

**March 18, 1988**

**Confidential Telegram from USINT Havana to  
Secretary of State George Shultz, 'Cuban Armed  
Forces Ministry Communique on Cuban-Angolan  
Defense of Cuito Cuanavale'**

**Citation:**

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<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/118171>

**Summary:**

A Cuban Defense Ministry communiqué details the "heroic defense" by Cuban and Angolan troops of Cuito Cuanavale against a South African onslaught. The brunt of the fighting was done by local Angolan forces, which successfully managed to repel the South African invaders.

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**Original Language:**

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**Contents:**

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Transcript - English

TEXT OF TELEGRAM 88HAVANA001546

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O 182126Z MAR 88  
FM USINT HAVANA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2436  
INFO NAMIBIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 01546

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: MARR, MOPS, PREL, AO, CU  
SUBJECT: CUBAN ARMED FORCES MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE ON  
CUBAN-ANGOLAN DEFENSE OF CUITO CUANAVALÉ

1. (U) THE MARCH 18 EDITION OF THE CUBAN COMMUNIST PARTY DAILY GRANMA FRONTPAGES A DEFENSE MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE DETAILING THE "HEROIC DEFENSE" BY CUBAN AND ANGOLAN TROOPS OF CUITO CUANAVALÉ AGAINST A SOUTH AFRICAN ONSLAUGHT. THE COMMUNIQUE REFERS TO 39 CUBAN CASUALTIES. USINT'S INFORMAL TRANSLATION FOLLOWS.

2. (U) BEGIN TEXT. COMMUNIQUE OF THE MINISTRY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES.

THERE HAS BEEN A SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN THE SITUATION IN ANGOLA. FOR ABOUT THREE AND A HALF MONTHS, SOUTH AFRICA, EMPLOYING INFANTRY FROM THE COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ORGANIZATION UNITA, TROOPS FROM THE SO-CALLED TERRITORIAL FORCES OF NAMIBIA AND REGULAR UNITS FROM ITS OWN ARMY, HAS TRIED IN VAIN TO OCCUPY CUITO CUANAVALÉ.  
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THE TOWN OF CUITO CUANAVALÉ, SITUATED TO THE WEST OF THE RIVER OF THE SAME NAME IN THE SOUTHEAST REGION OF ANGOLA. CUITO CUANAVALÉ IS TWO HUNDRED KILOMETERS TO THE SOUTHEAST OF THE CITY OF MENONGUE, WHICH IS LOCATED ON THE EXTREME LEFT FLANK OF THE LINES DEFENDED BY CUBAN TROOPS IN THE SOUTH OF ANGOLA. IT WAS TO CUITO CUANAVALÉ, WHICH POSSESSES AN AIRPORT, THAT A GROUP OF ANGOLAN BRIGADES RETREATED IN NOVEMBER IN THE FACE OF THE LARGE SCALE SOUTH AFRICAN ESCALATION THAT TOOK

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PLACE IN OCTOBER; THE RETREAT HELPED TO AVOID DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF UNITA IN THE MAVINGA REGION, APPROXIMATELY 150 KILOMETERS SOUTHEAST OF CUITO CUANAVALA.

THE SOUTH AFRICANS ATTACKED CUITO CUANAVALA WITH AMPLE EMPLOYMENT OF INFANTRY, TANKS, LONG RANGE HEAVY ARTILLERY AND AIRCRAFT. THEIR FINAL OBJECTIVE WAS TO ANNIHILATE THE ANGOLAN TROOPS THAT HAD GROUPED THERE FOLLOWING RETREAT FROM UNITA IN THE SOUTHEAST.

IN CUITO CUANAVALA THERE WERE NO CUBAN MILITARY PERSONNEL WHATSOEVER, NEITHER ADVISERS NOR COMBAT UNITS.

AT THE REQUEST OF THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT, CUBAN ADVISERS WERE FLOWN IN THE FIRST DAYS OF DECEMBER TO CUITO CUANAVALA, FOR THE FAPLA INFANTRY BRIGADES, THE ARTILLERY AND TANK CREWS. AT THE SAME TIME SOME PERSONNEL SPECIALIZING IN ARTILLERY AND TANKS WERE FLOWN IN.

ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE CUBAN AIR FORCE IN ANGOLA WAS REINFORCED WITH A GROUP OF OUR MOST EXPERIENCED PILOTS.

IN THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY, TO COUNTER THE PERSISTENT  
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SOUTH AFRICAN ATTACK AGAINST CUITO CUANAVALA, CUBAN MECHANIZED INFANTRY UNITS, TANKS AND ARTILLERY WERE SENT TO THIS FRONT, TO REINFORCE THE HEROIC COMBATANTS OF THE PEOPLE'S ARMED FORCES FOR THE LIBERATION OF ANGOLA (FAPLA); WITH THE COLLABORATION OF A LIMITED NUMBER OF CUBAN ADVISERS AND SPECIALISTS, THESE FORCES DEFENDED THEIR POSITION.

FROM THE START OF DECEMBER UNTIL TODAY, MARCH 17, ALL ENEMY ATTACKS AGAINST THE UNYIELDING ANGOLAN-CUBAN RESISTANCE HAVE BEEN SMASHED TO BITS.

THE HEAVY ARTILLERY AND LONG RANGE ATTACKS LAUNCHED BY THE SOUTH AFRICANS IN THIS PERIOD AGAINST THE CUITO CUANAVALA AREA - MORE THAN 20,000 PROJECTILES OF 150 MILLIMETER CALIBER - COULD NOT REDUCE IN THE LEAST THE TENACIOUS RESISTANCE OF ITS DEFENDERS.

EVERY EFFORT BY THE TROOPS OF SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS ALLIES TO OCCUPY CUITO CUANAVALA HAS BEEN MET BY A HAIL OF ARTILLERY FIRE AND AIR STRIKES. THE CUBAN-ANGOLAN AIR SQUADRONS HAVE PLAYED A BRILLIANT AND HEROIC ROLE IN THE COURSE OF THE COMBAT. THE PILOTS HAVE SHOWN TRUE PROWESS ATTACKING CEASELESSLY AND FEARLESSLY THE ENEMY COLUMNS AND CAMPS.



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ACTION ARA-00

INFO	LOG-00	ADS-00	AID-00	INR-10	SS-00	AF-00	CIAE-00
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	HA-09	L-03	TRSE-00	PM-10	PA-01	OMB-01	INRE-00
	BIB-01	ACDA-12	USIE-00	SP-02	SNP-01	C-01	PRS-01
	P-02	T-01	/076 W1				

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O 182126Z MAR 88  
FM USINT HAVANA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2437  
INFO NAMIBIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 HAVANA 01546

E.O. 12958: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: MARR, NGPS, PREL, AD, CU  
SUBJECT: CUBAN ARMED FORCES MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE ON

VALOR. BECAUSE THEY CONSTITUTE THE BULK OF THE DEFENSIVE FORCES, THE ANGOLANS WERE INVOLVED IN THE HEAVIEST FIGHTING.

THEIR UNITS HAVE SUFFERED SEVERAL HUNDRED DEAD AND WOUNDED. THE CUBAN FORCES, FROM THE ARRIVAL ON DECEMBER 5 OF THE FIRST PERSONNEL UNTIL MARCH 17, HAVE SUFFERED 39 DEAD AND WOUNDED, WHOSE FAMILIES HAVE ALL BEEN DULY NOTIFIED. MOST OF THESE LOSSES TOOK PLACE OVER THE LAST TWO MONTHS.

THE ENEMY HAS SUFFERED ABUNDANT LOSSES, BASED ON DATA COMPILED FROM THEIR OWN COMMUNICATIONS AND ESTIMATES MADE BY CUBAN AND ANGOLAN LEADERS; AMONG THEIR DEAD AND WOUNDED ARE HUNDREDS OF SOLDIERS FROM THE SO-CALLED TERRITORIAL FORCES OF NAMIBIA AND HUNDREDS MORE FROM THE WHITE REGULARS OF SOUTH AFRICA ITSELF. IN THE LAST 16 DAYS THERE HAS BEEN NO NEW SOUTH AFRICAN ATTEMPT TO OCCUPY CUITO CUANA VALE.

