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Africa

David Martin - 40 years of service to African liberation

 September 23, 2007 *Edition 1*

Own Correspondent

David Martin was a writer and photographer, and later in life, a publisher. He was a rigorous researcher and investigative writer who exposed the calamity and cost of South African economic and military destabilisation in southern Africa in the 1980s.

He marched with Frelimo into the liberated zones of Mozambique in 1973, where he met the Zimbabwean military commander General Josiah Magama Tongogara during the last phase of the liberation war.

He was the first journalist to interview the young commanders back from the front in 1978. And he produced the first book on that part of the story, called *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (1980).

He was the first journalist to write about the South African invasion of Angola in 1975, and in 1987 at Cuito Cuanavale, and in 1976 to expose the plans for Southern Africa of Henry Kissinger, the then-United States secretary of state, which were strongly opposed by the front line states.

He was the first journalist to expose the detail of the Rhodesian and then South African destabilisation of Botswana.

Martin was a former Africa correspondent for *The Observer* in London. From 1971 to 1974, he ran his own news agency in Dar es Salaam, reporting on the decisive phases of the liberation of Mozambique and Angola. And it was also during this period that he wrote the first articles exposing the atrocities of Idi Amin in Uganda, and the first book on this subject, titled *General Amin*, published in

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1974.

"In post-liberation Southern Africa, it is difficult to think of anyone who knew David or knew about him and his work who will not be moved by his passage, after a long battle against cancer, and who, in the last four years, when not on the operating table or in bed, still continued to travel and to write despite the agony and discomfort attendant to his illness," wrote his good friend, Benjamin Mkapa.

Martin was born in Britain in 1936, the son of a French mother and an English father who worked as a personal assistant to and caretaker of a member of the British aristocracy, and travelled the world with his "master", looking after his personal needs.

When David announced that he wanted to be a journalist, he was promptly dispatched by his godfather to take up the more suitable profession of tobacco farming in Southern Rhodesia. He failed dismally at this because he could not fit into its racially divided society and did not agree with superiority based on race.

He started his media career in 1959 in Britain at a small weekly newspaper in Devon. He arrived in Dar es Salaam five years later, on January 9 1964, to take up a position as a reporter on The Tanganyika Standard.

The Zanzibar revolution erupted three days later, and a few days after that, an army mutiny. A few months later, Tanganyika and Zanzibar joined together to form the United Republic of Tanzania.

This was the heady time when Dar es Salaam was the centre for the liberation movements.

The Organisation of African Unity had been established in 1963, and the OAU Liberation Committee was hosted by Tanzania.

David always credited his education to this period during the 1960s in which he worked in the media in Tanzania. He was influenced by Mwalimu Nyerere, Mkapa, who was then editor of the Uhuru newspaper, and others; and with the liberation movements and leaders based there. He became close to Eduardo Mondlane, Samora Machel, Sam Nujoma, and others.

He followed the liberation movement south, and spent a lot of time in Mozambique and Angola in the months during and after their independence from Portugal in 1975.

In 1976, Anglo-American talks were held on Zimbabwe and Namibia, and students poured out of South Africa following the Soweto uprising. David interviewed many of them in Dar es Salaam.

David's articles appeared as the front page lead story in The Observer for 16 weeks during 1976, often after briefings from Nyerere, Machel and others, who knew that he would accurately present their views and context, reporting honestly and without distortion.

"Through this connection, of a journalist and of a president

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