
DEATHⁱⁿ AFRICA



How Jonas Savimbi, leader of an Angolan resistance movement plotted to kill his deputy leader and his family. And how I tried to stop him. **By Fred Bridgland**

DEATH_{in}
AFRICA
FRED BRIDGLAND

A PROPOSAL FOR A BOOK ABOUT THE LIFE AND
MURDER OF TITO CHINGUNJI AND HIS FAMILY

© Fred Bridgland 2004

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD
www.coldtype.net

THE AUTHOR

Fred Bridgland, then a young Reuters correspondent, won his fifteen minutes of fame in 1975 when he exclusively revealed the secret South African military invasion of Angola, backed by the CIA, MI6, the French Secret Service and Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda.

Bridgland subsequently wrote a highly controversial biography of Jonas Savimbi, leader of an Angolan liberation movement and a friend of Che Guevara.

Savimbi's brilliant young deputy, Tito Chingunji, helped Bridgland research the book and became his closest African friend. But, after the book was published, Savimbi executed Chingunji, his wife and children, parents and his entire extended family. He also threatened Bridgland with death.

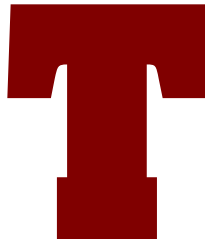
The essay that follows is a treatment Bridgland has completed as a proposal for new book on his friend Chingunji's murder and telling the true story of the madness that gripped Savimbi and his guerrilla movement.

FRED BRIDGLAND has won six awards for reporting from Africa, from Europe and from Scotland. He has been commended for his reporting from Africa in the British Press awards and was Scotland's Journalist of the Year – the highest award in Scotland – and Scotland's Reporter of the Year.

He has written three books, all on African themes, and made television films for the BBC, including an hour-long documentary based on his book, *Katiza's Journey*, about Winnie Mandela and her murderous soccer team.

He was a Reuter correspondent in Africa, India and the Middle East for a decade before joining *The Scotsman*, Scotland's national newspaper, where he worked as leader writer, Europe correspondent [based in Brussels], diplomatic editor [based in London] and assistant editor. Between 1988 and 1995, he reported for both the London *Sunday Telegraph* and *The Scotsman* from Johannesburg on the transition in South Africa from apartheid rule to democracy.

He returned to Johannesburg in 2002 to report on Africa for three British newspapers and Japan's leading news magazine, *Shinchosha*.



he legendary guerrilla leader sat in a big red chair, an ivory-handled pistol at his waist, facing his top commanders across a giant open-sided African hut. Just

before midnight I was ushered by guards, cradling AK-47 rifles, across a moonlit forest clearing to the great meeting hut, known in Angola as a django.

Jonas Savimbi, a former Maoist and friend of Che Guevara, bear-hugged me and gestured that I should sit to his right. My chair, as custom demanded, was lower than the guerrilla chieftain's. Savimbi, in his rich, baritone voice, invited me to speak. I was there on a dangerous mission. Lives, my own included, demanded that I hit the right notes.

I had been asked by a number of people to travel to Jamba, Savimbi's base deep in the lion-infested jungle of southern Angola – a place the country's former colonial rulers chris-

DEATH IN AFRICA

tened The Land at the End of the World – to check that one of his finest and most popular commanders was in good health. There had been well-founded rumours that Tito Chingunji had fallen foul of his leader and had been tortured. As the trusted author of a book [*Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa*, Hodder and Stoughton, London and others] on Savimbi and his guerrillas, I was the only person who could safely carry out such a mission – or so I had been told by others unwilling to make the trip.

I cast my eye around the semi-circle of guerrilla commanders facing their leader, their black faces lit by the glowing embers of a fire in the centre of the django. Some, I knew, were men of extraordinary physical valour: others I equally knew were cowards. But there also, in the middle of the semi-circle, was my courageous friend. I glanced briefly towards Tito: his face was drawn and haunted, a mask of fear.

I began with what I thought was the blandest possible statement. I had come, I told Savimbi and his men, on behalf of people who were puzzled as to why Tito had failed to return from Jamba to his high profile post in Washington. I said I felt obliged to represent them because, while working closely with Tito down the years on the book, I had come to regard him as my brother.

It was a bad start.

Savimbi's big, prominent eyes flashed like brilliants. His face contorted. The voice that had thrilled countless rallies and bewitched enchanted foreigners boomed: "Do you think you can still come to Africa to patronise us, puffing yourself up in a very arrogant manner and saying Tito is your brother and getting him into a lot of trouble?" He swept his arm towards

FRED BRIDGLAND

his commanders and said: “These are Tito’s brothers, the ones sitting around him who have been fighting imperialism in our country, not agents of imperialism who have come to divide us.”

Savimbi fixed his blazing eyes on me, voice thundering: “You come here thinking you can teach me lessons. I am older than you and all my life I have had to fight white racism, starting with the Portuguese. I never accepted that, and now you insult me. You have come here to insult me, and I have never accepted to be insulted by anyone, not anyone.”

Turning again to his guerrilla chiefs, he roared: “Haven’t I always said that imperialism will try to divide us?” The commanders loyally rejoined: “Yes, that’s right President”; “Correct, President”; “Absolutely, President.” Tito, I noticed, also nodded agreement.

Savimbi swung towards me and began a tirade that lasted more than two hours. I was so close I could feel the physical force of his passion, like a succession of blast waves: “I am so insulted by what you have said here that I think maybe you should just go, get out of here.”

Except that there was no way I could “just go.” I was deep in the African bush – a place with no roads, no towns, no development of any description for many hundreds of miles, and saturated by heavily armed guerrilla fighters fiercely loyal to their Big Man. The only way out was aboard the tiny plane that had flown me in from a neighbouring country.

Savimbi continued: “Our struggle is a big one, bigger than

DEATH IN AFRICA

your book. Your book may be thick, [670 pages] but it is a very thin thing in the history of our struggle. We have survived without it and, if necessary, we can die without it.”

I felt curiously relaxed, but the mood was not to last. At one bizarre moment – bizarre, because I had neither voiced nor written any public criticisms of Savimbi – he raised his left palm towards his comrades-in-arms and said to me: “I don’t know what Tito has been telling you, but I can tell you there is not a spot of blood on my hand.” This – and an admission by Savimbi that can be revealed only later – left me suddenly aware that Tito and I were in mortal danger.

Savimbi invited opinions of me from his commanders. One of his most unquestioning loyalists in a sea of sycophants sprang to the challenge. General Salupeto Pena attacked my opening remark about completing my book with the help of Tito. “Do you think,” Salupeto sneered, “Tito is UNITA [the name of Savimbi’s guerrilla movement]? Tito is not UNITA. He is not bigger than UNITA. But the people of UNITA are Tito’s true brothers.

“It is in Angola with his own people that he will be loved and cared for, not by you. The way you come here and insult our President in front of the entire Politburo [for this was a movement whose leaders trained in China] shows you are very racist.”

Savimbi cut in with a cruel taunt: “There is your friend Tito. So what do you want to do with him now? Take him to a room where you can discuss alone? Or take him out [of Angola] altogether so that you can be the guarantor of his safety?”

If only it had been possible.

At some point Jorge Valentim, the movement’s information

FRED BRIDGLAND

secretary who reminded me of a marabou stork and with whom I had clashed frequently, leaned across to Tito, tapped his knee and hissed: “These imperialists not only spread all these lies about your family, but they were writing untrue things like ‘Tito is the most intelligent man of the movement, he is the cleverest one,’ trying to divide us.”

Tito nodded in helpless agreement and then, to my relief, joined in the attack. He said I was wrong to speculate that there was any unusual reason for his failure to return to Washington – “You know yourself, Fred Bridgland, in conversations with me, that you have always asserted the brilliance, like a shining star, of Mr President, who has taught me everything.”

In fact, just a few weeks earlier, many thousands of miles from the jungle hut, Tito had revealed to me the dark, shocking secrets of Savimbi’s rule. It had been the most disturbing conversation I have ever had. “There are things that have happened and which might happen which I have never discussed with you,” Tito said. “Your family has loved me, and there are things I need to tell you now or you will not be able to understand future events.”

