

HOW OBOTE CHOSE OYTE AS SUCCESSOR



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highlighted systems failure as the cause of the crash.

Subsequently, in 1986 when Muwanga was remanded at Luzira after he was arrested during security operations co-ordinated by David Sejusa and Mugisha Muntu; his fellow political prisoner from Sese Islands, Israel Mayengo, asked him what could have caused Oyte's death. Muwanga responded: "Omussese, I will tell you that when we get out of here."

RWAKASISI LOBBYING

After Oyte died, the following senior officers of Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) were tipped for that position.

They included Col. Zed Maruru, Brig. Lupaka Langoya, Sam Nanyumba, Smith Opon Acak and Bazillio.

In spite of their presence, Obote spent months without appointing Oyte successor. In the meantime, the minister in charge of national security, Chris Rwakasisi kept lobbying Obote to appoint the new army Chief of Staff.

Rwakasisi was well-positioned to do so since he was among Obote's confidants. His office was near that of Obote on the fourth floor of Parliamentary building.

On a normal day, Rwakasisi would arrive at his office at about 7:00am and start on the day's work by perusing through security briefs submitted to him by security chiefs.

Rwakasisi would walk in Obote's office even without seeking permission from Obote's secretaries; Rose Akora or Joyce Heckman. He would then brief Obote about the security situation in the country. During those engagements, Obote fondly referred to Rwakasisi as 'Chris' while Rwakasisi has an American style in which he often referred to Obote as 'Mr President.'

It was, therefore, from those regular interactions that four months after Oyte died, Rwakasisi requested Obote: "Mr. President, don't you think this is the right time to appoint a new chief of staff to replace David?" Obote replied: "It is too early. We are still mourning."

After some weeks, when Rwakasisi was analysing for Obote the security situation in the country, he told Obote: "Mr. President, we have a lot of uncertainty in the security circles, especially in the army. Such predicament is because we lack a substantive army Chief of Staff. It is my prayer Mr. President you fill the vacant post of the army chief of staff".

Obote answered: "My dear Chris, please give me time. I am still thinking about it."

Around the same time, the deputy minister of finance, Henry Makmot, had proposed to Obote that Zed Maruru from western Uganda was the right candidate in the interest of regional balancing. Makmot did not want another northerner to become the army Chief of Staff since the army commander (Lutwa) was also from the north.

ACAK APPOINTED

Eventually, Rwakasisi came up with a write-up in which he analysed the strengths and weaknesses of each officer considered a candidate for that job.



Chris Rwakasisi



Milton Obote

In his write-up, Rwakasisi indicated that Acak who was the brigade commander for western Uganda was the best candidate. Actually, Rwakasisi underscored Acak's military trainings in Greece, Russia and Israel.

Hence, when Rwakasisi presented that write up to Obote, he (Rwakasisi) told him: "Mr. President, following our two conversations on the vacant position of army Chief of Staff, I have put the matter in writing to demonstrate its urgency."

Since Obote is the fastest reader Uganda has ever had as president, he read through the write-up and concurred with Rwakasisi's recommendation that Acak take over as the new army Chief of Staff.

Rwakasisi further requested: "Mr. President, it would be good if we hold the promotion ceremony in which we promote Acak and Bazillio to Brigadier, and Lutwa to General."

When Obote accepted that also, an officer was instructed to find out the requisite pips for the said officers to be promoted. Those for ranks below Colonel were available since Franklin Company of Britain had supplied them. However, the pips for officers above the rank of Colonel were not yet procured. They were, however, secured.

RIFT WITH MUWANGA

It should be noted that Muwanga never supported the idea of Acak becoming the army Chief of Staff.

He often described Acak as a drunkard and undisciplined. As defence minister, Muwanga was

aware that whenever Acak would be drinking his favourite whisky, Red Label (John Walker) using a glass, whatever security notes that would be given to him during his drinking spree, Acak would place them on the table and then place on them the already wet glass.

In the process, those security notes would get wet and thus stuck together. In case of that, he would be unable to present them the following day during national security committee meetings.

