

# The War in Guinea - Bissau



In Guinea-Bissau (so-called "Portuguese Guinea") African nationalism has established itself as a great unyielding force. The following articles are reproduced by special arrangement with the "Ghanaian Times" and "Daily Graphic".

**I**N the so-called "Portuguese Guinea" today, African nationalism has established itself as a great unyielding force to reckon with.

In spite of the military atrocities and repression of a decaying Portuguese rule, the nationalists and freedom fighters have been gaining a firm ground and are virtually in position to topple the Salazar regime.

Looking at a map of West Africa one finds a little strip of river-riven country labelled Portuguese Guinea, tucked away in the Republics of Senegal and (independent) Guinea. The statistics show that it has fewer than a million inhabitants.

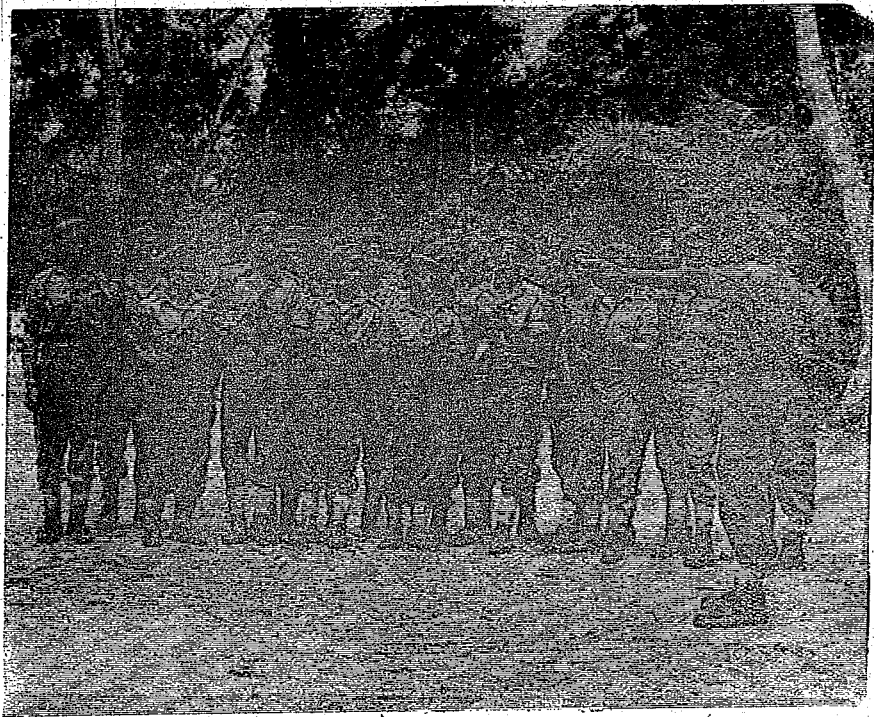
But it is not always the size that counts. For it is here, in Portuguese Guinea, that the vast and ancient Empire of Portugal may at last receive the shattering blow from

which it will never recover. It is here that Salazar regime may finally begin to crack.

As in Angola, African nationalism has fought the Portuguese in Guinea since 1961.

But in contrast with Angola, African nationalism here has gone from strength to strength.

After more than two years of open warfare, the nationalists are stronger now than ever before.



In Guinea; African nationalism has fought the Portuguese since 1961.

The nationalists are stronger than ever before.

Here, freedom fighters receive instructions for their next confrontation.

Resistance to Portuguese colonial rule opened in the late 1950s.

To begin with, it took the form of labour strikes, refusal to pay taxes and minor acts of sabotage.

These were met by the usual Portuguese repression.

This repression, though savage, failed. Towards the end of 1962 the nationalists passed to armed resistance by partisan detachments. They secured possession of a large part of the country south of the Rio Grande.

Salazar was obliged to send more and more troops. In 1959 he had maintained fewer than 1,000 troops in Portuguese Guinea.

Early this year, the number was reported in newspapers from Lisbon to be more than 20,000. But these troops have done no better than Salazar's police. They, too, have failed to master the revolt. This be-

came strikingly clear in April this year.

Two months earlier, the Portuguese command had launched a force of some 3,000 men against nationalist positions on the southern coastal island of Como.

In April these troops were obliged to accept defeat and withdraw, leaving the nationalists in continued control of the island.

#### MASSACRE

If the Portuguese army cannot evict the nationalists from an island they certainly cannot hope to master them on the mainland itself.

Other reports bear this out. Attacking from the south, nationalists have now cleared themselves a broad strip of territory which reach-

es from the southern frontier with (independent) Guinea to the northern frontier with Senegal.

Large-scale Portuguese bombing of "disaffected villages" has had no more effect than to massacre the civilian inhabitants.

Continued growth of the nationalist movement is another sign of its success.

At a recent congress held within the country, the independence movement (Independence Party of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands) took steps to reorganise itself on a new political and military basis.

Politically, it decided to reorganise its widespread popular support into a new democratic structure.