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THE RACISTS OF SOUTH AFRICA HAVE BEEN TAUGHT AN UNFORGETTABLE LESSON. BY STOPPING COLD THE FORCES OF RACISM AND APARTHEID, THE HEROIC ANGOLAN AND CUBAN COMBATANTS OF CUITO CUANA VALE HAVE BECOME AN EXTRAORDINARY SYMBOL OF THE DIGNITY OF THE PEOPLE OF AFRICA, AND OF THE WORLD. END TEXT



The March 18th edition of the Cuban Communist Party Daily Granma front-pages a defense ministry communiqué detailing the "heroic defense" by Cuban and Angolan troops of Cuito Cuanavale against a South African onslaught. The communiqué refers to 39 Cuban casualties. USINT's informal translation follows.

Begin text

Communique of the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

There has been a substantial change in the situation in Angola. For about three and a half months, South Africa, employing infantry from the counter-revolutionary organization UNITA, troops from the so-called territorial forces of Namibia and regular units from its own army, has tried in vain to occupy the town of Cuito Cuanavale, situated to the west of the river of the same name in the Southeast region of Angola. Cuito Cuanavale is two hundred kilometers to the Southeast of the city of Menongue, which is located on the extreme left flank of the lines defended by Cuban troops in the south of Angola. It was to Cuito Cuanavale, which possesses an airport, that a group of Angolan brigades retreated in November in the face of the large scale South African escalation that took place in October. The retreat helped to avoid defeat at the hands of UNITA in the Mavinga region, approximately 150 kilometers Southeast of Cuito Cuanavale.

The South Africans attacked Cuito Cuanavale with ample employment of infantry, tanks, long range heavy artillery and aircraft. Their final objective was to annihilate the Angolan troops that had grouped there following retreat from UNITA in the Southeast.

In Cuito Cuanavale there were no Cuban military personnel whatsoever, neither advisers nor combat units.

At the request of the Angolan government, Cuban advisers were flown in the first days of December to Cuito Cuanavale, for the FAPLA infantry brigades, the artillery and tank crews. At the same time, some personnel specializing in artillery and tanks were flown in.

Almost simultaneously, the Cuban Air Force in Angola was reinforced with a group of our most experienced pilots, in the middle of January, to counter the persistent South African attack against Cuito Cuanavale. Cuban mechanized infantry units, tanks and artillery were sent to this front, to reinforce the heroic combatants of the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA). With the collaboration of a limited number of Cuban advisers and specialists, these forces defended their position.

From the start of December until today, March 17, all enemy attacks against the unyielding Angolan-Cuban resistance have been smashed to bits.

The heavy artillery and long range attacks launched by the South Africans in this period against the Cuito Cuanavale area-more than 20,000 projectiles of 150 millimeter caliber-could not reduce in the least the tenacious resistance of its defenders.

Every effort by the troops of South Africa and its allies to occupy Cuito Cuanavale has been met by a hail of artillery fire and air strikes. The Cuban-Angolan air squadrons have played a brilliant and heroic role in the course of combat. The pilots have shown true prowess attacking ceaselessly and fearlessly the enemy columns and camps. Their actions have been decisive.

Simply put, South Africa, which announced the capture of this town on January 23, almost two months ago, has shattered its teeth against the ferocious resistance of Cuito Cuanavale.

The Angolan soldiers have performed with admirable valor. Because they constitute the bulk of the defensive forces, the Angolans were involved in the heaviest fighting. Their units have suffered several hundred dead and wounded. The Cuban forces, from the arrival on December 5 of the first personnel until March 17, have suffered 39 dead and wounded, whose families have all been duly notified. Most of these losses took place over the last two months.

The enemy has suffered abundant losses. Based on data compiled from their own communications and estimates made by Cuban and Angolan leaders; among their dead and wounded are hundreds of soldiers from the so-called Territorial Forces of Namibia and hundreds more from the white regulars of South Africa itself. In the last 16 days, there has been no new South African attempt to occupy Cuito Cuanavale.

The racists of South Africa have been taught an unforgettable lesson. By stopping cold the forces of racism and apartheid, the heroic Angolan and Cuban combatants of Cuito Cuanavale have become an extraordinary symbol of the dignity of the people of Africa, and of the world.

End text.