

Excerpt from

Idi Amin



by Steve Dougherty

1 On June 27, 1976, an Air France jet carrying nearly 250 passengers from Tel Aviv, Israel to Paris was hijacked by pro-Palestinian terrorists. After refueling in Libya, the hijackers flew to Uganda, where they expected a warm welcome from their leader, Idi Amin.

2 The terrorists claimed to represent the millions of Palestinian Arabs who had been forced off their land when the state of Israel was founded 28 years earlier. The Palestinians wanted their own nation on territory claimed by the Israelis. Some pro-Palestinian groups used terrorist tactics to make their demands known. Palestinian terrorists shelled Israeli settlements, hijacked airlines, and set off bombs in public places. In 1972, a group of Palestinians murdered 11 Israeli athletes at the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany.

3 When the hijacked jet landed at Entebbe Airport, the terrorists received exactly the reception they had hoped for. The jet touched down before dawn on June 28. Amin's soldiers helped unload the plane and place the passengers in an unused wing of the airport.

4 Amin personally took charge of the situation and helped to draft the terrorists' lists of demands. They wanted 53 Palestinians released from prisons in several different countries. If their demand was not met by July 4, the terrorists promised to kill their hostages.

5 The lives of innocent people hung in the balance, and Amin seemed almost giddy with excitement. According to his aide Henry Kyemba, he wanted the "glory" of humiliating the Israelis while the entire world watched. "Well, Kyemba," Amin told him, "now I've got the Israelis fixed up this time."

6 The Israelis, however, had no intention of being intimidated by Idi Amin. On the night of July 3, hours before the terrorists' deadline, four Israeli transport planes slipped across the Red Sea. They flew just 100 feet over the waves in order to avoid the radar systems of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. An hour before midnight, they touched down at Entebbe. A squad of 100 Israeli commandos jumped out and stormed the airport terminal where the hostages were imprisoned.

7 The raid took Amin and his men completely by surprise. Most of his officers were drinking and dancing at an airport hotel when the Israelis landed. As soon as the officers heard gunfire, they fled. Amin himself escaped to safety and remained in hiding until the shooting stopped. Nearly 50 of his soldiers—and all of the terrorists—were killed in the gun battle with the Israelis. Three hostages died in the crossfire, but the rest were hustled into the Israeli planes and flown to safety.

8 The success of the lightning raid was a triumph for the Israelis and an embarrassment for Amin. A few days later, some of his soldiers were jeered in the streets of Kampala for running away from the Israelis. The soldiers waded into the hostile crowd and beat up several people.

9 Amin vented his anger in a different way. He lashed out at the lone hostage left in Uganda. A 75-year-old woman named Dora Bloch had choked on a piece of meat the day before the raid and been taken to a hospital for treatment. Amin sent his security forces to seize her. Frail and unable to walk, Bloch was pulled screaming from her bed. Hospital workers and patients watched in horror as the men dragged her outside, shoved her into their car, and drove off.

10 A few hours later, Bloch's body was found dumped by a roadside 20 miles from Kampala. She had been shot and stabbed. The murder of Dora Bloch proved to be the beginning of the end for Idi Amin.

11 Encouraged by Amin's falling reputation, Ugandan exiles in Tanzania made a series of raids across the border. Amin responded with a new round of purges, once again targeting the soldiers suspected of supporting the opposition.

12 Amin became convinced that his enemies were closing in on him, and he lashed out with new recklessness. Janani Luwun, archbishop of the Anglican Church of Uganda, had found courage to speak out against the latest wave of violence. Amin decided to silence him.

13 In February 1977, Luwun and several Anglican bishops were arrested and hauled onto a hotel balcony before government officials, reporters, and a rowdy crowd of 2,000 soldiers. For three hours in the hot sun, Amin's security officers read pages of so-called "evidence" against Luwun. They claimed—falsely—that the archbishop had conspired with the opposition to overthrow the government of Uganda.

14 When the sham trial was over, Amin asked the soldiers standing below whether the bishops were guilty. Chants of "Kill them! Kill them!" rose up from the crowd. Several hours later, Archbishop Luwun was executed in the offices of Amin's security police.

15 Church leaders around the world erupted in anger. "Amin is the incarnation of what the Bible calls a wicked man," said Burgess Carr, head of the All Africa Conference of Churches. "He can be entertaining you in one room, while in the room next door people are being mutilated and tortured."

16 At long last, Idi Amin stood exposed to the world.

Name: _____ Date: _____

QUIZ
Idi Amin

Directions: Circle the best answer.

1. The central idea of this text can best be summarized by which statement?
 - a. Amin was a heartless dictator who engaged in cruel acts to maintain his power and control.
 - b. Amin was a powerful ruler who enjoyed torturing his captives.
 - c. Military rulers are always cruel and evil.
 - d. Amin fought the Ugandan rebels ruthlessly to maintain Uganda's independence.
2. The word erupted in paragraph 15 means
 - a. purged.
 - b. telephoned.
 - c. spoke.
 - d. exploded.
3. What traits best describe Archbishop Luwun?
 - a. cowardly and compassionate
 - b. fearful and outspoken
 - c. courageous and just
 - d. power hungry and selfish
4. What does the behavior of Amin and his officers on the night of July 3 reveal?
 - a. They were excited about executing the hostages.
 - b. They were careless and cowardly in the face of attack.
 - c. They were celebrating their victory over Israel.
 - d. They were poorly trained and needed better equipment to defend themselves against the Israelis.
5. What does the author mean by "At long last, Idi Amin stood exposed to the world"?
 - a. Amin's murderous ways were finally revealed to the world.
 - b. Amin managed to maintain his power on the world stage.
 - c. Amin would now be tried by an international court.
 - d. Other nations could now seek to rule Uganda.