I was totally unprepared for what came next. The story Tito told me beggared belief. My friend was caught in a moral trap of Kafkaesque dimensions. I was moved that he trusted me enough to share his dreadful burden. But I was also terribly troubled. Clearly there were rough times ahead. I couldn’t know it then, but in due course I would be accused of planning

DEATH IN AFRICA

with the CIA an assassination with poison made from the powdered remains of a chameleon. There would be death threats. Other people I loved would be threatened with mutilation. And worse. Much, much worse.

But Tito's attack on me in the django was, I knew, a message that, whatever may have happened to him since his return to guerrilla HQ, he had not revealed to Savimbi that he had told me the true inside story of the movement – so different from the thrust of my book. I realised that he was fighting for his survival.

There was nothing more I could do in Jamba, the Place of the Elephants, Savimbi's forest eyrie. I had all the clues I needed. It was necessary to get out alive and begin the struggle – I didn't know how – to save my friend's life.

As the dreadful session wound down, Savimbi, in mercurial fashion, changed mood. He said he was sorry if he had insulted me and suggested I embrace all his comrades. I did so, like an actor in a surreal drama. When I embraced Tito we got it all wrong, hardly daring to look in each other's eyes and fluffing the movement's silly handshake, which involved bumping fists, like that of some schoolboy gang. The armed guards escorted me out. As I walked to my hut under the huge, clear African night sky I heard the sound of laughter from the django mocking the white fool in Africa. I began scribbling notes on the encounter as I awaited the arrival of the small plane at daybreak that would take me to safety.

Aboard the plane, I thought hard about the profound moral challenge that now faced me. I ran through my head some of the events that had led to this macabre encounter in the African forest between a former English council house boy

FRED BRIDGLAND

and a guerrilla chief who had learned the arts of war from Clausewitz, Mao, Che and the CIA.

My mind went back to a tiny railway town deep in the interior of Angola. It was March 1976 and I was nearing the end of three months of fleeting fame as a Reuter correspondent who had discovered and exclusively exposed South Africa's military invasion of Angola and its fighting there against soldiers of Fidel Castro's Cuban Army.

I had shone a spotlight on the fact that the hottest, bloodiest battles of the Cold War were being fought by surrogates, thousands of miles from the superpowers, in an African country most Soviet and American citizens could not, if asked, have been able to place on a map.

In Luso, as I prepared to fly out of Angola before the town was overwhelmed by a fast-moving Cuban tank blitzkrieg, I bade what I thought was a last farewell to Tito Chingunji. Tito, then aged 19, was Savimbi's senior bodyguard. He spoke near-perfect, American-accented English, self-taught from a book in front of a mirror. He was easy to talk to. He had briefed me frequently.

My exposé of South Africa's intervention in alliance with Savimbi's Maoists against Soviet and Cuban-backed forces had triggered a South African withdrawal. The Soviets and Cubans would soon install a Marxist-Leninist movement as the first government of independent Angola.

That day in Luso I asked Tito where he and other leaders of their defeated movement intended living in exile. It was a reasonable question. With the South Africans gone and the Cubans sweeping everything before them, the war seemed finished. At that point in history, there had nowhere in the world

DEATH IN AFRICA

been a successful resistance to Soviet-backed takeovers. Resistance by a little known band of badly equipped black Africans would be futile.

To my astonishment, Tito said Savimbi intended leading his remaining forces on a “Long March” back to their old forest bases in the interior to begin a new liberation war against the Cubans, the Soviets and Angola’s new pro-Moscow rulers.

As guerrilla columns streamed out of Luso towards the forests, the Long March was beginning even as I boarded the last plane to the outside world. At the foot of the aircraft steps, Tito said: “If we survive, maybe one day you will write a book about us?” I shook his hand and said a hollow OK. I never expected to see him again.

F

our years later I was working in Britain when the phone rang and the operator asked if I would take a call from Morocco. It was Tito. He had survived. So had Savimbi and most of the movement after a Long March that lasted many months and involved many deaths and adventures. They wanted to meet me again. They were fighting a new war. And, said Tito, did I remember the promise about a book?

I flew to Casablanca, where I was whisked off by Moroccan secret service men to a rambling old villa where Tito and Savimbi sat with many of the other guerrilla fighters I had known in Angola. Some African Great Game was being played: it would take me many more years to work out how and why the United States, France and others were channeling huge amounts of arms through Morocco to Savimbi for his

FRED BRIDGLAND

war in Angola. Tito said he and Savimbi would cooperate in every way possible if I honoured my promise. I knew it would be difficult, but I agreed. I knew also that a tangled web was being weaved. I did not know then just how immensely tangled it would become.

It had all seemed so simple in the mid-1970s when I was posted from India to become Reuter's Central Africa correspondent based in the capital of Zambia in the mid-1970s. Lusaka then was home to nearly every conceivable African liberation movement. It was a young foreign correspondent's dream, a moralist's theme park and a magnet for every kind of unscrupulous adventurer. Down-at-heel men who would become their countries' presidents and ministers sat in my lounge feeding me just enough stories to keep my whisky and Drambuie flowing into their glasses. I had been a member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, a campaigner against sports ties with South Africa, and now I fantasised about liberating white-ruled Rhodesia and South Africa through the power of my pen.

Angola, on Zambia's western border, took me by surprise. Desultory civil war broke out there in August 1975 after the Portuguese announced that in three months time they would depart from their 500-year-old colony. There were three contesting Angolan liberation movements and I was ordered by my Reuters boss in London to report Savimbi's Maoist faction. To get to Savimbi's territory you entered the top security area of Lusaka Airport and hitched a ride on a Lear jet, owned by

DEATH IN AFRICA

the British trading company Lonrho. “You can call us MI-5^{1/2},” a pilot told one reporter. The Lear jet flew to Silva Porto, an exquisite Angolan railway town whose wide streets were lined by the crimson flame of the forest and mauve-flowered jacarandas. Ochre-tiled, Mediterranean-style villas were swathed in bougainvillea.

Silva Porto was controlled by black guerrillas wearing Mao caps who escorted me to a requisitioned former Portuguese secondary school. The scene was straight from a Graham Greene novel: guards festooned with belts of cartridges for their heavy machine-guns stood in front of a big cardboard sign on which runny red paint proclaimed the building as the Quarters of the Dragons of Death.

I was ushered into Jonas Savimbi’s office, hung with giant maps of Angola and bookshelves on which the works of Chairman Mao figured prominently. Savimbi was then aged 41 and, having just emerged from his forest base after a decade of war against the departing Portuguese, was very fit. He wore commando camouflage uniform, brilliantly polished boots and a green beret studded with a general’s three gold stars.

Savimbi’s greeting was warm, his handshake firm and his élan, energy and magnetism immediately apparent. He spoke fluent English, despite the fact that he had never lived in an English-speaking country. I was impressed. I was reminded of John Laputa, the African revolutionary in John Buchan’s *Prester John*. When John Crawford, the Scottish adventurer, heard Laputa address his followers, he commented: “My mind was mesmerised by this amazing man. Indeed I was a convert, if there can be conversion when the emotions are dominant and there is no assent from the brain. I had a mad desire to be

FRED BRIDGLAND

of Laputa's party.”

It was that day that I first met Tito. He stood behind Savimbi. Tall and slim with fine features, Tito had soft, intelligent eyes and a beret set at a jaunty angle. Despite his guerrilla fatigues, he exuded calm. Women thought Tito Chungunji was beautiful. It was true. Tito introduced himself. So began an intense and fateful relationship. Tito was commander of the Dragons of Death, Savimbi's fifty-strong bodyguard. He had not risen so high and so fast entirely on merit. He was the scion of a family that matched Savimbi's in importance in the resistance movement. Tito's father, Jonatão Chingunji, was a descendant of clan kings who had ruled in central Angola back into the mists of time. There were twenty-two clans among the Ovimbundu, Angola's biggest tribe, each with its own royal ruler.

While Savimbi led the guerrillas in the forests, Jonatão, a teacher and Christian pastor, organised underground cells in small towns and villages along the Benguela Railway – built by a Scottish engineer at the beginning of the twentieth century to haul copper more than a thousand miles from the mines of the Belgian Congo and Northern Rhodesia to the Atlantic port of Lobito.

Jonatão recruited men to fight alongside Savimbi, gathered intelligence, food, medicine and boots for the guerrillas, and established escape routes from the country for Angolans threatened by the ruthless PIDE political police, guardians of the Portuguese dictatorship. Tito, as a boy, visited Savimbi's supporters to deliver secret messages and collect money for the movement, carrying a bag in which small sums of money were placed and covered with food.

