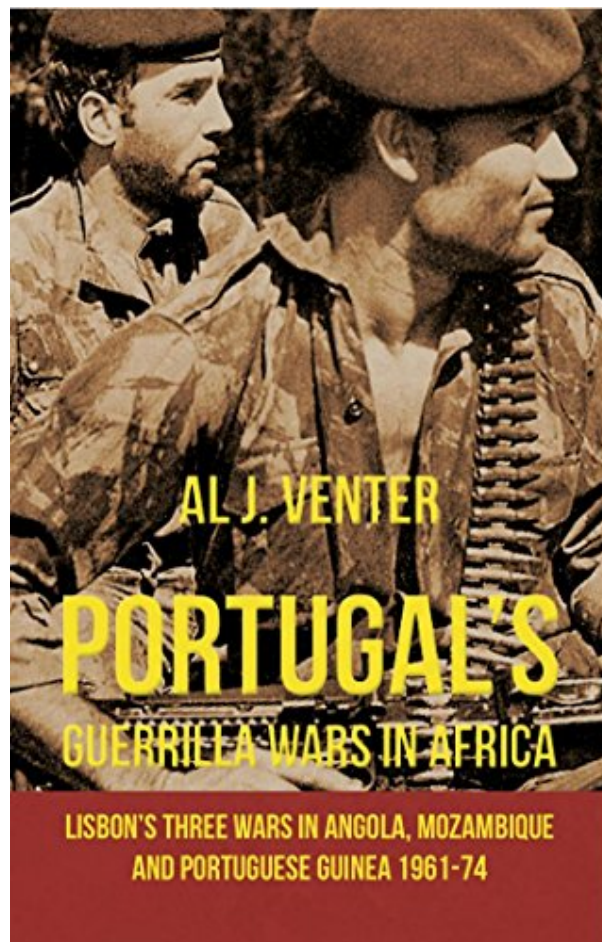
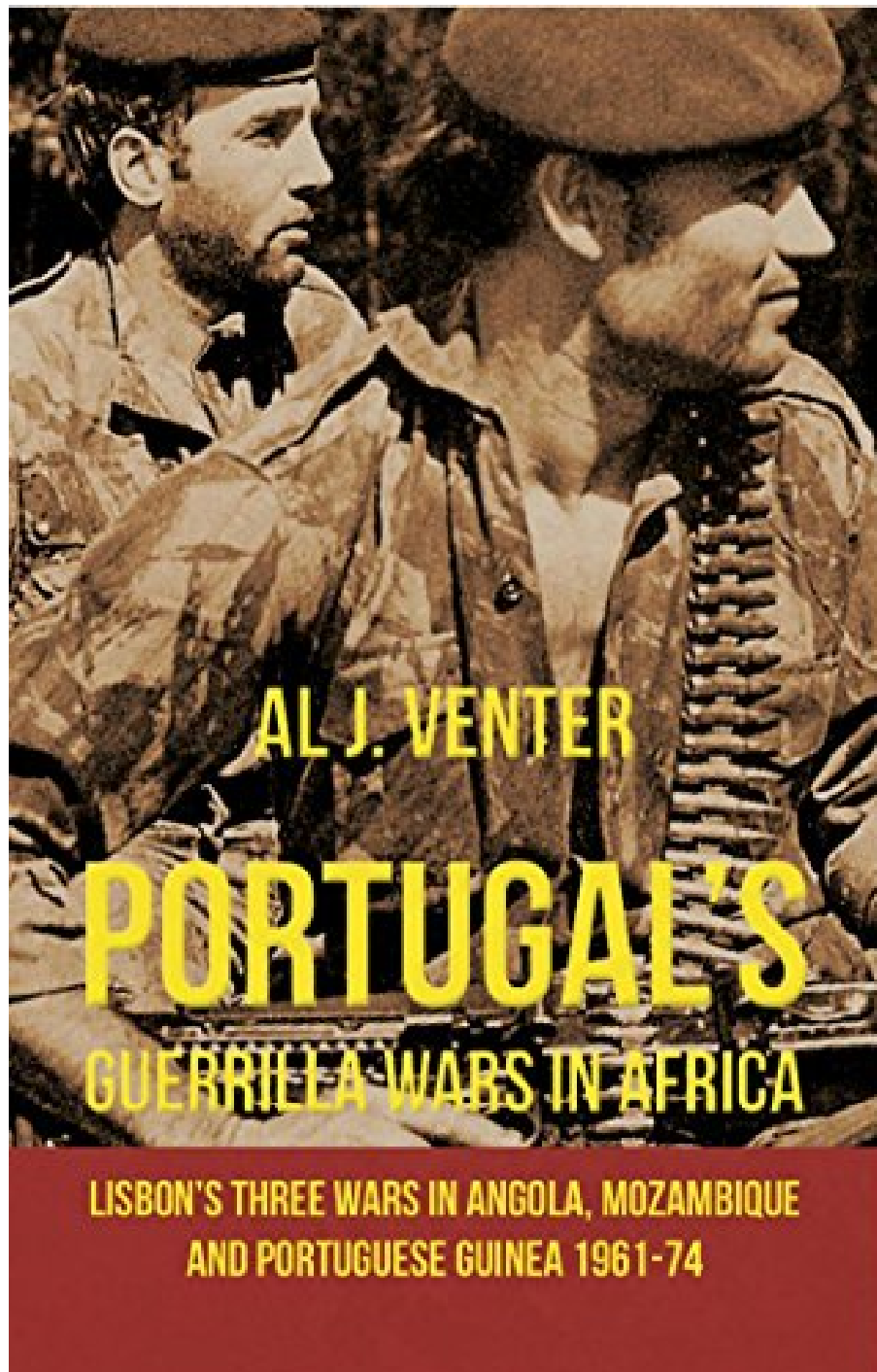


