WHY NRA, FEDEMU REBELS MERGED

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After president Milton Obote's government forces, Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) heavily attacked Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) rebels for the second time at Nalubugo (Malube) in Mpigi in 1982; UFM military leader Andrew Kayiira and his forces crossed River Mayanja and retreated to Kabagano, Ssimbamanyo, Bukerekere and Mpanga.

Then, Kayiira thought of relocating his forces to Kyagwe through Namayumba, an operational zone of the National Resistance Army (NRA) led by Yoweri Museveni. Thus, Kayiira, in company of his little dog, went to Namayumba Church of Uganda, where he met Museveni and requested him to allow his forces pass through Namayumba.

On return, Kayiira briefed his commanders that Museveni had replied: "Leave your guns here with me and pass through". Such feedback incensed UFM commanders who wondered whether Museveni expected them to fight Obote's armed soldiers in Kyagwe through boxing.

UFM commanders included Stephen Ndugute (Kalisoliso), George Nkwanga, Hussein Adda, Mark Kodili, Sajat Sori, Tony Zimulinda alias Subuhana Luyima, Kato alias Sweet Guerilla, Robert Kitaali, Magambo and Friday.

Matters worsened when UFM received security reports that NRA's deputy director of military intelligence and security, Jim Muhwezi, was happy with government forces' successful attack of UFM's camp at Nalubugo. Hence, UFM settled its two battalions; Red Eagle and Rangers, mainly in Kakiri sub-county. Not long, Kayiira abandoned the struggle and relocated to the US. His departure, therefore, caused a leadership vacuum that led some fighters to defect to NRA. They included Frank Kaka Bagyenda (now director general of Internal Security Organisation), Eric Mukasa (brigadier) and Jackson Sesanga. Besides, other useful UFM corroborators also shifted to NRA such as Asafu Ssozi, the father of the current state minister for Luwero triangle, Ssozi Galabuzi.

FEDEMU FORMATION

After Kayiira abandoned the struggle, UFM camps were incessantly attacked by government forces, especially at Mpanga. Indeed, UFM commander Magambo was murdered as he attempted to pick a gun his fighter, Kayayu, had dropped during the fighting.

Eventually, UFM fighters went into total concealment with Friday taking over as the emergence commander. Consequently, Kasirye Ggwanga (brigadier) went to Busujju with a section of fighters drawn from UFM training wing, Buffalo, which Kayiira had named after his clan. Those that went with Kasirye included Kyobe alias Doctor, Juma Demo and Ssozi Musonzi. It should be noted that Gwanga had joined UFM through its Nakasero recruiting cell inside the shop of Kabanda Ntwatwa and was hereafter sneaked to UFM camp at Nakasajja by Yahaya Mulindwa.

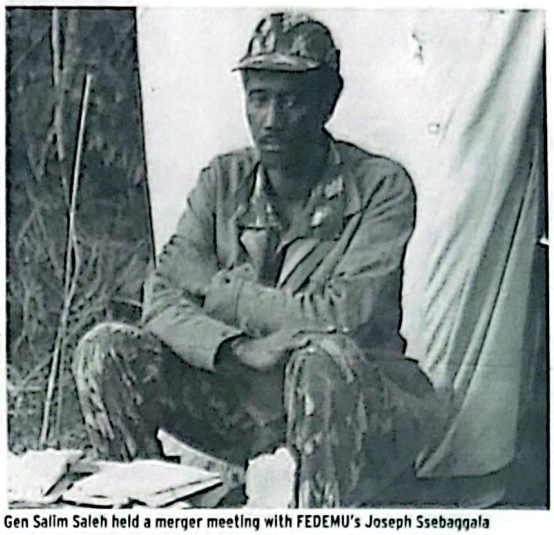
As UFM disintegrated, the guns in Friday's control, including a GPMG, were buried at Kalambi, Buloba, at the home of UFM fighter, Pecos Ssepuya, in an operation supervised by John White Jjagwe. Those guns were later retrieved by Kalisoliso and taken to Nalubugo during the UFM reorganisation. However, the only bulk of UFM weapons whose retrieval has never been confirmed were buried in Rubaga by Badru Muyanja and Lawrence Ssembajjwe, who hail from Kyamulibwa, Kalungu.

