

Russian Rockets Making Angola Another Vietnam

By Dial Torgerson
Los Angeles Times

Kinshasa, Zaire

Behind the shifting battle lines of northern Angola, Portuguese volunteers who have been battered by Russian rockets say: "Angola is going to be a Russian Vietnam."

The Russians' Cuban allies have thrown anti-Communist forces into retreat on all fronts with the skilled — and profligate — use of rockets, while MIG fighters and Russian tanks are reportedly being readied in the capital of Luanda for the civil war's next escalation.

In Johannesburg, where it is both early summer and time for Christmas shopping, those who know what it means read about the funeral of a soldier "killed in action on the border" and say: "Angola is going to be a South African Vietnam."

There are now more than 1400 South African regular troops in Angola. Reservists are being told to stand by for call-ups. Helicopters and armored cars are moving north.

Each day Angola looks more and more like Vietnam II.

But one thing is apparent to a correspondent who has been inside Angola and has interviewed informed sources in Kinshasa: Angola is not now destined to become America's second Vietnam.

An American official stationed in Kinshasa, Zaire's capital and headquarters of both U.S. and Zairois aid to Angolan anti-Communists said: "They can hold this war without us."

Millions of dollars in U.S. military aid ostensibly sent to Zaire is being illicitly diverted to the assistance of the anti-Communist National Front (FNLA) and National Union (UNITA). U.S. arms cannot be legally turned over to a third party, but U.S. Army and CIA men are expediting the flow of Zairois weapons into Angola.

Newsday quoted Washington sources as saying the CIA was airlifting \$20 million in U.S. arms to the anti-Communists in Zaire.

But the needs of the anti-Communist forces are so great, the area of conflict so large, and the infrastructure of roads and communications so inadequate, that American aid at this point can be considered negligible.

Despite the intervention of the big powers, it is still a war fought in Africa and by the African Angolans. An armored column of highly trained Europeans may cut through a mass of Africans, or a rocket barrage disperse them, but after the exhaust and rocket fumes fade the Africans close back in where white weapons have passed.

The side that will win will probably be the one that first trains its African troops to wage what has become a "conventional" war, a dig-in-and-fight struggle unlike the hit-and-run guerrilla war fought since 1961 against the Portuguese.

"We used to track each other for weeks," a Portuguese officer now with the FNLA said, "and then there would be a two-minute battle, and the side which was surprised would run. No one ever thought of digging a foxhole or sitting out a bombardment."

A mercenary soldier — the first are now appearing — called Angola's war a battle of decibels: Whichever side makes the most noise drives off the other. Firefighters with small arms are almost unknown. Fighting is done mostly at long range.

And the 122-mm. Russian rocket, which whistles fiendishly as it falls and explodes with a tremendous roar, has driven all opposition before it. Experts say only an armored raid, an air strike or massed artillery can chase the jeep-mounted launcher tubes from the battlefield.

From its headquarters at Luanda, the MPLA is moving out in all directions. A month ago the FNLA and UNITA, aided by Portuguese and South Africans, had been advancing.

The tides of war may change many times as it escalates from decibels to decimation. Meanwhile, both Russia and South Africa seem determined to win.

Russia is said to have 400 of its own experts in Angola, and perhaps 3000 Cubans. Authorities say Russia's aid in hardware runs \$10 million or more.

The FNLA-UNITA has the aid of about 4000 Zairois troops, but they have proved undisciplined and unreliable.

The South Africans believe the burden falls on them. It is clear that they think they must act if they are going to prevent a Russian foothold at close range — and another vehemently anti-white government added to their African enemies.

The South African government long denied it had troops much beyond the border of South African-controlled South-West Africa-Nambia and Angola. Then it admitted that troops might have moved deeper "in hot pursuit."

Finally, at an off-the-record briefing for South African military affairs reporters last week, the government admitted that at least 1400 regulars were in Angola.

The government has reported the deaths of 12 soldiers "on the border" which knowing South Africans know means inside Angola.