DEATH IN AFRICA

Tito's two elder brothers, Samuel and David, were among the first guerrilla recruits. With Savimbi, they accepted an invitation from Mao Tse-tung to train at China's Nanking Military Academy alongside young black Rhodesian guerrillas. Jonatão was arrested by the Portuguese in the late 1960s, convicted of terrorism by a military court and sent to a hard labour prison. Tito's mother, Violeta, Tito, then 14, and a younger brother were also detained. The boys were released, but the family home had disintegrated and they lived as street kids in Luanda, Angola's capital, foraging on rubbish tips, begging from foreign sailors and doing odd jobs in Portuguese houses.

Tito, as the son of a "dangerous revolutionary", was re-arrested in 1972 and imprisoned at the notoriously harsh São Nicolau prison in the coastal desert of southern Angola. For one six-month period he was kept in solitary confinement in total darkness, living among his own waste. He lost count of time. Food was delivered through a narrow slot on to a small shelf. "I used to grope for the plate," he told me. "But I was weak and I could see nothing. Often I knocked the plate from the shelf, but I was so hungry I would kneel and lick the food from the floor. When they released me from solitary I couldn't see for days. I was blind. But I was more frightened when I began to see again. My black skin had turned gray."

The Chingunjis were freed from prison after a military coup in Portugal on 25 April 1974 led to a decision by Portugal's new rulers to abandon their 500-year-old Angolan colony. The Chingunjis moved to territory controlled by Savimbi's guerrillas as Angola descended into civil war between three liberation movements.

From the time in 1980, when Tito telephoned me from Morocco, until 1987, when my book on Savimbi and his movement was published, Tito stayed frequently at my homes in London, Edinburgh and Brussels as we worked on the project. He became close to my wife, Kathryn, and my three children. He was particularly fond of my youngest daughter, Rebecca. He gave her teddy bears and, in the evenings, as he sat discussing religion and family life with Kathryn, Rebecca would stand behind him and run her fingers gently through his African peppercorn hair for long periods at a time. I took him also to my parents' council house home, where my mother fussed around him and plied him with her fabulous roasts.

Tito and I shared many adventures: I made major journeys on foot with Savimbi's guerrillas, following them into battle against Cuban troops and soldiers of the country's Marxist government. On one occasion we were together in a plane that crashed on take-off from the Angolan forest. The plane was destroyed: miraculously, no one aboard was killed.

By 1988 it looked as though Savimbi would emerge triumphant in Angola. He seemed the epitomy of a new kind of African visionary: tough enough to prevail, yet idealistic enough to favour pluralistic politics. Everything about him was larger than life: the man radiated charisma. One senior White House official trilled: "Savimbi had a world-class strategic mind. It was difficult not to be impressed by this Angolan, who combined the qualities of warlord, paramount chief, demagogue and statesman."

But, as everything began to look rosy for Savimbi's people, I

DEATH IN AFRICA

received another phone call from Tito that would, once again, transform my life.

The phone rang in my London office, just off Fleet Street. Tito was calling from Washington D.C., his base as Savimbi's foreign minister and top diplomat.

"Fred, I need to talk to you badly. Can you please fly here?"

"What's it about?"

He said he couldn't tell me.

"Look, Tito, I'm sorry but I don't just hop on transatlantic flights to have casual chats with friends."

He said I must come. There was an unusual edge of anxiety in the voice of a man who had always seemed to me remarkably composed.

"Tito, you can't expect me to come until you tell me a bit more."

"I can't on the phone."

"Well, let me ask you, is this a matter of life or death?"

"Yes."

"You're serious?"

"Yes."

"OK, I hear you. I'm on my way."

Nothing before in the 13 years I had known Tito Chingunji prepared me for the story he told me in my room in downtown Washington's Vista Hotel that autumn of 1988.

My friendship with Tito had already pushed my life, and those of my wife and daughters, in unforeseen and difficult directions. Now, in America's capital, Tito added a new and

FRED BRIDGLAND

terrifying twist. He said affairs within Savimbi's movement were more complex and traumatic than anything he had previously told me. He said that each time he returned to Savimbi's forest headquarters he did not know whether he would come out again or whether he would be killed.

"Why?" I asked.

He reminded me that when we researched the book together he had said his parents, Jonatão and Violeta, had disappeared in 1980 during a Cuban and Marxist government offensive and were presumed dead. "It's what I believed when I first talked to you about them," he said. "But then I heard they had been beaten to death on Savimbi's orders. I have confirmed it was true. He has also had my sister Xica executed."

Alarm bells began clanging inside my head. My Savimbi book had stirred huge controversy and I had staked my reputation on its accuracy. Now Tito was beginning to reveal a side of the movement that had been hidden from me. "You know that four of my brothers died?" Indeed, I did. From Tito's and Savimbi's accounts, I had described their various heroic deaths in combat against Portuguese, Cuban and Angolan Marxist soldiers.

Tito went on: "I now believe that three of them, possibly all four, were killed on Savimbi's instructions. My father discovered this and it is why he and my mother were executed."

The slaughter of his family was only part of the horror, said Tito. Several senior leaders outside the Chingunji family had been beaten to death. Savimbi had also ordered the public burning on giant bonfires of dissident women and their children.

This was madness. Echoes went through my mind of

DEATH IN AFRICA

Nicholas Monserrat's novel *The Tribe That Lost Its Head*, about an African liberation movement that lost all self-control and descended into barbarism. The implications for both Tito and me were awesome if these new stories were true. Tito said he had put together his new version of the Savimbi story only slowly. Back in 1980, he had preceded Savimbi to Morocco to prepare a diplomatic offensive for the movement. It was from there he had contacted me and reminded me of my book promise. While in Morocco, he received from Savimbi news of his parents' deaths.

He had believed Savimbi's account of how they had been killed by the enemy. After all, he had grown up in one of UNITA's leading families. His father had been joint founder of the movement, was deeply respected, and rated Savimbi highly. Tito's two oldest brothers, Samuel and David, although dead in combat, had been elevated to martyrs, commemorated in the movement's bases in song, dance, poetry and giant revolutionary banners, just as the dead Che Guevara was revered internationally. A school for political studies had been built in Jamba and named after Samuel: portraits of Tito's dead brothers hung next to those of Che and Mao.

But Tito's parents had not been killed in central Angola, as my book suggested, by the ruling Marxist MPLA [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola]. By 1979 Jonatão and Violeta had trekked to Jamba – where many members of the extended Chingunji clan had gathered – to escape capture by the MPLA or the Cubans. There they began hearing rumours that their sons had been killed not by the enemy but on Savimbi's orders.

David had allegedly been shot from behind while command-

FRED BRIDGLAND

ing an attack on a Portuguese train on the Benguela Railway back in 1970. Samuel had been poisoned while ferrying Chinese arms to Angola through Zambia in 1974, and a younger brother, Estevão, had been executed by Savimbi's personal bodyguard battalion while leading an attack against the MPLA in 1976. Another brother, Paulo, had died in an unexplained motor accident in the same year.

Jonatão refused at first to believe the evidence gleaned by family and friends. He said he felt insulted that people should associate Savimbi, whom he regarded as a son, with such evil: the rumours were being spread by those who wanted to destroy UNITA. But Jonatão, a deeply Christian and puritanical man, was troubled after he arrived at Jamba to begin discovering the extent of Savimbi's prodigious sexual promiscuity. The leader had a growing harem of "official" wives and concubines, some as young as fourteen. "He was taking wives from everywhere and everyone, and his children from many women are scattered through central and southern Angola," said Tito. Savimbi's had gone beyond most "usual" concepts of lust. He chose wives for his senior officers and slept with them in a bizarre rite of passage before they married.

Jonatão was faced with a mammoth crisis when Savimbi began making sexual advances to his youngest daughter, 17-year-old Lulu. Lulu had long believed the stories about her brothers' murders: she considered Savimbi repulsive in every way. Jonatão needed to protect his daughter. It led him to a further critique of Savimbi's iron grip on the movement, a cult of personality Jonatão considered to be at odds with UNITA's founding ideals. He began listening seriously to the evidence about the deaths of his sons and reluctantly accepted that

DEATH IN AFRICA

Savimbi had ordered the murders of at least three of them.

