

Bandits collected N3m, phone, victim's cloth, then announced his death — Family of slain Zamfara FGC teacher

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On May 4, Mallam Mustapha Maru, a Civic Education teacher at Federal Government College, Anka, Zamfara State, was on his way back to school after spending the weekend with his wife and family members at Maru Village. Joining him on the journey was Summayah Abubakar, also a Maru Village indigene, who just got admission to FGC Zamfara as Senior Secondary School (SSS1) student. Her chaperon was Mallam Maru. They boarded a vehicle heading to Anka. Summayah was excited about resuming school as a senior student, but not long after, the excitement was killed by a bullet from one of the blazing guns of bandits who had laid ambush on the road.

Heavy shootings rent the air, bringing the commercial vehicle to an abrupt and screeching halt. By then, Summayah's skull had been penetrated by the bullet while the driver's neck was pierced by the deadly ammunition in three different places. Unperturbed by that, **Saturday Tribune** learnt that the bandits ferried other passengers, including the teacher, Mallam Maru, into the bush and started demanding for ransom.



A teacher and friend of the deceased, Mallam Nura Hassan

From Mallam Maru's relatives, the bandits demanded for N50 million and five motorcycles, telling them to pay promptly. The family, in turn, pleaded for mercy, telling captors that they had never come across such an amount. Suddenly, the abductors agreed to N3 million, and at the end of the payment, announced the killing of Mallam Maru to his family, on Tuesday, May 26.

With uncontrollable tears being shed, the disquiet in Maru Village, in Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State, is still palpable, with the village thrown into mourning.

Narrating the incident, a friend and colleague of the deceased, Mallam Nura Hassan, who is an Islamic Studies teacher in the same school, told Saturday Tribune: "I was with Mustapha on Saturday, May 2. He was in his village, Maru, in Maru Local Government Area, where his wife and extended family members are, for the weekend. I'm from Gusau, but we were so close. We were not just like brothers, but actually brothers.

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"On Monday, May 4, he was on his way back to school in Anka. He had a newly-admitted student, a female, Summayah Abubakar, whom he was taking to the school. It was her first time of going to the school. Mustapha even called to tell me he was on his way to school, and I told him I would join him after carrying out some assignments.

"The next call after the conversation was from Mustapha's wife, who was crying hysterically. I asked her: 'Amina, what is the problem?' She replied that she just called her husband to know if he had got to school but, instead, heard a voice of someone who said he was a bandit and informed her that her husband was in captivity. Shocked, I told her to let me call and confirm it, which I did. As I called, the bandit gave Mustapha the phone, but I couldn't hear him very well because the network was bad. I called back and the bandit collected the phone from Mustapha and said: 'It's not Mustapha. It's me, a bandit. Mustapha is in our captivity now.' I just recited 'Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un.' The bandit asked: 'why are you reciting this prayer when I already told you he's with us?' Then I just ended the call.

"I started wondering: so this was what really happened. Different people also started calling Mustapha to confirm when they heard of the incident. I had to tell Mustapha's brother, Kabiru, to make the bandits know that only he should be contacted for negotiations. This was because some people might make some utterances that might make the bandits start torturing my friend.

"They called Kabiru and demanded N50 million and five Honda (Japan made) motorcycles. He told them that the family members had never seen such money in their lifetime. After some days, they suddenly reduced the ransom to N3 million. When we heard that, we were surprised and wondered if he was still alive. We had to go along with their demand and pleaded with them to give us a week to gather the amount. They called us on a Wednesday and told us that they wanted the money by the same day of the following week.

"We decided to adopt a method to know if Mustapha was still alive or not. We had spoken with him twice since he became a captive. We made them to know that we had been able to put together N1.8 million, and another N1 million had been sent to the account of Mustapha's wife, but her Automated Teller Machine (ATM) card was with him. We said we would like to speak with him so that he would tell us where the ATM card was and we would go to withdraw the money.

"However, the bandit replied that we could not speak with Mustapha, and that all his ATM cards were with them. They did not allow us to speak with him. We never heard his voice again after three days of his being held hostage. They later said that we were playing with their intelligence as if they didn't know what they were doing. They became hard, telling us that if that was what we wanted, so be it. We started begging them and told them that we would get the money for them.