Muwanga further complained that Acak had stayed longer serving in Idi Amin's army as the company commander at Malire barracks, when Muwanga and Rwakasisi among others were fighting Amin. Acak deserted Amin's army not so long before his regime was toppled.

Aware that Muwanga didn't support him, Acak had a beleaguered working relationship with him. The fiercest animosity between the two occurred at Mbuya armoury when soldiers loyal to Muwanga fought with those commanded by Acak.

That incident occurred when Obote was on a mobilisation tour in eastern Uganda. His delegation was first briefed about that incident by Patrick Mwendha. Hence, Obote cut short his tour and returned to Kampala using Uganda Airlines Fokker friendship plane. Actually, throughout his flight to Entebbe airport, Obote remained silent even though on board were his ministers such as Anthony Butere.

On arrival, Acak briefed Obote that he had found Muwanga's loyal soldiers trying to sneak out weapons in an attempt to storm Kampala to overthrow his regime. On the other hand, Muwanga downplayed the clash by simply describing it as "unco-ordinated troop movement".

In the meantime, Obote tasked Brig. Livingstone Ogwang to investigate the actual cause of that saga.

Also in light of their rivalry, whenever Muwanga summoned Acak to his office for security meetings, Acak would delay at his residence, Malcom X Avenue, Kololo. Thereafter, he would go to meet Muwanga in his military uniform minus the cap. By so doing, he aimed at evading saluting Muwanga. On some occasions when Muwanga felt he had waited for Acak for long, he would abort such security meetings.

DEFIES OBOTE

On July 26, 1985, a day before Obote's government was toppled by forces loyal to Lutwa and Bazillio, Obote arrived early at his office on Parliamentary building.

Through Martin Orech, his private secretary, Obote summoned Acak to his office and instructed him to go to Nakasongola to plan thwart operations against mutineers led by Maj. Eric Odwar, the Buffalo Battalion commander.

By midday, Obote was told that Acak was still in Kampala. On summoning him again, Obote gave Acak the same instructions. However, at around 3:00pm, when Obote was told that Acak was still in Kampala, he sent Lt. Michael Kasozi to Nakasongola to assess the situation and also morale boost the commanders.

Later after 10:00pm, Obote's chief driver, Celestine Odongo instructed Henry Muniyole to drive Obote from parliamentary building to Nile Mansions where Obote chaired a security meeting in suite 205 attended by the Inspector general of police Okoth Ogola and Rwakasisi.

As the meeting progressed, presidential guards such as Capt. Tom Odongo received security alerts from Maj. Akiki concerning assassination plots targeting Obote. This prompted Obote to relocate to the residence of his personal physician, Henry Opiote at Plot 20, Kololo.

Obote was received by Opiote's brother, Eng. Alex Ochen, then working with Uganda Airlines. Opiote's wife, Elizabeth, a South African was not at home. She had travelled to Johannesburg.

At Opiote's residence, Rwakasisi pleaded with Obote to leave for exile but Obote retorted, "No way. I am not going anywhere. If these fellows want the chair (presidency), let them come and kill me from here." Rwakasisi replied: "No sir. This country needs you alive. As long as you will be alive in exile; your supporters shall have hope".

Amidst that standoff, Abraham Sagal, a police officer took him inside the Mercedes-Benz and the journey to exile commenced. In Mukono and Jinja, Obote's convoy encountered road-blocks by mutineers. Opiote skillfully presented his identification card and lied to the soldiers that Obote had sent them to pick his wife, Miria from Malaba.

On being cleared, they proceeded to Busia border, where they had a brief scuffle with the customs authorities. By the time Obote crossed into Kenya, Acak was already in Kenya, where he flew to by helicopter.

UPDF KILLS HIM

Following President Yoweri Museveni takeover in 1986, Acak returned to Uganda. But, in 1987, he was arrested by soldiers of the National Resistance Army, NRA (now Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF)). He was accused of committing treason. Following his release, Acak fled back to Kenya. After he returned, he was shot dead in July 1999, during a UPDF military operation at Baropok, Akoro sub-county, Lira district.

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