Jonatão sought a meeting with Savimbi. He believed that with his reputation and diplomatic skills he could ensure the well-being of his surviving family. So, although he demanded that Savimbi stop harassing Lulu, he did not raise the issue of his dead sons. However, he did request that Tito be recalled from abroad to collect his remaining family and that they then be allowed to leave Angola to rebuild their lives.

A few days later, said Tito, Savimbi's bodyguards arrested his mother and father, Lulu and Tito's twin sister, Helena. Savimbi accused them at a rally of witchcraft and of plotting to kill him. Savimbi said Violeta was a witch with powers so great she could fly. She had flown over Savimbi's own house. She also ate people, claimed Savimbi.

This shocked me, although I took seriously African traditional beliefs in a spirit world that permeates every aspect of life. It is widely accepted throughout Africa that everyone runs the risk of being harmed by a witch: sooner or later, the evil is likely to get you. In fact, the white Rhodesian Army, in an attempt to undermine enemy morale, used to drop pamphlets in guerrilla areas telling the fighters that their ancestral spirits were displeased with their armed resistance. Traditional healers, or witchdoctors, in modern South Africa are so rich and successful that they fly their own aeroplanes and install lifts in their palatial homes. It would not have been difficult for Savimbi to convince the majority of his followers of the need for the catharsis of a "witch hunt."

Jonatão, Violeta, Helena and Lulu were beaten with rifle butts. The old couple was tied to a truck and dragged through the bush. Violeta died behind the truck and Jonatão died later.

FRED BRIDGLAND

Helena lost the baby she was carrying and, with Lulu and enemy prisoners, was thrown into one of the underground pits that served as UNITA prisons.

Tito's lone surviving brother, the youngest, Dinho, was a soldier serving on the front when news reached him of his parents' deaths. He vowed revenge publicly. Savimbi held another rally and denounced him as a counter-revolutionary. Dinho was beaten so badly that his back was broken and he never fought again.

The Chingunji family were not the only prominent members of the movement to suffer. Jorge Sangumba, whom I had got to know and respect, was a brilliant graduate of Lincoln University near Philadelphia. He was Savimbi's first foreign secretary and had established close links with MI6 and other Western intelligence agencies.

Sangumba, a sophisticated and widely read man, began openly criticising Savimbi's erosion of collective leadership. He warned that a political settlement of the Angolan conflict was a necessity: otherwise the war could continue for generations. He tried also to begin a debate on how the movement could lessen its dependence on South Africa.

Sangumba was put on trial, charged with plotting to kill Savimbi and lending young guerrillas his copy of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a textbook for absolute rulers on how best to preserve power by the judicious use of violence and deception. The last offence was the most serious. Savimbi seems to have been attempting to return his people's resist-

DEATH IN AFRICA

ance to a kind of Year Zero. Tito said all writing, all political philosophy, all poetry except Savimbi's own had gradually been banned. Savimbi ordered that he be addressed as O Mais Velho (The Elder), as though he were God-like. He had come to share with Mao all the old Chinese leader's paranoia, duplicity, rages and cruelty.

Sangumba was sentenced to die and was hacked to death with machetes. For years, people who had known Sangumba and asked after his wellbeing were told that he was on "an educational assignment in the north."

It was Savimbi's way with women that entrapped Tito ever more tightly in The Elder's web. The story is so devilish, so preposterous, that I feel almost embarrassed to tell it for fear of being disbelieved. Tito gave me the basic story: I have fleshed it out over the years from other sources.

Tito had an affair in the early 1980s with a slim, beautiful girl called Ana Isabel Paulino who had been sent with other girls on a language and secretarial course in Paris arranged by the French Secret Service. Ana Isabel and Tito fell deeply in love. But when Ana Isabel returned to Jamba, Savimbi claimed her for his own: she was forced to become his "number one" official wife, accompanying him abroad to America and Europe dressed in the latest fashions.

Before Ana Isabel was sent to France, Savimbi had raped his own teenage niece, Raquel Matos, and made her one of his concubines. Raquel's parents protested and were executed.

Raquel turned up in London in 1982 to begin a college

FRED BRIDGLAND

course. She had, in fact, been sent on a mission by Savimbi to seduce and spy on Tito. How willingly he succumbed I do not know, but succumb he did. Raquel told Tito what Savimbi had done to her and the nature of her assignment. She begged him to take her or she would, at best, return to concubinage with Savimbi, or, in extremis, be killed like her parents.

Raquel, by all accounts, fell in love with Tito. It was hardly surprising. Tito had effortless charm. He was young and intelligent and the hero of a whole younger generation back in the Angolan grasslands and forests.

“Tito was never in love with Raquel,” according to his nephew, Eduardo Chingunji. “But he was intensely lonely and felt compassion for her. He was also in a classic Catch-22 situation. It spelled danger for him if he spurned her, and he realised that for her it was clearly a matter of life or death.”

In 1983 Raquel became pregnant and at the end of the year visited Jamba. She and her son by Tito, Kalei, born in 1984, were not allowed out again. Tito continued to live abroad, in London and then Washington, continuing his work as foreign secretary.

It was after Raquel’s return to Jamba that Savimbi began publicly burning women and children to death.

On 7 September 1983 he summoned everybody to a “very important rally” on the central parade ground at Jamba. Commandos were ordered to ensure that no one missed the event. As the crowds flowed towards the arena – where television crews had filmed senior American and British politicians

DEATH IN AFRICA

and officials reviewing Savimbi's troops – they saw a giant stack of wood at its centre and blindfolded men tied to trees at the edge. Savimbi arrived with his senior generals, all wearing scarlet bandanas.

Savimbi rose to speak on a day that would be remembered as Setembro vermelho (Red September). He said witches had been plaguing the movement. Some witches would this day breathe their last and would no longer be able to retard the war effort.

An armed detachment marched towards the blindfolded men. The troops lined up, fired and the men slumped dead, still held by their ropes to the trees.

Savimbi had only just begun. He ordered every person in the crowd, children also, to gather a twig each and cast it on the woodpile. The giant bonfire was lit. O Mais Velho called names of women and asked them to step forward: they, he said, were witches whom he had condemned to death. Some had children: they would die with their mothers because “a snake's offspring is also a snake.”

J

udith Bonga was called first. She was so shocked she was unable to move. Commandos grabbed her and threw her into the flames. Eyewitnesses said she jumped from the bonfire and begged for mercy. Savimbi carried an ivory-handled pistol, which so fascinated reporters that they made it almost as famous as the man himself. He always wore it at his waist. Now he drew the gun and, together with one of his senior generals, forced Judith back into the fire.

FRED BRIDGLAND

Victoria Chitata begged the crowd to save her small son who was dragged to the bonfire with her. No one moved and she and her son died together in the flames.

Aurora Katalayo was a paediatrician and haematologist who had trained as a doctor in Switzerland. She was also the widow of a popular and outspoken guerrilla commander, Mateus Katalayo, who had been executed by Savimbi three years earlier. Aurora had resolutely refused Savimbi's invitations to sleep with him either before or after Mateus's death. Aurora, by several accounts, cursed Savimbi's soul aloud, called him a criminal and warned he would never win as she was next frogmarched from the crowd with her four-year-old son Michel. Mother and son were pitched into the fire. Tito said the proof Savimbi gave of Aurora's witchcraft was the "Swissification" of Michel and his 12-year-old sister M'Bimbi – but, said Tito, she died because of her resistance to Savimbi's sexual advances. One man, João Kalitangi, died on the pyre with the women. Kalitangi, a male nurse, had for many years cared for Savimbi's mother. Kalitangi's wife and children, including a mentally handicapped daughter, were also burned.

Tony Fernandes, a senior Politburo member who in December 1964 wrote the UNITA constitution in the Swiss Alps with Savimbi, witnessed the burnings. He has described them as the most horrific events he has ever experienced. Fernandes defected in 1992 from the organisation he had jointly founded. He later became Angola's Ambassador to Britain.

A

halt was called after 13 victims had been consumed by

DEATH IN AFRICA

the fire. A remaining group of condemned women, who had been scheduled for burning, had their heads shaved in public before they were led away to underground cells where a witch doctor searched their vaginas for magic charms. The group included M'Bimbi Katalayo, who had just watched her mother die; Navimbi Matos, sister of Tito's wife Raquel; Eunice Sapassa, one of Savimbi's former lovers; Tita Malaquias, from one of UNITA's leading families; and Francisca Chingunji Domingos.