From Busujju, Kasirye went to Nairobi, Kenya, hoping to find Kayiira. On return in 1983 after many of former UFM fighters had transited into a breakaway rebel group, the Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU) led by Lawrence Semakula, with detaches at Nalubugo and Najjemba, Gwanga surprisingly said he was heading to Lukoola in Luwero to meet Museveni and give him a special message from potential war funders he had met in Kenya. Thereafter, Gwanga rejoined FEDEMU fighters at Najjemba before heading to Busujju, where he established a training wing he named Hagana.

Besides Gwanga , the other prominent FEDEMU commanders were; Kalisoliso, Ogwang-IO, George Mugerwa, Gyagenda Kalyesubula (now lieutenant colonel), Hitler Mayanja, William Kasansula, Jack Lyazi (Mandevu), Moses Segujja, Mpiso, Musisi Bossa, Victor Nyakana, Moses Galabuzi, Fred Ndawula, Pecos Ssepuya, Asuman Musisi, Rwaguma, Bantuki, Gayira and Tom Demo-Tomusange.

Others were; Kiggundu Kadomola, Mande, Male Kaduuka, Yasin, Odoi-Chwalle, Ssebbi, Moses Ntaalu, Kayayu, Robert Kitaali, Mbabazi Muleefu, Gongolo, Kyangwa, Basaliza, Yusuf Semalulu-Nakasajja, Jaberi Mugerwa, Mwebe, Fred Wamala-Nkonya, Kyobe Doctor, Mbabazi Muleefu, Dan Mukasa (brother to Eric Mukasa), Eric Mbabazi, Mbaziira Nyoka, Yiga Mtalamu, Kawuki Kyeyune-Kkubo, Bulime-admin and Galabuzi Galimubanga.

Generally, senior FEDEMU fighters such as Mpiso, were hostile to NRA. But other UFM commanders chiefly at middle level would share routes and passwords with NRA's fighters such as the Black Bombers whose Galamba location was across the swamp from FEDEMU camp at Katubwe. They also co-operated with NRA's camp at Namugongo run by Sserwanga Lwanga, Kaseera Kibirango and Kibirige.



Gen Salim Saleh held a merger meeting with FEDEMU's Joseph Ssebaggala

> **Senior FEDEMU fighters such as Mpiso, were very hostile to NRA. But other UFM commanders chiefly at middle level would share routes and passwords with NRA's fighters**

Intriguingly, FEDEMU fighters networking with NRA had to do so secretly bearing in mind that earlier in 1982, during UFM days, two of its fighters; Kabali Masembe and Wamala, the regimental Sergent major were murdered between Buloba and Kisamula over their links to NRA. As part of the said concealed co-operation, one time when Museveni was returning from Kenya, FEDEMU agents operating on the other side of Lake Victoria such as Kalisa Sabina, John Baptist Nsubuga alias Kikapu and Kasozi, offered travel guidance and escort role to Museveni and his entourage. They did so after a top Catholic priest supportive of FEDEMU instructed that: "Escort those persons, no questions, no answers. Museveni is part of those persons."

Later, in 1984, FEDEMU leader, Semakula, was kidnapped and hence murdered by Obote's security agents. Before that, Semakula's aide, Donozio Sewandigi of Kiti Kifumba near Kira had been murdered. Semakula had trusted Sewandigi with delivering FEDEMU's operational funds to different detaches. But one day, he went missing with FEDEMU money.

On the other hand, Semakula defied advice to isolate himself from another fighter Sseguya alias Doctor whom many fighters had suspected to be turncoat. With FEDEMU largely infiltrated, its co-ordinating point at Muyenga was attacked by government soldiers, but FEDEMU collaborator, Kaggwa, who lived there managed to escape and later joined NRA. Before that attack, Sewandigi had been one of the few FEDEMU fighters whom Semakula would send to that house in Muyenga.

In a bid to ensure that the fighters were never demoralised, the murder of Semakula was not announced. The fighters were thus hoodwinked that he was on fundraising tours in France and Israel. In his absence, Dr David Lwanga took over as the political leader. By and by, all fighters got to know that Semakula was long dead.

