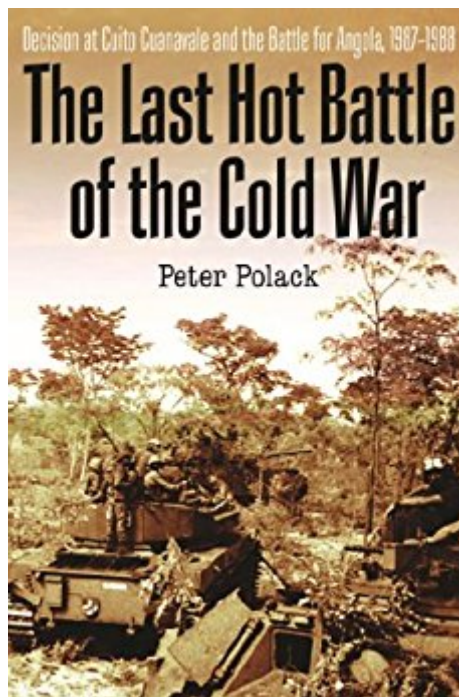


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The Last Hot Battle Of The Cold War: South Africa Vs. Cuba In The Angolan Civil War



Synopsis

As the Soviet Union teetered on the edge of collapse during the late 1980s, and America prepared to claim its victory, a bloody war still raged in Southern Africa, where proxy forces from both sides vied for control of Angola. The result was the largest battle on the dark continent since Al Alamein, with forces from both sides paying in blood what U.S.-Soviet diplomats were otherwise spending in diplomacy. The socialist government of Angola and its army, FAPLA, fully stocked with Soviet weapons, had only to wipe out a massive resistance group, UNITA, secretly supplied by the U.S, in order to claim full sovereignty over the country. A giant FAPLA offensive so threatened to succeed in overcoming UNITA that apartheid-era South Africa stepped in to protect its own interests. The white army crossing the border prompted the Angolan government to call on their own foreign reinforcements—the army of Communist Cuba’s. Thus began the epic battle of Cuito Cuanavale, largely unknown in the U.S., but which raged for three months in the entirely odd match-up of South African Boers vs. Castro’s armed forces, which for the first time in the Cold War proved what it could achieve. And it turned out the Cubans were very good. The South Africans were no slouches at warfare themselves, but had suffered under a boycott of weapons since 1977. The Cubans and Angolan troops, instead, had the latest Soviet weapons, easily delivered. But UNITA had its secret U.S. supply line and the South Africans knew how to fight, mainly at a disadvantage in air power for lack of spare parts. Meantime the Cubans overcame their logistic difficulties with an impressive airlift of troops over the Atlantic, while the Boers simply needed to drive next door. As a case study of ferocious fighting between East and West—albeit proxies for the great powers on all sides—this book unveils a remarkable episode of the end-game of the Cold War largely unknown to the public. The Angolans on both sides suffered heavily, but it was the apartheid South Africans versus Castro’s armed forces that provides utter fascination in one of history’s rare match-ups.

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Customer Reviews

This was a very disappointing book. While the Author did a great deal of research, the book is just not very well written. It is more of a compendium of facts. The only thing worse than the structure of the book was the quality of the proof reading. There were quite a few typos, repeated words, and other proof reading type errors. I was reading the physical copy, but I thought for a while I was reading a Rosetta Kindle monstrosity. The wikipedia article on this battle is actually much better than this book as a narrative description of the events.

If you are a student of the war in Angola, particularly as it involved Cuba and South Africa, you will probably want this book. On the other hand, you will need to realize it has a lot of data, and is rather disjointed. There is no common thread or no narrative that links the chapters together. Instead each chapter is virtually a stand-alone effort. If you understand this you will probably enjoy it a little more. Also, despite the fact the book's title implies it is about the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, of the 15 chapters in the book, only three are about the battle. Having said that, it doesn't mean the other chapters are worthless; the author provides a lot of background on the other aspects of the war to include portions of the orders of battle of Cuba, South Africa, FAPLA, UNITA, and the Soviets, each with their own chapter. The author also has two biographical chapters on two leaders of General Ben Ben (UNITA) and Commandant Robbie Hartsliel (South Africa). Other chapters discuss prisoners of war, the air war, casualties of the battle, and the cease fire that followed. Because I am researching the conflict in southern Angola I found the book

to be interesting and useful, but it's not the book you want to rely on for a cohesive perspective on these last conventional battles of the war.

I bought this book because I am not too familiar with the late Cold War, nor am I well read into the Angolan Civil War. I was very satisfied, but for someone who does not love history as much as I do, this book could be very dry. The book does a good job of covering the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, which was the last major engagement of the Angolan Civil War involving the Cuban and South African militaries. It briefly describes the background, and then discusses the aftermath. The focus is almost exclusively on Cuba and South Africa, with very little attention paid to their FAPLA and UNITA allies. Also, at the end, the author largely avoids discussing the claims, justified or not, that the "defeat" of the South African forces led to DeKlerk's decision to start dismantling Apartheid. Much of the book covers, quite well, the respective Orders of Battle for the Cuban and South African militaries, but the reader learns almost nothing about what the Angolans brought to the table. For these reasons, I can give this book 3 stars, and recommend it to a serious student of History. However, for anyone with a more passing interest, I don't think they would find this book a good read.

As an infantry officer, perhaps I am expecting too much in a book written by somebody whose expertise is not military matters. As noted by many reviewers the lack of maps and the inclusion of material in the main narrative that should otherwise be in appendices detracts from the narrative. Also as noted by others, portions of the book are difficult to understand due to poor editing. I was hoping for much more in this book than presented. However, the book did bring up points that influence operations that are generally not discussed. For example, the discussion to which a few South African casualties would consume exorbitant time by their leadership to send the casualties back through medical chain was interesting. The same problem occurs with Israeli forces and was also observed in coalition forces in Afghanistan. A more detailed analysis in the current book could have looked at whether this issue was the result of a conditioned leadership response to injuries during training exercises. One of my former soldiers who fought in some of the leadup battles to the battle described in the book had previously been in the Rhodesian Army and when he and some of his colleagues joined the South African army noted how casualty risk adverse the South African Army was compared to the Rhodesian Army, despite having a much larger population base to draw from. In summary, when I told some friends I had this book, they expressed interest in reading it. After, I finished it I told them not to bother.

This book had substantial hype leading one to believe that this was the definitive work on the battle. While the author has attempted to give a balanced view of the conflict, he has failed to accurately describe it. There are not enough battle maps, the author's writing style does not flow and there are far too many grammatical errors.

this book read like a catalog, just terrible. This could have been a very interesting story, too bad. i suggest the author read Hampton Sides, David McCullough, or Rick Atkinson to understand how to write excellent history.

I really wanted to like this book, but it had just too many problems. Mr Polack is very unqualified to write a military battle book that happened in Africa. He pretty much calls the Cubans super soldiers and liberators and degrades the SA army as racist and poorly trained draftees. Poorly printed photos, bad maps, poor editing, jumps around the story and really no ending. Details about any of the combat or the soldiers on the ground are not there. He mentions about tank vs tank battle but does not go into detail at all. This book just seems to be a propaganda book put out for the Cuban army. I waited a long time for this book (ship date kept getting put back) and I am so disappointed.

An excellent copy of the book. It arrived very quickly

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