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## A TRIBUTE TO AMADÚ BAILO DJALÓ, AFRICAN VETERAN OF THE PORTUGUESE ARMED FORCES

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To date, Amadú Bailo Djaló is the only African veteran of the Portuguese Armed Forces (FAP) who has published a book about his experiences in the Portuguese Colonial War. Amadú was 70 years old when his book *Guineense, Comando Português (1964-1974)* was published by the Associação de Comandos in 2010. The book was based on one of his diaries. He had at least two more that he wanted to publish one day.

Amadú Djaló was born on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1940, in Bafatá in Guinea under Portuguese rule. For three years he went to an Islamic school, and a Catholic school opposite his house for two. Just after his eighteenth birthday he considered enlisting in the Portuguese army so that he could get his driving license, but he delayed taking the decision because he needed to continue to work to support his family. In 1962, he was drafted to undertake Portuguese military service. He did it in Bolama, specializing as a driver. So began his military life. He was enlisted on January 9<sup>th</sup> 1962, joined the commandos in 1964 and was demobbed on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1975. He took part in many operations, was seriously wounded in combat



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twice and was awarded the Medal of the Cross of War and the Medal of Dedication and Merit. The cover flap of his book notes that on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1974, Amadú Djaló “learned on a soldier’s radio that there had been a military coup in Lisbon. That day that war ended, and another began, the struggle for survival in Guinea-Bissau. Arrested more than once, he kept on escaping until, in 1986, he came to Lisbon”.

I met Amadú Djaló on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2007, when he gave me the first interview of my PhD research, that resulted in the thesis *African Veterans of the Portuguese Armed Forces: War as a Territory of (Re)conciliation*. Without Amadú’s generosity, much of that work would not have been possible. For that, and much more, I offer my tribute to him.

On the day that I met Amadú Djaló, he confessed to me that he had two big unfulfilled wishes in his life: the first was to publish his manuscript of his life story as a book; the second was to secure Portuguese nationality for his two daughters. In 2010 his book was published, and in 2011 his two daughters finally received their Portuguese nationality, after many years of efforts and deferred decisions.

Beyond these two desires, Amadú Djaló held onto one more: to return definitively to Guinea-Bissau. He wanted to go back because although, as he emphasized, he was Portuguese, Guinea was his homeland, the land where he had left his two wives and that promised a better climate for his poor health. However, he feared that his past in Guinea during the colonial period could still create problems. So, he further delayed his return to Guinea, while planning to publish a second book.

Amadú Bailo Djaló was a senior officer in the Portuguese Army, in a company of African commandos in Guinea. He fought for eleven years there. Muslim, and of futa-fulani heritage, he entered military service on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1962, before the war “officially” began, and remained in the Portuguese Armed Forces (FAP) until the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1975. He was promoted to First Corporal on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1966 and on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1970 he graduated as a Lance Sergeant. The following year, on 7<sup>th</sup> November he was made a Sergeant. He received three awards for bravery in operations, one in 1966, another in 1967, and the last in 1972. In 1973, Amadú Djaló was awarded the Medal of the Cross of War 3<sup>rd</sup> class, the same year in which he became a lieutenant.

After the independence of Guinea-Bissau, Amadú Djaló escaped from prison several times and began to go frequently to Senegal. He went to Senegal not to retire, as other African veterans did to protect



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themselves from the persecution they suffered after the independence of Guinea-Bissau, but to take care of his trading business. From 1986 he lived in Portugal. He left Guinea under its own steam, and when he arrived in Portugal he lived at the Commandos Association, with other veterans. In 1982, in collaboration with the Portuguese Government of the time, the Association had brought a group of 22 African veterans to Lisbon. They were initially housed by the Association in improvised housing at its own headquarters and, later, in housing assigned by the Lisbon Council. The Association took care of housing expenses until the veterans were able to provide for themselves. They also paid for food and gave the veterans a subsidy for personal expenses. Amadú Djaló lived in this situation, with the status of an immigrant, until he completed the process that recognized him as a member of the Portuguese Armed Forces. In order to take advantage of Portuguese citizenship, and obtain retirement from the Armed Forces, he was required to apply for the Portuguese nationality that he had lost with the independence of Guinea-Bissau. Until his health was no longer good enough, he worked as a security guard and bought videotapes abroad, mainly in Paris, and sold them in Portugal. After a few years in Portugal, Amadú Djaló became one of the leading members of the Commandos Association.

One by one, Amadú Djaló brought his children from Guinea and watched them move on, one by one, after having acquired Portuguese nationality, to London, Spain and the United States. Amadú Djaló lived on the outskirts of Lisbon with two of his daughters and grandchildren. His house was always full of fellow countrymen, some veterans like him, others friends from his homeland who visited him often, or who lived in his house for periods.

Like many veterans originally from Guinea, Amadú Djaló rarely wore African clothes or signs of religious affiliation, except on special religious occasions, particularly during Ramadan, when going to the mosque or while attending a religious ceremony. In military ceremonies and veterans' meetings, unlike other Guinean veterans Amadú Djaló did not tend to emphasize his African or Muslim origins, other than by bringing lunch from home, or ordering it specially, so as not to risk eating pork. On these occasions, Amadú Djaló rarely wore the medals that he received during the Colonial War.

But he was sure to wear the marks that showed his belonging to the Portuguese Armed Forces, including his beret and his commando badge, of which he was very proud. He wore them, for example, at the Ceremony on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007 that marked a very special moment for Guinean commandos. On that day, two plaques were unveiled with the names of Guinean commandos shot after 1974. Amadú Bailo Djaló was among the men who presided over the unveiling ceremony.



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Amadú Bailo Djaló passed away at the Military Hospital, in Lumiar, Lisbon, on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. He had accomplished what he most wanted: publication of his book and Portuguese nationality for all his children. He returned to Guinea-Bissau where he was buried.

Thank you, Amadú Bailo Djaló. Rest in peace, my friend.

Translated by **Archie Davies**

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