When forces loyal to Lt. Gen. Tito Okello Lutwa ousted Obote on July 27, 1985, FEDEMU joined that junta as pushed for by Nkwanga under certain conditions laid down by FEDEMU commanders. Aware that some FEDEMU were unenthusiastic about joining the Lutwa junta, Nkwanga made a tactical move aimed at consolidating his influence over FEDEMU. For that reason, he sent vocal middle level FEDEMU commanders for an immediate military training at Hagana in Busujju. They included Musisi Kalende, Stephen Kato, Ssepuya, Ssimbwa, Kalule and Deo Mugenyi. Their military instructors at Busujju were all former Uganda Army officers; Maj. Gongolo, Capt. Kyangwa, Basaliza, Dadula and Kasasa.

MERGER TALKS

During that training, Joseph Ssebaggala alias Ssalambwa, an old boy of St. Mary Kisubi who was one of FEDEMU commanders, went to Busujju and advised the disappointed FEDEMU trainees to consider allying with NRA. (Note: Joseph Ssebaggala Ssalambwa I am referring to should not be confused with Maj. Michael Ssali Ssalambwa, a former aide de camp of Col. Kizza Besigye).

Ssalambwa proposed that merger basing on the resolution of an earlier clandestine meeting at Mpambire attended by NRA agents; Kayumba Nyamwasa (lieutenant general) and Musoke. Unknown to NRA and Ssalambwa, that meeting was infiltrated by Kalule, an agent of Nkwanga, who was against FEDEMU-NRA co-operation. Hence, Ssalambwa and several FEDEMU officers were arrested and detained at Luzira. After their release, they held another clandestine meeting at FEDEMU's camp at Kaazi, Busabala in which Friday and others demanded Nkwanga to let FEDEMU pull out of Lutwa's junta over its failure to meet their demands but Nkwanga declined.

This, therefore, led to a palace coup, in which Ssalambwa was made the defacto military head of FEDEMU's splinter group, based in Mukono. Notwithstanding that fallout, Ssalambwa's group alerted Nkwanga that top military officers in Lutwa's junta intended to murder him but Nkwanga did not heed to the warning. Ultimately, Nkwanga was lured by a military officer in Lutwa's junta into picking some money from him. It was out of that trick that he was gruesomely beheaded.

Immediately NRA ousted Lutwa, a meeting between Salim Saleh (general) and Salambwa was held at Collins Hotel, Mukono, the tactical headquarters of FEDEMU. As Saleh and Ssalambwa were touring FEDEMU's liberated areas, stretching from Mukono to Iganga, they were hosted in Lugazi by managers of Kakira factory to thank Ssalambwa for returning their tractors hitherto looted by some fighters of UFM which Kayiira had reorganised while serving under Lutwa's junta. At Lugazi, the Indians served Ssalambwa and Saleh with lots of beer. Indeed, the free flowing beer at Lugazi during those days of its scarcity, forced Ssalambwa and Saleh to cancel their tour in order to consume as much as they could.

THE MERGER

After the talks were concluded, FEDEMU fighters numbering about 3,000 were incorporated in NRA thereby constituting the 27th battalion based at Rubongi, Tororo with Ssalambwa as its commanding officer. Its C-Coy was led by Jaberi Mugerwa, who was sent to Rhino Camp in West Nile. Its A-Coy was led by Lt. Joy Kiggundu alias Kadomola. It was attached to NRA 1st battalion, both rejoined their mother battalion en route to Moyo.

Later, the 27th battalion was relocated from Tororo via Gulu enroute to Moyo. In Moyo, they replaced the 11th battalion led by Chefe Ali. This battalion was in charge of one of the widest axis in NRA/UPDF history: Atiak-Bibia - Nimule-Adjumani-Moyo-Obongi-Midigo, etc, which it by the way handled efficiently. The 27th battalion success stories include its August 1986 battles against UPDA rebels of Odong Latek and Angelo Okello Kolo. Ssalambwa commanded a fierce assault against those rebels' and hence foiled their ambush at Palenga, the day they attacked Gulu. The 27th battalion foiled other deadly ambushes laid along Gulu-Kilak-Pabbo-Amuru-Atiak-Bibia-Nimule-Adjumani axis.

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NOTE: I sincerely thank readers who have sent me condolence messages over the death of my mother. May her soul rest in eternal peace.

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