This involves a central committee of 60 members elected primarily at the village level. The central committee bureau of twenty members,

and these elect an executive committee of seven members.

Led by the party's secretary-general, a shrewd Cape Verdean hydraulics engineer called Amilcar Cabral, these seven men form the embryonic government of nationalist Guinea.

Each has charge of one or other department of affairs.

And it is significant of Cabral's highly practical approach to current problems that he himself should have taken charge of political education and orientation, especially with reference to the newly-created nationalist army.

For the second set of decisions taken at the recent congress make it clear that the movement was no longer satisfied with irregular partisan detachments.

What was now required, given the favourable military position, was nothing less than a regular army.

The congress accordingly announced the formation of FARP, the Army Revolutionary Forces of Independent Guinea.

This new Army is to be flanked and aided by local irregular militias at the village level.

### UNITY AND SACRIFICE

But the country is now divided into military zones, and steps are being taken to suppress the personal ambitions of local partisan leaders who were beginning, here and there, to vaunt their own importance and independence at the cost of the movement as a whole.

The governing idea behind these decisions is that the independence of Guinea cannot mean much to its hungry farmers and fishermen unless

it is followed by a tremendous effort at social and economic change and growth.

But no such effort will be possible without great inner unity and personal self-sacrifice. Cabral's idea is that Guinea's revolutionary army should lead the way in achieving unity and demonstrating self-sacrifice after independence as well as before it.

All in all, these moves bear witness to a maturity and long-sightedness which augur well for the next phase of the struggle, which will be the driving of the Portuguese out of all their strong points with the exception of Bissau, the capital and one or two other towns.

Reduced to these, Salazar's rule in Guinea cannot hope to last for long.

But if Salazar loses Guinea, what must be the effect in Angola and Mozambique?

## Amilcar Cabral

**P**ORTUGUESE Guinea has an area of about 22,500 square miles with a population of about 800,000. Portuguese colonisation of this beautiful and fertile land began in 1471-1475.

For centuries, the Portuguese colonialists have subjected the country to ruthless plunder; first its people in slave trade, then its natural resources and farm produce, especially peanuts. What they brought were slaughter, suppression, slave labour, poverty and ignorance.

### COLONIAL DOMINATION

Ninety per cent of the population of Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde, the so-called natives, are deprived of the right to vote and are forbidden to take part in political activities.

Ninety-nine per cent of the population is illiterate. There is only one doctor for every 80,000

people. Infantile mortality runs as high as 50 per cent.

The people of Portuguese Guinea have never ceased their resistance during these long years of colonial domination. From 1878 to 1936, not a single year passed without witnessing some uprising against the Portuguese colonialist domination.

The African Independence Party of Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde Islands was formed underground in 1956. It has mobilised, organised and led the people in the struggle for national liberation ever since.

Cabral has just arrived in Conakry from the liberated areas in Portuguese Guinea when I interviewed him the first time.

His unshaven, travel-worn face under a pair of broad rim spectacles, his easy manner, and serious quiet demeanour at once gave one the impression of a veteran revolutionary fighter and a scholar.

In a deep voice, he related, "Our

struggle is an arduous one. The first victory won by our party after its birth was mobilising and organising the masses to rise in struggle to wipe out colonial rule and win national independence.

"At the outset, we restored to legal or peaceful struggle; strikes,



AMILCAR CABRAL

demonstrations, speeches and so on. But the Portuguese colonialists answered us with bombs, mass arrests and repression."

## ATROCITIES

He recalled that on August 3, 1959, the longshoremen of Bissau, the capital, went on strike under the leadership of the African Independence Party to demand payment of back wages.

The Portuguese colonial authorities used large numbers of troops to fire on the workers. More than 50 were killed on the spot, scores of others were wounded and still more were thrown into concentration camp.

At that time, hundreds of patriots were put behind bars. Then the Portuguese colonialists started their colonial war in Angola.

The Bissau wharf bloodshed and the colonialist war in Angola drove home to the people the truth that only force could drive the Portuguese colonialists out of Africa.

The fire of armed struggle was first touched off in the Southern part of Portuguese Guinea.

Cabral said: "When the armed struggle began, we met with much difficulty. We had only bows and arrows, knives, shotguns and a few pistols to confront the Portuguese colonial troops, who were armed with modern weapons. successful at first, but we stuck it out. Drawing on the experience of other countries and applying it to the conditions of our country, we set up bases in the rural areas.

"There are no mountains in our country, but there are dense tropical jungles. So we set up bases in the jungles to carry on armed struggle."

Later, the people's forces grew in strength by seizing arms from the enemy and the struggle rapidly developed.

He continued: "Actual armed struggle began in early 1963 when we fought more battles. By now our people's revolutionary armed forces control nearly 45 per cent of the country. We can say that we have found the right form of struggle suitable to the conditions of our country."

## LIBERATED AREAS

"The establishment of big liberated areas is a tremendous victory for our party", Cabral said. He unfolded a map to show me the revolutionary base that covered the whole area south of the Geba and Corubal Rivers, the liberated area in the central region, and the northern liberated area extending right to the border.