Francisca – or Xica, as she was affectionately known – was Tito's eldest sister. She became an instant celebrity when she arrived in Jamba in the late 1970s. Savimbi paraded her at rallies as the sister of the movement's great revolutionary hero, the late Samuel Chingunji, known by his war name of Kafundanga. She cut the tape when a political studies school named after Kafundanga was opened. It was hung with giant revolutionary paintings of Kafundanga, Che and Mao.

Xica and the other women who survived the burnings of Setembro vermelho were later brought back to the parade ground and charged again with witchcraft. They were led barefoot and made to kneel while an old chief smeared their heads, arms and legs with ashes from the pyre on which the other women died. They were pronounced guilty of plotting to overthrow Savimbi and of casting spells which caused setbacks at the front and made soldiers' wounds unhealable.

They were executed over a period of months.

Navimbi Matos was the first to die. She was accused of flying over Savimbi's house to stop him winning the war against the Cubans and the MPLA government.

Xica Chingunji was second. She was accused of using witch-

FRED BRIDGLAND

craft to cause miscarriages in other women. Xica, seven months pregnant, was blindfolded and made to stand next to the grave that had been dug for her. The hail of bullets from the firing squad cut her in half and her child was said to be seen falling from her womb.

Eunice Sapassa was hacked to death with machetes. M'Bimbi Katalayo was shot dead with three other girl children. Tita Malaquias was pardoned and later escaped to tell the tale.

After my confrontation with Savimbi in the forest django on Christmas Eve 1988, I returned to London wondering how I could help save Tito's life. I remembered our meeting in Washington and his revelations about the true nature of Savimbi. In just a few hours Tito had changed so much in my own personal and professional life. I would have to reappraise drastically an important and, I believed, historic issue in which I had been immersed for more than a decade. Savimbi was not only bestialising his people, but he was condemning them to defeat.

What, I asked Tito, was I to do with this devastating new information? I smiled wryly when he replied that I was a man who understood Africa. In fact, the more I learned about and lost my heart to that extraordinary continent the less I felt I understood it. Tito went on: "Either I will give you a signal that the time has come to act or you will know, without me, that the time is right."

Well, I had now received bundles of signals and the time was

DEATH IN AFRICA

certainly right. Too much delay and it would be too late. My dilemma was that I could not tell the story outright: to publish that Tito himself had made these revelations to me would be to sign his death warrant. I would have to dig into my limited powers of subterfuge.

T

ito had advised me, at our Washington meeting, that if the worst came to the worst there were two people who also knew the story and who I could trust with my life. He had advised both to confide in me.

The first was Olga Mundombe, an Angolan from Tito's home town, Silva Porto, and a graduate in biology and public health from Chicago University, who worked in Tito's Washington office. The second was his nephew, Eduardo, Kafundanga's son, who had just arrived in London in the hope of beginning engineering studies. They became my close friends and allies.

Olga, a tiny sparrow of a woman, had more information to tell me about Tito's living nightmare as well as a scarcely believable story of her own.

Tito, despite his frightful troubles, had seemed to me to be as calm and composed as ever when he briefed me in Washington. Not so, said Olga, perhaps his closest confidante. Olga said he felt mentally tortured and had been on the verge of a nervous breakdown for months.

All his pleas to and compromises with Savimbi had failed to win protection for his beloved little sister, Lulu. Tito's parents had died trying to protect Lulu from Savimbi's sexual predation. Lulu had enormous spirit and courage. Not only had she

FRED BRIDGLAND

constantly refused Savimbi sex, she openly berated him for killing her parents, her brothers and older sister Xica. In Jamba, Portugal's mournful, nostalgic fado folk songs – which were popular even among black Angolans – were banned. So Lulu took to roaming at night among the huts at Jamba singing fado in what everyone knew was deliberate defiance of Savimbi.

So feisty and contemptuous was her conduct that she was more often in the movement's fetid pit prisons than out. At the age of 27 all her teeth had been broken in frequent punishment beatings and Tito had pleaded unsuccessfully with Savimbi to allow her to receive hospital treatment abroad.

Even out of prison, Savimbi subjected Lulu to terrible pressure. He sent her to teach, with Raquel and Tito's twin sister Helena, at UNITA's model secondary school, the Polivalente, always on the itinerary of distinguished foreign visitors to Jamba. When the women arrived to begin teaching they were confronted by pupils carrying banners which said: "We refuse to be taught by traitors." The three women were beaten up by pupils while Savimbi's bodyguards looked on.

Savimbi had constantly refused to send Raquel and their three children to join Tito in Washington. Tito's family were being held as hostages against his good behaviour, successful diplomacy and continued loyalty. At the same time, Tito had discovered that two of his subordinates in the Washington office were sending secret, belittling reports about him back to Savimbi through right-wing lobbyists Savimbi had hired with Saudi Arabian money. "The more success Tito achieved, the more Savimbi sent demeaning messages and the more he humiliated the Chingunji family in Jamba, either imprisoning

DEATH IN AFRICA

them or punishing them in some other way,” said Olga. “It was driving him crazy.”

Tito was so disturbed and under such stress that he occasionally collapsed in apparent fainting attacks. Right through his involvement in the movement, he had been groping, fighting, towards a more just society. Instead he found himself subject to arbitrary tyranny, a corrupted struggle for freedom and the cruel whims of one man. He lived with the knowledge that the slightest mistake could cost the lives of his entire family.

Within weeks of my meeting with Tito, Savimbi recalled him to Jamba for consultations. Olga and Eduardo urged him not to go. “Savimbi will get you,” Eduardo recalled telling Tito. “He knows he will have to kill every last Chingunji to stop the truth from being known.” Eduardo reminded Tito that his trapped sisters had warned him never to return: they might die, but at least someone would survive to tell the story.

Tito did consider refusing to go back, but quickly rejected the possibility. He had embraced again the Christian faith of his childhood and believed that God might protect him. But he also knew there was a chance that it could be the end. “Either all the family live, or we all die together,” he told Olga.

B

ut, within hours of Tito’s departure for Jamba, Olga was kidnapped from her Washington house in the middle of the night by a group of Savimbi hit men, probably with CIA approval. She was held captive and told to write a public denunciation of Tito, saying he was plotting to assassinate Savimbi. Knowing it was cruel nonsense, she refused, even

FRED BRIDGLAND

when her brother, a guerrilla major, arrived from Angola and told her she must cooperate.

She continued refusing to collaborate. Then at the beginning of December 1988 she was told that Tito had returned to Washington and wanted to meet her at Dulles Airport. It was a ruse. Three men arrived in a car, but instead of going to Dulles they took her to a private clinic, from where they managed to get Olga, now in an extremely fragile state, committed to Fairfax Hospital as a mental patient.

“I was so shocked, and my story was considered so fantastic and unbelievable, that they put me in solitary confinement with a surveillance camera for my own protection,” Olga recalled. “I decided at the beginning I should use some of the time to reach inside myself for some strength, for a way of understanding all this evil. So I stayed silent and read and read.

“Ironically, when I came out of solitary it was the really crazy people who first realised I was not crazy. They kept calling me ‘nurse’. Then a social worker noticed I was reading newspapers. She began asking questions and she believed my story when I was able to show her newspaper stories featuring people who had appeared in my account.”

Olga was discharged. She phoned me in London and became the first person to ask me to travel to Jamba on the mission to secure Tito’s life.

Back in London from Jamba, I discussed extensively with Eduardo Chingunji how best we could help Tito. We

DEATH IN AFRICA

decided we had to take some calculated risks. We briefed Amnesty International's Angola specialist, Gill Nevins, who had her own sources about trouble within Savimbi's movement. Gill issued a series of carefully worded statements that alerted the world about possible human rights abuses by Savimbi against his own followers.

I also approached a retired MI6 officer who, while still in the service, had been close to Tito and who was now brokering the sale of second-hand Chinese tanks to various Third World countries. He was disturbed by what I told him, but said he found the story impossible to believe. In that, he was not unusual. The West's covert Angolan actions in the African Great Game were working exceptionally well. They believed Savimbi would come to power through the ballot box. His powerful backers either did not want to know Savimbi could act so evilly or else they chose to believe that Tito had done something so wrong as to deserve his leader's wrath. I do not know what action, if any, the British agent took. He died before we could meet again.

