

Everything I fought for has come to pass — Maj. Gen. Nalyweyiso

By Chris Kiwawulo

At the rank of Major General, Proscovia Nalyweyiso is currently the highest ranking female officer in the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF).

Nalyweyiso was among the very first women to join the National Resistance Army (NRA) combatants in the jungles of Luwero.

Other notable female combatants who joined the 1981-86 struggle include Lt. Joy Mirembe (RIP), Capt. Oliver Zizinga, Capt. Gertrude Njuba, Maj. Maimuna Nadduli and Maj. Dora Kutesa, the wife of Maj. Gen. Pecos Kutesa.

Nalyweyiso joined the bush war in 1982.

A year later, when the NRA formed the women's wing, she was appointed the unit commander. In 1984, most of the women were ordered by the NRA high command to move to western Uganda from their base in Luwero.

They moved together with the sick and injured combatants.

Although the overall commander of this expedition was the late Maj. Gen. Fred Rwigyema and the late Brig. Chiefe Ali, Nalyweyiso played a big role since she was in command of the women.

By 1985, the NRA had successfully set up the western front and the women's wing actively participated in several battles in western Uganda.

"We were in a unit that attacked Mbarara barracks, for example," she was quoted as saying in an interview with *New Vision* recently.

It was, however, in this battle that they lost the highest number of combatants in a single battle, numbering 45, including five women fighters.

Several fierce lady fighters like machine-gunners Nalongo and Mukombozi were among the NRA combatants that attacked Mbarara barracks, but were killed.

The women's unit was then moved to Fort Portal and that is where they stayed until the NRA captured power in 1986.

After the war, Nalyweyiso was promoted to the rank of Captain and given full command of the women's wing, which according to records, had around 800 fighters then.



Nalyweyiso being decorated by Gen. Katumba Wamala during a ceremony at Mbuya Army Barracks in 2017

NALWEYISO'S BACKGROUND

Born in 1954 in Mpigi district in a large family with 20 children, Nalyweyiso turns 65 years on June 1.

Nalyweyiso was married to an army officer in 1974 while still a civilian, but separated with her husband.

The mother of four encourages other women to join the army. She says unlike the previous armies, the UPDF is now devoid of sexual harassment and promotion opportunities are

open to all.

"I can confidently say that whatever I fought for has been achieved and I am happy that women made a significant contribution to this achievement," she says.

For the last 10 years, she has been based at State House as a Senior Advisor to the President on Defense matters, and according to sources, she is one of the most trusted army officers.

"When you become a leader of women, you play more than the role of command. You are also a counsellor, a mother and an aunt," she said of the role.

From then, Nalyweyiso has steadily risen through the military ranks.

By 2000, she was at the rank of a Lieutenant Colonel before she was later promoted to a full Colonel.

In September 2011, Nalyweyiso became the first female Brigadier in the UPDF and in January 2017, Gen. Yoweri Museveni, who is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, promoted her to the rank of Major General, making her the highest ranking female officer in East Africa.

Joining NRA

Nalyweyiso says if it had not been for the brutal Uganda National Liberation Army

THE KILLINGS I WITNESSED TOOK AWAY ANY FEARS I HAD. I REALISED THAT MY ONLY WAY OUT WAS TO GO AND FIGHT FOR MY COUNTRY

(UNLA) government soldiers at the time (1982), she probably would not have become a soldier.

"Mine was a family that liked the Kabaka, so whatever happened to Buganda, we were touched," she said.

When Kabaka Muteesa was exiled in 1966, Nalyweyiso was 12 years old. And although she was just a child, Nalyweyiso says what happened to her king hurt her deeply.

And when Muteesa died in exile in 1969, it hurt even



Maj. Gen. Proscovia Nalyweyiso appearing before the land probe committee at the National Archives and Records Centre on 11/04/2018, where she gave her views on the land wrangles in Ntawo, Mukono district

more. By 1979, Nalyweyiso had started working as a junior teacher and a typist at a church near Gombe in the current Mpigi district. It was at this time that the political animal in her was stirred up.

"I thought that the Democratic Party (DP) had a good mission. So, I joined it and I was named the sub-county publicity secretary as we moved closer the 1980 elections," she says.

But when the elections were held, they turned out to be a fiasco.

According to Nalyweyiso, DP won the elections and celebrations had broken out.

"We were sure we had won and that is why we were celebrating, but we were stunned much later when the radio started announcing

that the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) had won," she recalls.

The elections had reportedly been rigged by the sitting government of UPC, led President Milton Obote, which upset Nalyweyiso.

"A period of persecution then ensued. UPC youth wingers and soldiers were harassing and killing DP members and whoever did not support them," she says.

This is what propelled her to join armed rebellion in 1982.

"I realised that my only way out was to go and fight for my country. The killings that I had witnessed took away any fears that I may have had," she says.

Life in the bush was particularly tough for the women.

"We are supposed to go into our menstruation periods, however, at times we failed to get pads to use in the bush. With time, even the periods stopped coming because of the conditions," she recalls.



Maj. Gen. Proscovia Nalyweyiso was among the first women to join the NRA