



Book Review of “Sanctuary Lost. Portugal’s Air War for Guinea 1961-1974” Edited by Matthew M. Hurley and José Augusto Matos¹

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The air battle for the former Portuguese colony Guinea-Bissau between 1961 and 1974 was an important part of the colonization movement in Africa that started in the 1950s. Matthew M. Hurley and José Augusto Matos give a precise account in their book about the first part of the mission that Portugal undertakes to „defend” the rights of the West and its empire in Africa. The work is part of the Africa@War Series published by Helion & Company Limited. These books are interesting works that circumscribe the wars that developed on the black continent just before the modern era and that are connected with the independence movements of the former colonies.

The present book is composed of five chapters. The first one introduces the beginnings of the war and the Portuguese power forces that came to power at the time. The second chapter takes each of the aircrafts of the FAP (*Força Aérea Portuguesa*) and describes them to give a picture about the Portuguese air forces. The third chapter evaluates the terrain and the environmental circumstances that characterized Guinea-Bissau at the time of the war, while the fourth chapter goes on to explain Portugal’s first attempt to restore peace in the African country. Finally, the authors endeavour to describe the second attempt of Portugal to pacify the rebellious area, which was more or less successful.

In the first chapter, the writers start with describing Portuguese interests in the region and on the continent, explaining the role of Guinea-Bissau among these gemstones in the Portuguese crown – which became from 1910 a republic. However, the writers explain that this government didn’t last for long, as from 1932 the radical right-wing governor, António de Oliveira Salazar rose to power, and he implemented the „Estado Novo” system which represented the unity of the colonies with the central Portuguese government. Hurley and Matos state that from the 50s on there was an air of difference, which was also felt on the Portuguese colonies as well, and starting with Angola, it created a „wind of change”. As the researchers conclude, Portugal had to decide its preference between the NATO defensive operations and the „*Ultramar*” offensives, from which the Portuguese leadership chose the latter. From 25 November 1960 on the government decided to turn to the African territories and dispatched a load of its air force and 32,000 soldiers to Guinea-Bissau (p. 14.).

The second chapter goes further in evaluating the FAP which fought the war in the skies above Guinea-Bissau. This part of the book takes into consideration each fighter or reconnaissance plane, helicopter and air unit that was part of the FAP during the time

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when it took part in operations in Guinea-Bissau. The authors express that with the NATO-membership a set of new responsibilities arose to which the Portuguese government wanted to adhere to. Thus, their leaders went to NATO trainings and came back with a lot more experience in the air combat that helped them improve their capabilities in fighting. The authors explain that there were 5 bases in which the air training and ground training were situated: Sintra, Ota, Tancos, Lajes (Azores archipelago), Espinho, Montijo, São Jacinto and finally Monte Real. Hurley and Matos explain that most of the fighter jets were obsolete and were used in the Second World War and the pilots fighting in the Guinea-Bissau war were usually inexperienced because there was not a lot of combat at the time for Portugal. The authors first pick the F-86 Sabre, which was a fighter plane, and the FAP acquired 65 of them from the US and Norway. They go on then to the T-6 Texan/Harvard, of which the FAP had 251 pieces. The G.91-R4 was a lightweight air jet which was useful for the Portuguese air forces. The P2V-5 Neptune was also part of the Portuguese fleet, and it was a special aircraft designed mostly for anti-submarine and anti-naval combat. The P2V was used in Portuguese force until 1977. The B-26 Invader was a more heavyweight aircraft carrying bombs and rockets. Portugal was able to get 20 pieces from this valuable carrier. The SE3130 Alouette II was one of the light-fighter helicopters the FAP used in the war against Guinea-Bissau, but its upgraded series was the real hit which was called SA3160 Alouette III. It was more powerful and it could take with it a lot more weaponry and crew so it was a more useful helicopter in the Portuguese air fleet. The FAP got 142 Alouettes altogether and they were very useful for the air force. There was then the Auster D.5/160, which was a light-weight air jet, and 102 air fighters were used in Africa by the Portuguese. The MH.1521 Broussard was a transport and reconnaissance vehicle, and 5 of them were used in Portuguese forces. 149 pieces of the German Do-27 fighter was bought by the FAP, which was praised by the pilots as one of the most aerodynamic aircraft of the fleet. There were several other aircrafts that were ordered by the FAP, but due to limited space we mention only these ones. However, the Portuguese aircrafts included transport vehicles and heavy bombardiers as well which have to be mentioned. The Portuguese nevertheless knew, that if they would want to begin a fight in Guinea-Bissau with all the jungles and hard terrain, they had to rely a lot on intelligence gathering, instead of destroying everything with bombs (p. 26).