We turned to television. A producer at Britain's ITN, understanding the constraints Eduardo and I were under, made a half hour programme on the history of the Chingunji family. Both Eduardo and I appeared, saying we believed Tito himself to be in potential danger while avoiding specific allegations against Savimbi that would make it clear Tito had briefed us. All hell broke loose after the documentary was screened. UNITA representatives around the world gave press interviews saying we had been paid by the Angolan government to fabricate lies. Death threats quickly followed, night after night in telephone calls from three continents.

FRED BRIDGLAND

When a UNITA hit squad was reported to have arrived in London, I sent Eduardo to a safe house with relatives in Scotland. I received protection from Scotland Yard's Special Branch. As all this was happening letters were delivered to both of us from Tito. Mine, in Tito's neat, clear handwriting, read, in part:

To Fred Bridgland

I'm writing this letter to you wishing you well. I'm doing well and fine. I hope your family is well ... Through the many years I've worked with you we have shared different experiences as we went along. All was based and still is about the struggle of the Angolan people with UNITA ...

Everything that I told you I want you to know from this moment that history will prove that Dr Savimbi is the only one that protected and still protects our family. Without him my family would not have survived at all ... I committed personal insults to Dr Savimbi. Despite it all, he protects me every day. I hear you want to organise pressure groups in my support. I'm not in jail and never have been. Everything you, or anybody else, could do is to create problems for me, stopping my brothers in the struggle to trust me ... I ask you to drop everything. I will fight against you if you insist. The millions of Angolan families have given more than my family alone. I can't be selfish nor betray them. I'm with them for ever.

From Tito Chingunji

The letter had been written under intense pressure. And although it signalled that Savimbi was alarmed by the doubts being cast on his democratic credentials, we had no way of knowing whether our gamble had increased or decreased

DEATH IN AFRICA

Tito's chances of survival.

One positive outcome, however, was that Savimbi now felt the need to parade Tito at nearly every visit to Jamba by foreign dignitaries, many of whom saw Tito and dismissed as nonsense our suggestions that he might be any kind of danger.

Typical was a visit by British Liberal Democrat MP Sir Russell Johnston who had become an advocate of UNITA's cause, having been briefed and charmed by Tito. Sir Russell visited Savimbi in March 1989 and said on his return to Britain that he had spent an hour alone with Tito. "He was certainly fit and well and denied having been tortured," Sir Russell told reporters. "Chingunji did not seem constrained. I watched him carefully while Savimbi gave a press conference and he laughed at the jokes as heartily as anyone."

Sir Russell said Tito had specifically told him he could not understand why I had suggested he might be in danger – "He (Tito) is embarrassed by it all."

Sir Russell's gullibility was a bitter blow. His remarks were widely reported. But, on the plus side, we knew Tito was still alive.

I was posted soon afterwards to South Africa to report that country's epic transition from apartheid to democracy. It was a huge privilege and the culmination of one of my major youthful ideals. But, truth be told, Tito weighed more heavily on my mind than Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990 when, in the Cape, I watched the great South African make his walk to freedom after nearly 30 years of imprisonment

FRED BRIDGLAND

From Johannesburg I continued to coordinate with Olga, Eduardo and Gill Nevins. Opportunities kept arising to pressurise Savimbi over Tito. Researchers and journalists passing through South Africa on their way to Jamba used to drop into my office to be briefed about Angola. Tito particularly interested Shawn McCormick, a young analyst from Washington's Centre for Strategic and International Studies. Tito had established a reputation in Washington for the skill with which he had helped establish Angola Task Forces in both houses of Congress, which kept more than US\$80million a year rolling to Savimbi.

"I soon heard about Tito when I arrived in Washington," Shawn said. "He was absolutely critical to UNITA's success. He was comfortable with Congressmen, heads of think tanks and national security advisers, which helped UNITA transcend from the stupid right to moderate Democrats and Republicans. The bipartisanship of the Task Forces was a remarkable achievement. When the Angolan government itself couldn't be seen anywhere on the Hill, in walks this young Angolan guy and gets a powerful caucus set up. He had a grace, a charm, about him. For those who didn't like the movement, he made UNITA palatable."

Shawn dropped by my office on his way to Jamba in August 1990. I decided to tell him the "real" story and he subsequently became an invaluable ally in the attempt to keep Tito alive.

In Jamba Tito was produced for Shawn in the full uniform of a brigadier with a holstered pistol at his waist. He was not allowed to speak to Tito alone, but as everyone walked from one meeting to another Shawn sidled up alongside him and said Olga, Eduardo and I sent our love and had not forgotten

DEATH IN AFRICA

him. Shawn reported back: “He turned and looked at me and his eyes filled with tears. This chill ran down my spine because I felt I was looking at a dead man.”

Little wonder. A short while earlier Lulu, back in a pit prison, had attempted suicide. Savimbi ordered her removal and then executed her to join the list of Chingunji dead.

Desperate to persuade Tito’s “friends” and mentors in the US government that he was in extreme danger, I wrote to Hank Cohen, the US Secretary of State for Africa, pleading with him to use his influence with Savimbi to ensure Tito’s survival. Cohen never replied, but he told others in Washington there was nothing he could do.

No one wanted to know, especially at the highest level. Individuals counted for nothing in the US masterplan for Angola, which was meant to culminate in a Savimbi victory at the ballot box. “It was too heretical to speak out against Savimbi in Washington at that time,” said Shawn. “You just got drowned out. There was near-agreement on holding elections, with Savimbi, Washington’s man, as the likely winner.”

My advanced lesson in ruthless realpolitik progressed further when Senator Edward Kennedy’s top researcher, Nancy Soderberg, dropped by the office on her way to Jamba in June 1991. Nancy believed Tito was in trouble, so I suggested she might use her influence by writing to General Colin Powell to secure his help.

I knew General Powell had had dealings with Tito. During a visit to Washington in early 1988 Tito’s phone rang and he

FRED BRIDGLAND

apologised to me that he would have to break off the meeting. General Powell, then President Ronald Reagan's National Security Adviser, wanted him to go to the White House immediately to discuss business.

Nancy persuaded Senator Kennedy to write to Powell, who by now had moved from the White House to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The senator told Powell: "There are credible reports that he [Tito] had been tortured by UNITA and that his life is in danger."

In his reply to Kennedy, Powell wrote: "I don't believe I know Mr Chingunji and to the best of my knowledge I did not meet him during the long time I was National Security Advisor."

In February 1992, as Angola's first general election approached after 18 years of civil war and perhaps a million deaths, Savimbi paid an official visit to Cape Town for talks with South African President F.W. de Klerk.

Savimbi called a press conference at the five-star Mount Nelson Hotel on the flanks of Table Mountain to proclaim his commitment to peace, justice and democracy. With a journalist friend, Chris McGreal of the London Guardian, I plotted a hijack. Savimbi paid tribute to South Africa's moves towards democracy [Nelson Mandela had been free from imprisonment by now for two years] and compared it to the Angolan peace process. Answering questions, Savimbi confidently predicted that he would be elected president when Angolans went to the polls in September.

I sat hidden from Savimbi's view at the back of the packed

DEATH IN AFRICA

conference room and hidden by a pillar, but after a few questions I rose and asked my own: “Can you tell the international community whether Tito Chingunji still alive?” If Savimbi was shocked to see me for the first time since the “rumble in the django” more than three years earlier, he didn’t show it. “Yes, of course, Tito is alive and well, doing his job as deputy secretary-general and looking forward to the election campaign,” Savimbi told me and the rest of the assembled reporters.

Up bobbed Chris McGreal, as planned, from the other side of the room to ask why Savimbi simply didn’t put the whole Tito Chingunji controversy to rest by letting foreign correspondents talk to him. Savimbi nodded like a sage and replied: “No problem, you will meet him in Luanda soon.”

McGreal asked whether that was a promise. “For certain,” said Savimbi. As usual, Savimbi turned on his formidable charm. Tony Fernandes, then still with UNITA, cornered me and said the President would like to talk to me. My heart sank, but after his promise that we would soon meet the living Tito it would have looked petulant to refuse. So dreamlike was my state during our conversation that I scarcely remember what was said, except for an assurance by Savimbi that Tito and I would soon meet. That was good news. All our efforts had kept Tito alive and now, after he had appeared in public in Luanda, the Angola capital, it would be difficult for Savimbi to kill him.

