

# *I Grew Stronger and More Humane in the Angola War*

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Forty years after the beginning of Operation Carlota, the Cuban internationalist military mission in the People's Republic of Angola back in the 1990s, both Angolans and Cubans treasure moving memories of that crucial chapter of their history.

The mission, named after a rebel African woman slave in Cuba, ran August 1975 through May 1991, with the return of the last group of combatants. In that 16-year lapse the Cuban contingent reached the figure of 337 thousand 33 combatants and 50 thousand civilian workers.

Ramon Salmon Palu, now an 80-year-old man living in Eastern Santiago de Cuba was 40 when he assumed the historic duty that would change his life, which he describes as the greatest honor ever and a reason of pride for his ten children.

Being the chief of a reserve military unit in his town, Ramon Salmon said he arrived in the capital Luanda in February 1976 to lead an infantry company, which would contribute to the fight against the Apartheid regime. "I had so many good comrades and excellent chiefs," he said while recalling

Division General Carlos Fernandez Gondin, Hero of the Republic of Cuba, who currently heads the Cuban Interior Ministry.

The veteran from Santiago said that in Angola all times were difficult because nothing is easy at war, danger is always there and with it the possibility of finding death while you constantly feel homesick.

You could say that lived days full of heroism in the homeland of Agostinho Neto, which made me grow stronger and a more humane man, though I do not talk about it very often; I rather keep it all in my heart, right here," he says.

A moving moment for Ramon was his return to Cuba to his hometown Santiago, where he currently lives after retiring from the Electric Company. Ramon looks back at the old days at war and says "I feel deeply satisfied for having contributed to the freedom of Angola. This has been the best example I have given my

children, and now I can die in peace,” he concluded.

Operation Carlota, was the most important internationalist military mission met by the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces and it was mounted in response to a request for assistance issued by the leader of the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola, Agostinho Neto to the Cuban government, in the face of a military aggression perpetrated against Angola by South Africa and Zaire, backed by paid mercenaries to overthrow the Angola government and occupied the country.

“We have to admit that the internationalist assistance given to us by the government, the military and the people of Cuba was decisive for the young Republic of Angola to be able to mark its 40 years of existence,” said Angolan General Candido Pereira Dos Santos Van Dunem, leader of Vets of the war.

Van Dunem headed an official delegation to Cuba to commemorations for the 40th anniversary of the beginning of Operation Carlota, the proclamation of the Independence of Angola and the establishment of relations between Luanda and Havana.

But the Cuban assistance kept on growing in other fields. At present, over 3000 workers are offering their services in the areas of health, education and agriculture in Angola, while more than one thousand Angolan students are taking different higher education specialties in Cuba to help the advancement and development of the sister African nation.

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