The authors then turn to the actual battles that took place in Guinea-Bissau and they described the circumstances and the environment the fighter pilots had to go through to fight in the area. First of all, the terrain of the small country was disastrous for the air fleet of the Portuguese, they couldn't see a thing, the 90% of the land was covered by jungles and the 100 kms of seaside was unable to be accessed because of the mud and difficult terrain that developed at the shores. It was obvious, then, that the Portuguese forces, however strong they have been were unable to exert enough force to achieve significant results in the area. Rather, the morale of the pilots diminished, and they were practically disappointed in the mission, since after years of useless bombing the rebels couldn't have been detained at a successive level. Notwithstanding, the ammunition,

the post and the accessories were all either lacking or missing, and the letters from their beloved ones were late, which further lessened their morale in the fighting. They had only 60 stretches of earth where they could land, and they immediately found themselves in some jungle or forest, where they lost their way. The logistics of the missions were catastrophic and the morale of the soldiers was desperate. The special fighters they brought with themselves were second world war-made, so they were practically a wreck, and useless for a full-fledged attack on a well-organized guerrilla force. Even though they concentrated intelligently a lot on reconnaissance missions, intelligence gathering that couldn't solve at the end the fight and these 3-5 years looked like an endless effort to achieve nothing. The best to describe the situation was the opinion of Edgar López, one of the pilots, who said that the worst part was when he arrived, and the best when he left... (p. 42.).

The fourth chapter concerns Portugal's first endeavour to suppress guerrilla counterinsurgency that developed in the meantime at the territory. There were previous signs already in 1961 that the guerrilla forces of Amílcar Cabral were gathering in neighbouring countries to strike an offensive against Guinea-Bissau. Soon all right the Portuguese guerrillas used the terrain and the environmental circumstances to their advantage and took hold of 15% of the territory of Guinea-Bissau, which was a considerable amount for a rebel force to take control some parts of the country. Meanwhile, the Portuguese – who planned a retaliation attacks against the guerrillas – gathered their territorial forces, but it can be concluded, that the air, naval and ground powers of the country were not fit to conclude an operation on the terrain. The territorial forces were obsolete, they desperately needed reinforcements, so they turned to the British and the USA (p. 50.), and got some helicopters which proved effective in „*Operation Tridente*”. During the war, the air forces mostly concentrated on intelligence gathering although they employed some napalm bombs as well, but these were ineffective and hazardous so they stopped using them. At the end, they were able to chase away the rebels from Guinea-Bissau, but it proved to be a Pyrrhic victory as the rebel forces later came back to the area and stood their ground against the Portuguese offensive.

Finally, Hurley and Matos describe the last part of the war between the Portuguese aircrafts and the local guerrillas. The Portuguese leadership realized, that it needed serious improvement if it wanted to defeat the rebel forces in Guinea-Bissau. It employed new, more modern aeroplanes, deployed more forces and distributed another type of administrative reform: it deployed its forces locally, so the ground and air forces could react in time if there was a guerrilla uprising. The Portuguese forces announced *Operação Resgate* (Operation Rescue) (p. 67.), which was an assault in the winter of 1965. The Portuguese learned from their previous mistakes, although they fought against heavier anti-aircraft guns, but eventually achieved partial results against the rebels, however, the problem remained ever so important. At the end, it can be assumed, that it was a difficult task for the Portuguese to keep order in the rebellious Guinea-Bissau.

Altogether, one can assume that the book of Matthew M. Hurley and José Augusto Matos gives a comprehensive view on the air war fought by Portuguese air fleet against the rebel Guinea-Bissau ground forces, which is an ever-exiting theme and I would recommend both for the average reader and the scientific researcher to read the book to get acquainted with the area and its conflicts.