Except that Tito was already dead. Seven months earlier Savimbi had summoned his execution squad and ordered its commander to kill Tito and every remaining living member of the Chingunji family.

On 5 July 1991, the commander, General Cami Pena, Savimbi’s nephew, and his men took Tito and his brother-in-

FRED BRIDGLAND

law, Wilson dos Santos, another popular young official, to a tree grove and bludgeoned them to death with rifle butts.

Raquel and Tito by now had five children, including new born twins, Katimba and Jonatão, not yet a year old. Raquel was beaten to death. The five children were picked up by their legs and their brains bashed out against tree trunks.

Tito's twin sister Helena, Wilson's wife, and their three children along with Tito's one surviving brother, Dinho, his wife Aida and the couple's three children were shot dead. By the time the slaughter finished there was not a single Chingunji left alive in Savimbi's territory. In all, an estimated fifty members of the family died.

I should perhaps have guessed the enormity of Savimbi's Cape Town lie, the obscenity of his guarantee. I flew home to Johannesburg immediately after the press conference. That night, at about 3am, the phone rang. This time Savimbi's hounds did not threaten my life. Instead they described to me in detail how they intended ravishing and mutilating my partner, Sue. (My wife, Kathryn, and I had by then separated and divorced). I disconnected the telephone and we retreated to the mountains for a few days.

It was only in March 1992 – a month after the Cape Town press conference and eight months after the execution – that I learned Tito had died. Miguel N'Zau Puna, who for many years was Savimbi's second-in-command, and Tony Fernandes defected while they were in Lisbon. They called a press conference and said Tito had been executed. Puna had

DEATH IN AFRICA

seen Tito's body.

Fernandes, after he became Ambassador to London, told me that the last time he saw Tito had been in May 1991, six weeks before his death. Fernandes had been ordered to arrange a reception in Jamba for a visit by Bill Richardson, a senior Democratic Party US Congressman.

Fernandes had not seen Tito for some months. But youth rallies had been held at which young fighters, Tito's natural constituency, were told he had been plotting to kill Savimbi with help from me and a CIA faction. "Savimbi built up the hatred against Tito for the day when he would kill him," said Fernandes. "He had to prepare young soldiers' minds because Tito was loved by the youth. He needed to take his time because for years Savimbi had said Tito was more to him than a son. That's what we all saw, but Savimbi's love was calculated to within an inch to prepare Tito's smooth disappearance in a way that could not be questioned."

Tito had been put on trial more than a year before his execution. The prosecutors charged that he had worked with the CIA to topple Savimbi; that he had joined a black American church to acquire witchcraft powers to strengthen his plot against the President; and that he had had an affair with Ana Isabel, the President's wife. They said it was unpardonable that someone who had climbed so high had behaved so treacherously.

"It was a show trial," said Fernandes. "The people were moulded to believe there was a traitor among us. Only those designated by Savimbi could speak. No one could dissent: it was forbidden to criticise O Mais Velho.

"Tito never did anything to undermine Savimbi. What

FRED BRIDGLAND

offended him most was the fact that Ana Isabel never stopped loving Tito or appealing to him to save her. I believe Tito never stopped loving her. There was nothing else against Tito: it all rested on Ana Isabel.”

Ahead of Congressman Richardson’s 1991 visit, Fernandes was allowed to see Tito in prison but was not allowed to speak with him. Fernandes was shocked to see how thin Tito had become. He persuaded Savimbi to begin feeding him properly – “By the time Richardson arrived Tito had put on weight. He told Richardson he was well and there were no problems. He wore a pistol, but there were no bullets in it. He went straight back to prison when Richardson left.”

Just before Richardson’s visit, Raquel gave birth in her own pit prison to Katimba and Jonatão, but Tito died without ever having seen his new sons.

In December 1991, with Angola’s first election nine months away and the US Administration confident that Savimbi would win, Fernandes began preparing for a high-powered Congressional visit. It was led by one of Tito’s closest Democratic Party friends, Dave McCurdy, chairman of the House of Representative’s powerful Permanent Select Intelligence Committee. Tito had worked closely with McCurdy in setting up the Congressional Angola Task Forces. Another Tito admirer, Senator Dennis DeConcini, a Democrat from Arizona, chairman of the Senate’s Intelligence Committee, was part of the McCurdy delegation.

By then Savimbi had moved out of his secure forest base at Jamba to Luanda to prepare for the election. He had bought a luxurious house, ironically named Casa Branca (The White House), in the posh diplomatic suburb of Miramar as his cam-

DEATH IN AFRICA

paign headquarters.

McCurdy did not merely request to see Tito. He demanded it. Fernandes mounted the Casa Branca stairs to Savimbi's private quarters to brief his leader and suggest that Tito again be fattened and smartened up before meeting McCurdy and DeConcini.

"Savimbi," said Fernandes, "looked at me and said: 'But Tony, don't you know? I had Tito killed a long time ago. Go away. Don't bother me.' I was shocked and frightened. If he could kill Tito he could kill any of us. The first person I saw in the Meridian Hotel, where I was staying, was Puna. I told him what I'd just heard from Savimbi and that for me it was the end. I had to abandon UNITA."

Miguel N'Zau Puna was already planning to defect. He had known for months that Tito had been executed. On the day that both Tito and his brother-in-law, Wilson dos Santos, had been killed, Puna was ordered by Savimbi to verify that the execution squad had carried out their orders.

General Cami Pena led Puna to a forest burial site. Puna ordered the graves to be exhumed. There were two bodies, each blindfolded, who had clearly been beaten to death and badly mutilated. Puna, whom I met after his defection, said he identified both Tito and Wilson when the blindfolds were removed.

Puna confirmed the deaths to Savimbi. Four months later, on 1 November 1991, Puna was ordered by Savimbi to issue a press statement accepting responsibility for Tito's execution.

Savimbi said UNITA would soon be called upon by the McCurdy delegation to explain Tito's disappearance. Savimbi told Puna it was logical that a "traitor" like Tito should be exe-

FRED BRIDGLAND

cuted by UNITA's Interior Minister, Puna himself.

And, indeed, there was a vile rationale to it. Puna, at Savimbi's side since they trained together in China in 1965, was an exceedingly tough man who reminded me in style and physique of a black Nikita Krushchev. People who had met Puna would find it entirely possible that he had done the dirty work. Puna told me Savimbi said to him: "UNITA is bound to win the election and the whole matter will be forgotten." Puna decided Savimbi was stretching his loyalty too far. He began planning his own defection, coordinated eventually with that of Fernandes.

The pair announced their departure from UNITA in Lisbon in February 1992. They said Tito and his entire family had been executed on Savimbi's orders, and they confirmed a large number of other killings and human rights abuses. It was the first that the wider world and I knew of his death.

It came as an immense shock to me, the sheer, mad, destructive, cruel wastefulness of it. I had found it difficult to believe Savimbi would dare go that far: Olga and Eduardo were always less sanguine. Soon I knew the meaning of bereavement, a cosmic despondency, a wrenching, terrible deprivation of a friendship that had endured difficulties and had, I hoped, many rich years to run. All our efforts and subterfuges to preserve Tito's life had failed. His death must have been as lonely as Steve Biko's. His life had been snuffed out with much the same callousness.

With Angola's presidential and parliamentary elections only six months away, the Fernandes and Puna defections caused a sensation. UNITA quickly countered with a damage limitation communiqué admitting for the first time that Tito

DEATH IN AFRICA

and Wilson had “unaccountably disappeared.” Reversing all its previous public statements, UNITA said the pair had been detained for several years because they had tried to oust Savimbi “by defaming him abroad and attempting to oust him in Jamba.”

The US government finally acted. Secretary of State James Baker wrote to Savimbi demanding to know what had happened to Tito. Someone leaked to me Savimbi’s 6000-word reply of 21 March 1992. It was true, Savimbi told Baker, that he had lied to the US government and members of Congress about Tito being a free man. Tito had indeed been detained for a long time after he confessed to plotting to take over the Presidency by killing Savimbi “with Olga Mandombe, Fred Bridgland and lower levels of the CIA, using a type of poisonous chameleon known in Angola.” The third most powerful man in the world was told that Tito, Wilson and their families had been killed on the instructions of Miguel N’Zau Puna, who had concocted a false cover story that Tito and Wilson had fled from captivity.