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## **About the Author**

Al J. Venter has been an international war correspondent for nearly thirty years, primarily for the Jane's Information Group. He has also produced documentary television films on subjects from the wars in Africa and Afghanistan to sharkhunting off the Cape of Good Hope. Among his previous works are The Iraqi War Debrief: Why Saddam Hussein Was Toppled and Iran's Nuclear Option: Tehran's Quest for the Atomic Bomb. A native of South Africa, he is currently resident in the United Kingdom.

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Nominated for the NYMAS Arthur Goodzeit Book Award 2013

Portugal's three wars in Africa in Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea (Guiné-Bissau today) lasted almost 13 years - longer than the United States Army fought in Vietnam. Yet they are among the most underreported conflicts of the modern era.

Commonly referred to as Lisbon's Overseas War (Guerra do Ultramar) or in the former colonies, the War of Liberation (Guerra de Libertação), these struggles played a seminal role in ending white rule in Southern Africa.

Though hardly on the scale of hostilities being fought in South East Asia, the casualty count by the time a military coup d'état took place in Lisbon in April 1974 was significant. It was certainly enough to cause Portugal to call a halt to violence and pull all its troops back to the Metropolis. Ultimately, Lisbon was to move out of Africa altogether, when hundreds of thousands of Portuguese nationals returned to Europe, the majority having left everything they owned behind. Independence for all the former colonies, including the Atlantic islands, followed soon afterwards.

Lisbon ruled its African territories for more than five centuries, not always undisputed by its black and mestizo subjects, but effectively enough to create a lasting Lusitanian tradition. That imprint is indelible and remains engraved in language, social mores and cultural traditions that sometimes have more in common with Europe than with Africa. Today, most of the newspapers in Luanda, Maputo - formerly Lourenco Marques - and Bissau are in Portuguese, as is the language taught in their schools and used by their respective representatives in international bodies to which they all subscribe.

Indeed, on a recent visit to Central Mozambique in 2013, a youthful member of the American Peace Corps told this author that despite having been embroiled in conflict with the Portuguese for many years in the 1960s and 1970s, he found the local people with whom he came into contact inordinately fond of their erstwhile 'colonial overlords'.

As a foreign correspondent, Al Venter covered all three wars over more than a decade, spending lengthy periods in the territories while going on operations with the Portuguese army, marines and air force. In the process, he wrote several books on these conflicts, including a report on the conflict in Portuguese Guinea for the Munger Africana Library of the California Institute of Technology.

