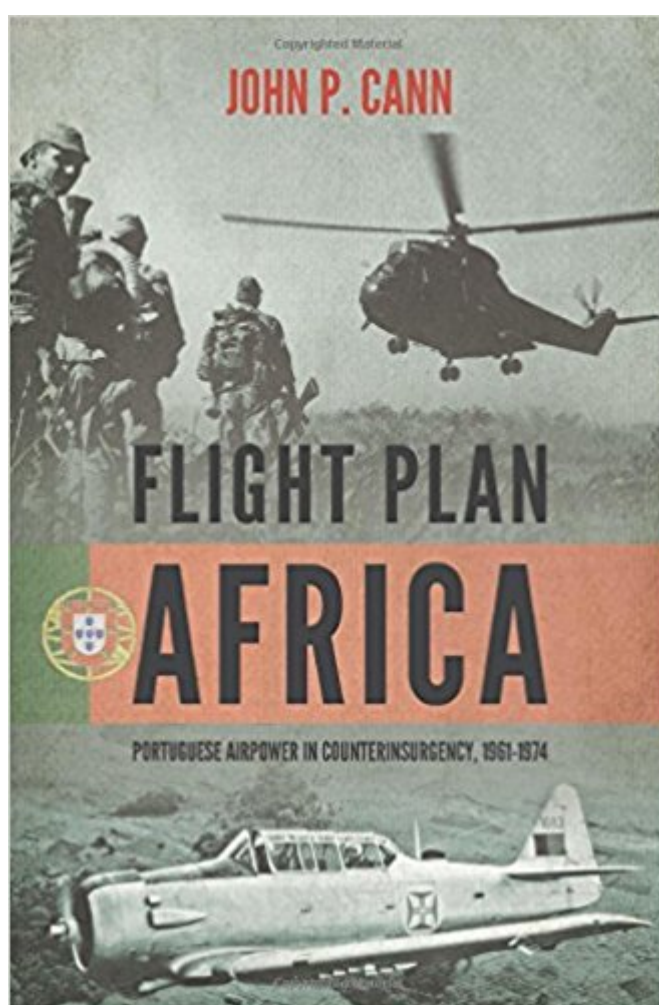


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Flight Plan Africa: Portuguese Airpower In Counterinsurgency, 1961-1974 (Wolverhampton Military Studies)



Synopsis

Following the 1952 reorganization of the Portuguese Air Force from the army and naval air arms, Portugal now had an entity dedicated solely to aviation that would bring it into line with its new NATO commitment. As it proceeded to develop a competence in modern multiengine and jet fighter aircraft for its NATO role and train a professional corps of pilots, it was suddenly confronted in 1961 with fighting insurgencies in all three of its African possessions. This development forced it to acquire an entirely new and separate air force, the African air force, to address this emerging danger. This is the story of just how Portuguese leadership anticipated and dealt with this threat, and how it assembled an air force from scratch to meet it. The aircraft available at the time were largely castoffs from the larger, richer, and more sophisticated air forces of its NATO partners and not designed for counterinsurgency. Yet Portugal adapted them to the task and effectively crafted the appropriate strategies and tactics for their successful employment. The book explores the vicissitudes of procurement, an exercise fraught with anti-colonial political undercurrents, the imaginative modification and adaptation of the aircraft to fight in the African theaters, and the development of tactics, techniques, and procedures for their effective employment against an elusive, clever, and dangerous enemy. Advances in weaponry, such as the helicopter gun ship, were the outgrowth of combat needs. The acquired logistic competences assured that the needed fuel types and lubricants, spare parts, and qualified maintenance personnel were available in even the most remote African landing sites. The advanced flying skills, such as visual reconnaissance and air-ground coordinated fire support, were honed and perfected. All of these aspects and more are explored and hold lessons in the application of airpower in any insurgency today.

REVIEWS

“Cann has accomplished a remarkable feat of historical investigation. This is in fact a trailblazing book, the first in-depth English language study of a central but long-neglected aspect of Portugal’s African wars. Airpower professionals and aficionados should also find it exceptionally useful for its novel contributions to an increasingly noteworthy field of military history.”

• Journal of Military History

vital volume. Dozens of photos, maps and annotations augment Cann’s account. Interested in low-intensity warfare? Grab this one.

Cybermodeler a significant contribution to the study of counterinsurgency, irregular warfare, airpower, and military leadership.

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“Aviation enthusiasts will delight in the exhaustive detail on the aircraft the Portuguese air force, the Força Aérea Portuguesa (FAP), used in the decade-plus it was on the front lines, but there are lessons here for today’s policymakers as well.”

• Journal of the Middle East and Africa

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Customer Reviews

Extraordinary book. Wich gives you na extream acurate picture of the sucessfull war of portuguese Air Force to preserve and mantain the Portugese Overseas Provinces, even against the mundial superpowers.

Nice book and great story of many heroes they did a war with so little supplies and airplanes.

This new book by John P. Cann addresses the role of the Portuguese Air Force (FAP) in Portugal's counter-insurgency campaigns in Africa. The subject is new and is part of the author's interest in the Portuguese Colonial War, which lasted 13 years ending with the inevitable independence of the African colonies in 1974/75. Many aspects of this conflict are still unknown outside Portugal and in the last years the author has done a very important work in the theorization of this war. With this book Cann closes a cycle on the Portuguese style of warfare. Cann covers many aspects of the use of the Air Force in the three Portuguese colonies (Guinea, Angola and Mozambique) and the important role that aviation played in support to ground troops, flying ground attack and close support missions against the rebels. On the other hand, FAP has an important role in logistical support acting in an environment characterized by large distances. The colonies themselves especially, Angola and Mozambique, covered vast areas and included a great variety of terrain,

from deserts to jungle. Only with the aviation could be possible to cover these areas. Cann gives a good overview of the air campaign in the three war scenarios and the impact it had on the control of the guerrillas. In fact, aviation was the great advantage that the Portuguese had in relation to the rebels, who have always been powerless to stop the Portuguese airpower. The situation only changes in Guinea in 1973, when the PAIGC rebels use an improved version of the missile Strela (SA-7), that shook the Portuguese strategy in that territory based on the use of airpower. However, the best part of the book concerns the start of the war in Angola in 1961 and the Portuguese campaign to recover positions taken by the UPA rebels in the north of the colony. The book is full of good stories. However, we can find some weaknesses in Cann approach. The first thing is that used many Portuguese published sources, but virtually from one side. African sources are absent from the book and could have been used because they are available in Portuguese. Another problem is that research in archive was reduced only to the Portuguese Air Force archive which is a major limitation in that case. Many things with interest are in the Portuguese National Defense Archive and not in the Air Force. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Cann did still a great deal of research, which is not easy for an author that does not live in Portugal. We can see by the bibliography that the survey was good and can inspire many people to research on their own. So we have a good book that reveals a very interesting aspect of the Portuguese war in Africa. Cann is the first author to venture into this field and therefore deserves to be read.

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