Savimbi told Baker that in retrospect he regretted never having informed him about the Tito-Bridgland-Mandombe-lower level CIA assassination plot. “We were fearful of damaging the relationship with the USA,” he wrote. “But that, unfortunately, is water under the bridge.” Savimbi further told Baker that Tito’s mother, Lulu and Xica had been convicted of practising witchcraft. But he said nothing about their deaths or the Jamba witch burnings. He concluded the letter by saying he was “deeply frustrated” that all the fuss about Tito and Wilson had lessened concern about an assassination plot against himself by the MPLA.

FRED BRIDGLAND

I hope Savimbi's bizarre letter merely confirmed to the State Department what it already knew – that its man in Angola had lied to them all along about Tito. But with the elections looming, Savimbi remained America's favourite Angolan son of a bitch, not least because intelligence reports said he would be elected President. America still hoped for a Savimbi victory.

In the event, Savimbi lost the election so narrowly that a second run-off election was scheduled. But Savimbi was so convinced the poll had been rigged that he took UNITA back to a war that lasted 10 more years. I believe Savimbi might have won the election if people of the quality of Tito, Wilson dos Santos, Jorge Sangumba, Mateus Katalayo and many others had still been alive to campaign among the people of Luanda, whose votes tipped the election towards the MPLA candidate, the incumbent State President Eduardo dos Santos.

I don't know how these fine men – hopelessly torn between their own original ideals and the realisation that their leader had become a dictatorial monster – would have coped with a Savimbi victory. Yes, Tito had told me that after a UNITA victory he would leave the movement and challenge Savimbi openly about the abuses of the past. But by then it would probably have been too late. And so perhaps his courage in telling the truth before his bleak and terrible death was essential to save Angolans from electing a President on the basis of a myth.

T

he story of my relationship with Tito does not end with his death. In some ways, it is where it begins. Hundreds of

DEATH IN AFRICA

mysteries remain. For example, just why did Savimbi feel compelled to kill him and scores of other people who could have raised him to supreme power in Angola? What demons, most of them peculiar to Africa, drove him? In Luanda and other places around the world scores of people are ready to tell me the inside story of what happened inside the UNITA guerrilla movement for it to self-destruct. I need to talk to these people in order to probe deeper into the mystery. I also want to be taken to the forest site where Tito was murdered and, if possible, remove his bones to a dignified burial site.



Of course, if you behave as disgracefully as Savimbi did there comes eventually a time of retribution. General Geraldo Nunda was the man who proved to be Brutus to Savimbi's Caesar. Nunda was one of the finest of Savimbi's top UNITA commanders. Back in the eighties I trekked many hundreds of kilometres across Angola with Nunda and his 2000-strong UNITA brigade, canoeing across rivers, diffing parasites from our feet, passing abandoned, roofless settlements until we reached the forested outskirts of a small town called Alto Chicapa. There Nunda told me: "The morale of the enemy is very low, and in one hour everything will be over." It was all part of my research for my book on Savimbi.

That day Nunda's guerrillas easily overran the 500-strong garrison of the national MPLA army. Twenty-five MPLA soldiers were killed and 11 taken prisoner. There was a weapons haul and among the arithmetic books I picked up from the local primary school was one that posed the question: "If it

FRED BRIDGLAND

takes three bullets to kill two counter-revolutionaries, how many does it take to kill four?"

Nunda, a lean, mild-mannered man who was much loved by his soldiers, was called by Savimbi from the northern front in 1991 to become chief of staff of UNITA's army, second in the military hierarchy only to Savimbi himself.

Nunda, like Tito, believed that Angolans deserved the opportunity to vote in multi-party elections, a possibility that had been denied them by the MPLA, Cubans and Soviets.

In 1992, after 17 years of MPLA-UNITA warfare, Nunda saw his ideal achieved when a peace deal was signed and parliamentary and presidential elections were held.

Nunda protested against Savimbi's decision to return to war after his narrow defeat in both contests. "I told Savimbi that the decision to go back to war was a mistake," Nunda told me. "I told him the people wanted peace and it would be a long time before we got the opportunity again. I demanded a meeting of all UNITA's generals to discuss whether they agreed with Savimbi's decision to return to war."

Nunda told me he was then tipped off by his own personal bodyguards that Savimbi had given them money to kill their commander. "Most of my bodyguards had been with me for 17 years," said Nunda. "They were like brothers. They gave me Savimbi's 2,500 American dollars. They said, 'take the money, the important thing is your survival and our honour.'"

Nunda had been closely involved with the MPLA in the two years before the elections. During that time he made a lot of friends with military officers from the MPLA which, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, did an ideological flip-flop and became a pro-Western, capitalist party.

DEATH IN AFRICA

With the help of two senior MPLA commanders, Nunda, his wife and children and his senior bodyguard were whisked by helicopter to the MPLA-held Atlantic port of Lobito.

It was a huge relief for Nunda, whose disillusion with Savimbi had been deepening for some years. Although his battalion was isolated in the north, hundreds of miles from Savimbi's southern headquarters, he knew the UNITA leader had been executing many of his outstanding second-tier leaders. Savimbi had also tried, unsuccessfully, to have sex with Nunda's wife.

"I concluded Savimbi was insane," said Nunda. "Multi-party elections were what we had fought for and now he was destroying all that. He was afraid of being an ordinary citizen. He wanted to be a presidential dictator. Until as late as 1989 I still thought UNITA was a big project of all the people. After that, as the killings of dissidents and women who refused to sleep with Savimbi accelerated, I realised that Savimbi had turned the party into his own personal project.

"He knew how to manipulate people. Like a scientist, he was always experimenting to see how far he could go. I saw that he would advance to the very end, when everything would fall apart."

Nunda, immediately after his defection, was inducted into the national army as a special adviser on how to eliminate Savimbi. Rapidly he became deputy army chief responsible for training a unit whose task was to kill Savimbi. With a special force formed around that national army's crack 16th Brigade – which Nunda had often fought when with UNITA – Nunda from early 2000 onwards began a scorched earth campaign around Savimbi's southeastern strongholds.

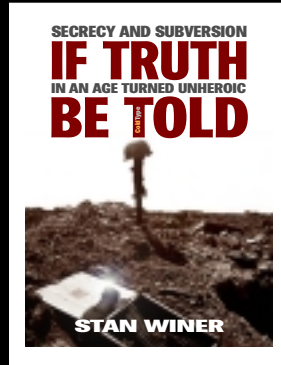
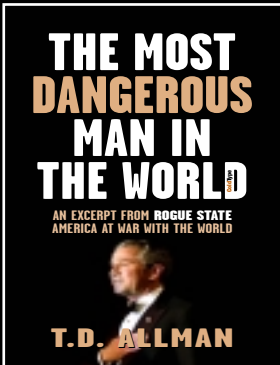
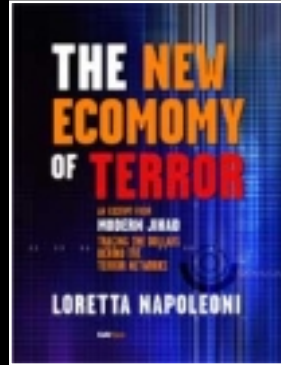
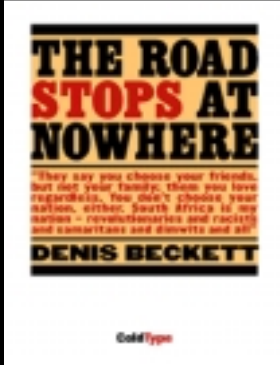
FRED BRIDGLAND

Supported by new equipment from western and old Soviet bloc countries, Nunda's offensive gradually tightened the noose around his former leader. UNITA communications were intercepted by the CIA – which had now transferred its support to the MPLA – and passed to Nunda. Israeli specialists set up a radar screen that made it impossible for Savimbi to bring in fresh supplies by air. Lack of fuel paralysed UNITA's tank and truck units.

Finally, on 22 February 2002, Nunda's force trapped Savimbi on the western bank of the Luevei River, a tributary of the Zambezi, and riddled him with 15 bullets. Savimbi was dead, and within days a peace deal was signed between the MPLA and UNITA, bringing to an end 25 years of civil war that had caused more than a million deaths and left many more people maimed for life.



WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Download these, plus many more books, booklets,
essays, newspapers and magazines – all in pdf format,
all free of charge – at www.coldtype.net

(Click on this link to enter web site)

ColdType

Published by ColdType magazine at www.coldtype.net