Russian cameras.

The editors/authors have indeed achieved what they set out to do, namely to contribute to a wider understanding of the war in Angola (and in Namibia); a war that had lasting consequences for the whole region – consequences that are still felt today. In *A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989* the editors and their authors provide an excellent review of the above-mentioned conflict. In the first chapter, important historical background information is provided. In the next chapter, the war is placed in the context of the broader Cold War. In separate chapters, the role of the Cubans and of the Soviet Union, is analysed. In other chapters, the relationship between South Africans and Russians, the military support provided by East Germany for the liberation movement in Angola, the resistance to national service by many South Africans, as well as the militarisation of South African society, are discussed and analysed.

Pages 165-200 of the book contain the most comprehensive list to date of sources that deal with the war: more than 500 book titles are listed, as well as some 500 articles, a report, 44 theses, as well as internet sources, websites, CDs, films, records, novels, plays, etc. This bibliography is an invaluable source for anyone interested in the war in Namibia/Angola and will be of great assistance to postgraduate students and other researchers, as well as anyone interested in the most traumatic southern African conflict in the era

since the end of World War II.

As Romanian Gen. (rtd) Dr Mihail Ionesco has previously correctly pointed out, *A far-away war* does indeed contribute to an understanding of present-day realities in the countries that were involved in the war in Angola. Furthermore, it offers striking if not controversial interpretations to past events that (perhaps disconcertingly), broadens our understanding of the present. To this, one can add that more than forty years after South Africa's armed forces invaded Angola in 1975, this excellent publication provides much thought-provoking background information, as well as an invaluable bibliography on the war in Angola (and adjacent areas), thus enabling those on all sides who participated in the conflict, together with those who watched from the sidelines, to either once again or for the first time take stock of this relatively recent and most devastating conflict. This is undeniably a very important scholarly publication and a worthwhile contribution towards the historiography of the Angolan/Namibian/Border/Bush War. It should be read by anyone interested in (southern) African military history, the political development of southern Africa in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and related themes. *A far-away war: Angola, 1975-1989* is highly recommended.

The new black middle class in South Africa

(Jacana Media, 2016, 296 pp. ISBN 978-1-4314-2316-3)

Roger Southall

Simphiwe Ngwane

Bloomberg Media Africa Initiative (BMIA) fellow

Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS)

Ngwane23@gmail.com

While today's black middle class may be 'new', it has important roots in the households of the past (p. 164).

In *The new black middle class in South Africa*, Roger Southall offers us what he terms as a modest aim to making some contribution to the greater understanding of contemporary South African society. The book was originally inspired by