



## GENERAL AMIN'S COUP D'ETAT

**W**ith substantial evidence relating to both the Okoya murder case and the misappropriated funds from the army now stacking up against him, and coupled with his strained relations with Obote, the only option open for Amin was to take the initiative and make the first decisive move. With Obote away in Singapore and with foreign powers, especially the Israelis and the British, covertly and overtly urging him to make his move now with the bulk of the soldiers loyal to Obote away on leave, the field was wide open for him to carry out the classic coup d'état. Thus, on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1971, Amin made his move and carried out a swift and successful coup against Milton Obote and his government. The master whom he had previously served was no more, and Amin was now the boss.

Soldiers loyal to Amin, mostly Nubians and those whom he had recruited directly, especially since the escalation of the Anyanya activities in southern Sudan, moved swiftly and decisively. On that fateful January day, at approximately 2:00 am, small arms, mortar and tank fire were heard on the outskirts of Kampala city. The army's progress was swift and unimpeded; within a very short time, they had entered the city centre. The few civilians still on the streets of Kampala were chased away, and sporadic bursts of gunfire echoed across the city. In no time, the Parliament building, the national radio station, the main post office, the railway station, banks and other critical institutional buildings had been surrounded by armed soldiers and tanks. A further detachment of soldiers and armour had scurried off quickly to Entebbe airport and, on arrival at the terminal building's main entrance, promptly launched a shell through the building's main front doors, killing several airport staff and civilians. Maybe this was an attempt to block Obote from returning to Uganda, for he was scheduled to return that evening. Unfortunately, two Catholic priests, Father Jean-Paul Demers and Father Gerald Perrault, were also caught in the firing line and killed.



*Amin (at the wheel) arrives in Kampala triumphant after the coup d'état*

Most residents of Kampala, oblivious to the proceedings going on in the centre of town, slept through the coup. By dawn, however, it became apparent to all exactly what had transpired during the night, and that the country was waking up to a new government. Obote had gone - Amin was in. That morning, crowds, comprising ordinary civilians, gradually emerged from all directions and moved towards the city centre. Singing, dancing, and rapturous jubilation was the order of the day. Every soldier was hugged and cheered, and Amin was now considered the saviour. One placard even read 'Amin - Our Christ - Our Saviour'. The Baganda were ecstatic and joyous that their nemesis, Obote, had been removed from power and ejected from their land. The whole of Buganda breathed a sigh of relief and wallowed in the vengeful retribution that God had cast on the enemy of their kabaka, namely Milton Obote.

During the course of the morning, the army started making broadcasts on Radio Uganda, the government-owned and run broadcast service. These transmissions justified the reasons and rationale for overthrowing the government insisting that this had been done so as 'to prevent a bad situation from getting worse'. They gave examples of how everyone was worse off due to Obote's economic policies; the high taxes, the continued unjustified use of State of Emergency powers, kondoism, and the arbitrary detention of citizens by the hated GSU. They went on to accuse Obote