LIBERATION MOVES AHEAD IN GUINEA-BISSAU

On his 17th trip to Africa this summer, George Houser, ACOA's Executive Director, visited Tanzania, Zambia, Zaire, the Republic of Guinea, and Liberia. He also made a journey inside the liberated area of Guinea-Bissau. He met with leaders of the liberation movements of Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, and South Africa, and visited some of the nation-building projects of the PAIGC and FRELIMO.

The following observations, excerpted from George Houser's report to the ACOA Executive Board, concern the situation in Guinea-Bissau where the Portuguese are waging a well-armed, brutal campaign to wipe out the struggle for freedom, now 14 years old. This first-hand report clearly indicates that the liberation movement will prevail. Indeed, the PAIGC on September 24th made a formal proclamation of the existence of its state, and is now seeking international recognition for Guinea-Bissau.

It is important that you write Secretary of State Kissinger urging American recognition of the state of Guinea-Bissau. Subsequent reports to ACOA members will review the status of other African liberation movements.

Report From The Field
by George Houser

This has been a critical year for Guinea-Bissau. Amilcar Cabral, the founder and leader of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) was cruelly assassinated on January 20th. Earlier, it had been announced that the PAIGC would proclaim the existence of its state in 1973. According to my information, the loss of Cabral was not expected to delay this important proclamation. [Editor's note: In fact, the PAIGC proclaimed the existence of its state on September 24th.] Clearly, the PAIGC continues to be the de facto government for the majority of the people.

The Movement Goes On: Aristides Pereira, new Secretary-General of PAIGC, and Ana Maria Cabral.

The Conspiracy

At PAIGC external offices in Conakry, the capital of the Republic of Guinea, I met with Aristides Pereira, recently chosen PAIGC Secretary General, succeeding Cabral. Pereira had been a member of the small underground group that founded the PAIGC and planned the historic strike of workers at the Pidjiguiti docks in 1959 where Portuguese police killed 50 and wounded more than 100 Africans.

On the night that Cabral was shot in Conakry, Pereira and a score of other PAIGC leaders were captured by plotters conspiring with the Portuguese. With Cabral dead, Pereira was the main prize of those who were trying to bring the PAIGC and its liberation struggle to ruin. Pereira was dragged off to a small boat bound for Bissau along the Atlantic coast, where he was to be turned over to the Portuguese colonialists. His arms were tied with thongs that made deep wounds. The scars are still visible. Pereira owes his freedom and probably his life to the fact that, just before reaching Bissau waters his boat was intercepted by a small vessel from the Navy of the Republic of Guinea.

A number of the conspirators, who came from Guinea-Bissau, were captured, and it was revealed that they had been promised high positions in a Quisling-style regime. The Portuguese price was the elimination of the main leaders of the PAIGC and the political abandonment of the Cape Verde Islands.

In spite of the failure of the plot, great damage had been done with the assassination of Cabral. Nevertheless, the PAIGC made a remarkable recovery. The movement, its leaders, and its people have been inspired by the necessity to redouble their efforts in order to make up for their tremendous loss.

Message of Leader's Widow

I met Ana Maria Cabral, the wife of the fallen leader. With three children, she is still carrying on her activities, and is very much a part of the movement. She received many messages of condolence from the United States and said to me: "Give our best greetings to all of our friends in the United States."

War Heats Up

One of the obvious results of Cabral's death was the intensification of the military struggle. Between March and the middle of June, I was told, 18 Portuguese planes had been shot down. A 19th plane was brought down during the week I was there.

I travelled to what had been a major Portuguese military base in the south in a place called Guilege.
The battle for Guilege had lasted five days, ending successfully on May 22nd. The base had been reduced to rubble, and seeing it was a reminder of the terrible horrors of combat. And yet it also reflected the strength of the PAIGC and its almost complete control of the land surface of the country.

The Battle For Guilege: Major Portuguese military base destroyed by PAIGC forces.

"People’s Shops" Organized

I saw some of the nation-building activities of the PAIGC carried out in the midst of conflict. Among these were the PAIGC trading centers called "people’s shops." Thirty-two of these are scattered throughout the country. Here, in the middle of forests, the people are able to trade what they themselves produce such as rice and the skins of animals, for shoes, clothing, soap, sugar and other manufactured items. These goods are sent to the PAIGC from friendly countries including Holland, Sweden, Norway and countries of Eastern Europe. Under the organized barter system of the people’s shops, one square meter of crocodile skin, for example, can be exchanged for two kilos of rice, and three kilos of rice for one pair of trousers.

"People’s Shop," Kandiafara: Local items are traded for manufactured goods from friendly countries.

New Schools Opened

Five boarding schools have been established by the PAIGC. In the two that I visited the discipline and organization is almost entirely in the hands of the students themselves. The children are bound together by the common effort and they know how fortunate they are to be able to attend school. The PAIGC has also established many village schools which now have 14,531 students and 258 teachers. Under the Portuguese, there were only 2,000 students.

Medical Services Offered

I spent several hours at the hospital of the PAIGC, the Solidarity Hospital, located inside the Republic of Guinea where it is relatively safe from bombing attack, but close to the border. About two-thirds of the patients were war-wounded. There are also seven regional hospitals inside Guinea-Bissau and 12 other medical centers. A place is called a hospital if a doctor is stationed there. A medical center has a medical assistant or a trained nurse in attendance. There are now nine trained Guinean doctors.

PAIGC Boarding School: Student enrollment has increased seven-fold through establishment of PAIGC schools.

Foundations Well Laid

I came away from Guinea-Bissau feeling that Amilcar Cabral had laid the foundations for the movement well. The struggle is continuing in all of its phases, both militarily and nation-building, as he would have wanted it to. Just before leaving Conakry to go on to other parts of Africa, I hesitantly asked one of the responsible party leaders where the body of Cabral was buried. He said: "We did not bury his body. He is in a mausoleum in the Republic of Guinea. After the independence of our country is secured, we will move his body inside the country where he would want to be."

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