They have formed a large continuous area stretching from the northern to the southern border. They are also the most densely populated and most important farming districts in the country.

In these extensive liberated areas the Portuguese colonial troops are in control of only a few isolated cities, besieged by the vast countryside.

I visited a hospital of the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces in Guebo, a Guinean city across the southern border of Portuguese Guinea.

Here, I met Mamabon Alfa Djaló, vice-commander of the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces in the Quebo area. This 28-year-old former worker from Bissau told me that when his guerilla unit was formed in December 1962, there were only some 30 guerillas, armed with three pistols and some knives.

Now, young people of all 15 villages in the area were armed with machine-guns, carbines or rifles captured from the enemy.

Djaló gave an account of how they besieged the city of Guebo. He said that together with the people they had set up observation posts around the city, mined all roads leading to it and detailed men to ambush the enemy.

As a result the 200 Portuguese colonial troops were confined to the town surrounded by barbed-wire fences, trenches and fortifications.

They did not dare venture out. Under the leadership of the African Independence Party, the people in the liberated areas have been mobilised and organised. The young people have taken up arms in the

ranks of the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces. The peasants are organised to develop production. The women are active in supporting the front by sending food and water to the fighters.

The Portuguese colonialists all along tried to compel the peasants to grow peanuts for export. But the people in the liberated areas boycotted this crop last year and grew grain instead.

Now, food is plentiful in the liberated areas while the cities occupied by the Portuguese colonial troops suffer a shortage of food and vegetables. The enemy has to bring in food and vegetables by plane or ship.

But this air or sea transportation is often under attack by the guerillas. As a result many city dwellers have fled to the liberated areas.

The fire of resistance and struggle has never ceased for a moment even in cities where the enemy is entrenched. The stories of little Paul and a ship's captain are but two examples.

The heroic exploits of little Paul are widely known in Bissau. I met Paul in a school run by the African Independence Party in Conakry.

This 14-year-old schoolboy, already a mature father, is the son of a worker. He joined the underground movement of the African Independence Party at the age of ten.

Once leaflets condemning the Portuguese colonial rule and demanding national independence appeared every where in Bissau overnight.

Some even found their way into the residence of the Portuguese Governor. The colonialists thought they had been dropped by planes.

That night, little Paul and some of his mates had distributed and posted the leaflets.

One day, a member of the African Independence Party was arrested by two policemen. Paul happened to be nearby. One of the policemen dropped his pistol and stopped to pick it up. Little Paul shouted to the arrested man: "Run, quick!" The PAIGC man escaped by knocking down the policeman.

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## LITTLE PAUL

Little Paul fled, with a price on his head. That is why he is studying in a foreign country.

On March 29, 1963 a 100-ton ship, the largest of the vessels belonging to the Portuguese monopoly C.U.F. Company in Portuguese Guinea sailed over to the side of the people's armed forces.

I visited the ship and its captain in a port on the border of Guinea and Portuguese Guinea.

Flying the flag of the African Independence Party of Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde Islands, a tri-colour (yellow, red and green) with a black five-point star, the ship is now sailing between ports in the liberated areas, bringing to the people's armed forces the most needed materials and personnel.

The captain was an old docker of Bissau. He was one of those who had taken part in the strike of August 3, 1959. He said he saw how Portuguese planes took off from Bissau everyday to bomb the people in the southern liberated areas.

"Then I made up my mind not to serve the colonialists any longer," he said. So, one night in March he and his mates set out for the liberated area with a full cargo of rice and other military material.

The fighters I visited told me of the life in the liberated areas. The people's revolutionary fighters live and train in the dense forests and strike out at the enemy from there.

The Portuguese colonialists have carried out wanton bombing of the liberated areas everyday this year. They even use napalm bombs.

Many villages have been

destroyed. During the day the people hide in the jungle, and return home at night. Some have simply moved to the jungles and built new homes there. But the people of Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde Islands are confident of final victory. Cabral sized up the picture for me thus:

"The balance of forces has undergone new changes, tipping the scales more and more in favour of the people of Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde Islands.

"The struggle has entered a new stage. Politically and militarily, the balance of forces between us and the enemy has already reached a stage of equilibrium."

The Portuguese now have 20,000 troops in the country as compared

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## CABRAL

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with only 1,000 in 1959. In the first three months of this year, they launched large-scale attacks on the liberated areas.

But the liberated areas, instead of being in size, have been consolidated and expanded.

In the Como Island battle the Portuguese massed a large force of 3,000 troops trying to drive a wedge into the southern liberated area.

They were routed after a campaign lasting two-and-a-half months.

Cabral said that the Portuguese colonialists had imposed an economic blockade on the liberated areas. But they themselves had become its victims. There was a shortage of food in Bissau and other cities.

The panic-stricken Portuguese colonialists knew only too well what the future had in store for them. Cabral then showed me a copy of a Portuguese newspaper.

It read: "If the strength of Cabral's troops exceeds ours they will drive us away as the autumn wind sweeps away the fallen leaves."