Portugal's Guerrilla Wars in Africa represents an amalgam of these efforts. At the same time, this book is not an official history, but rather a journalist's perspective of military events as viewed by somebody who has made a career of reporting on overseas wars, Africa's especially. Venter's camera was always at hand; most of the images used between these covers are his.

His approach is both intrusive and personal and he would like to believe that he has managed to record for posterity a tiny but vital segment of African history.

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Unknown history that few Americans ever read about.

By Rufusfirefly

This book was a treasure trove of facts and information about a war that the US press covered very minutely if at all. In fact only when the Carnation Revolution came to pass did most Americans realize that Portugal had been fighting 3 Vietnams at one time, and with somewhat better success than the US did. Shame that American political leaders never read books like this, or have advisors who do rather than make policy decisions on partisan politics. This book really details these conflicts and Mr. Venter had the luck to have visited some of the theaters of operation and came back to tell the tale.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Cold War creeping into dying Colonialism

By Solari

It's hard to grasp that Portugal had African colonies up to the 1970s, when pretty much the entire world had left the Colonial bandwagon and was more preoccupied with the Cold War. While the eyes of the world were on Vietnam, Portugal, one of the poorest countries in Europe, was waging three different wars at the same time: in Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea (today's Guinea-Bissau).

The book *Portugal's Guerrilla Wars in Africa* meticulously analyzes the period. South-African journalist Al Venter is a veteran war correspondent in Africa and the Middle East, and witnessed first hand Portugal's fight against its former colonies. The book has a very good combination of factual research and the author's own perspective on the conflicts. That was essential for the understanding of someone like me, who knew squat about it. The book also comes with several photographs and maps that help a layman make sense of the conflict.

"It is difficult to tell a man's age in the bush: a 13-year-old often looks 18 or older and it was no secret that many of those captured were barely 14 or 15, all of them armed. It was the same in old Stanleyville (today Kisangani) in the Congo: some of the worst brutalities were perpetrated by children not yet into their teens."

It is a conflict in a different scale than Vietnam. Helicopters and bombings were rare, as were direct confrontations. The norm were cat and mouse skirmishes, of slow and constant attrition. More than all, those were wars of wills. The books defends that the Portuguese pride, that wanted to keep a self-image of a colonizing powerhouse, kept Portugal for decades stuck in a war it couldn't win. There was a crucial

imbalance of determination between the colonies and Portugal.

The book describes several atrocities, perpetrated both by the government and the revolutionary groups. The first traces of distress date back to 1961, when Angolan peasants revolted because they had to sell their cotton by a price fixed by Portugal, a lot lower than the international market price. The Portuguese commanders simply bombed dozens of villages with napalm, killing 7 thousand locals.

“During bush operations, everything in their path would be destroyed; livestock slaughtered, crops and villages burnt, the local people rounded up for questioning and anyone acting in a suspicious manner arrested and hauled back to base. Tribesmen who attempted to escape this treatment were regarded as “fleeing terrorists”, and shot. The death would then be formally listed as a “terrorist kill”.”

Most of the Portuguese soldiers, young and poor, felt like they were dragged into a meaningless conflict and did the minimum necessary until their campaign was over. It is sad to see how, like in any conflict, the local population suffered the hardest blows. They were pushed both by the government and revolutionaries. It is very interesting how the book explains the guerrilla's backgrounds, many insurgents were trained in China and incorporated tactics by Mao Tse Tung and Che Guevara in the African context, like using propaganda and mobility. It's the beginning of the Cold War creeping into dying Colonialism.

It is also sad to know how these revolutions would end up after Portugal packed away from Africa. The former colonies were taken by even bloodier conflicts, that echo to this day in the continent because of the arbitrary divisions set up by the European nations.

Portugal's Guerrilla Wars in Africa is at the same time an informative and personal book about an obscure period of our recent history.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Great insight into Portugal's involvement in the "African Liberation Wars."

By Maggot

What looks like a terribly boring title was in fact a very nicely written "memoir" with elements of scholarship. Most unusual was the plethora of photographs, "each worth a thousand words." I learned a lot from this nicely written book and it flowed easily. It was not a typical "boring scholarly book."

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