"When we informed them again that we were still trying to get the N3 million, they asked us not to bother bringing Honda motorcycles again. They said we should get them a phone with three cameras. We made them to know that we had only N1.8 million with us, while N1 million was in Mustapha's wife's account. They agreed to our bringing the N1.8 million with the handset but said that they wanted it as we were discussing with them. And it was already evening. We told them we couldn't get cash again at that time, and they swore that if we didn't give them the money that day, then they would collect a complete N3 million from us. They also asked for Mustapha's best dress to be added to the N1.8 million.

"They asked us to take the money to a village but we told them that everyone had been afraid of going there, that they should let us know how to reach them. One of our elders in Maru Village knew someone working in Jangebe and who was close to those associating with the bandits. The money and phone, along with Mustapha's good cloth, were given to the man in Jangebe. He, in turn, gave the items to the person that would take them to the bandits. For doing the job, we were told to pay the agent N100,000 as a fee, and N20,000 for fuel purchase, totalling N120,000.

"When the money was taken to the bandits with the items, they counted it and said it was not complete because we missed paying it the previous day. They asked us to add N1.3 million, totalling N3.1 million. The man who wanted to take it to them also collected another N50,000.

"After collecting the balance, they told the money courier to tell Mallam Mustapha's family that they were sorry because in the evening of the previous day, it was raining and Mustapha with two others that were also hostages decided to run away. They said that the bandits' leaders were not around and the captives were being watched by some young boys. They said that their boys ran after them but couldn't catch them, so they decided to kill them by firing at them. They made the explanation after collecting the money, which made us believe they had killed him before asking us to bring the money."

Mallam Nura also spoke on how the bandits snuffed life out of the student who was in the vehicle with Mallam Mustapha: "As the vehicle in which Mallam Mustapha, Summayah and other passengers were approached where the bandits laid an ambush, they started firing gunshots indiscriminately. One of their bullets penetrated Summayah's skull. She didn't die immediately. After the bandits left, she was rushed to General Hospital, Anka, but

when the doctors noticed the critical condition she was in, they said it was more than they could manage. She was rushed to Usmanu Danfodiyo University Teaching Hospital (UDUTH) in Sokoto. Sadly, she succumbed to death at about 3a.m. the following day. The driver of the vehicle was also shot on the neck in three different places. He is still in the same hospital in Sokoto."

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Sadly too, the family has not been able to see Mustapha's remains for a decent burial, at least, to pay him the last respect.

Mallam Nura said Mustapha was more than a friend: "We were like relatives. I can't express myself because I'm yet to get a grasp of this incident. It is a great loss to me. That is why I'm the one being consoled by many because we were always together," he said.

The brother of the deceased, Mallam Kabiru Maru, while speaking with Saturday Tribune, expressed sadness at the way bandits have instilled fear in all dwellers in Maru Village. He called on the government to put a stop to bandits' operations, not only in Zamfara, but particularly in the north and generally in Nigeria. "I will like the federal government to take the decision to dislodge them," he said.



Part of the road cleared of trees by Anka Local Government Council after Mallam Mustapha Maru's abduction

"I live in Maru, and in our village, we don't sleep at night. The bandits would come with sophisticated guns to our houses, rob us of our belongings and take our people as hostages. Those fortunate to escape being taken as captives would run away, and our village would be deserted. If they operate today, two days after, they would be back. Mustapha was kidnapped along Anka Road. All the roads that link one another have become fearful to pass through because of the bandits," Mallam Kabiru told Saturday Tribune.

He recalled that the activities of bandits became more prominent two, three years ago. He also spoke of how the bandits abducted one Alhaji Ilia about two years ago and collected over N150 million as ransom before he was

released. "The communities couldn't do anything and the fear has pushed many villagers to Gusau to live," Mallam Kabiru stated further.

When asked of the action taken by the government, Mallam Kabiru said that nothing had been heard from those in government and security agencies. "The governor knows. The security agencies know. The Department of State Services knows. The military knows. We are just appealing to them to help us clear the bushes of bandits."

He also expressed sadness for not giving Mustapha a decent burial, saying that the bandits just threw his remains in an unknown place.

The wife of the deceased, Hajiya Amina, who also spoke with **Saturday Tribune**, narrated how her husband left home for work but met with abductors who eventually terminated his life: "My husband was on his way back to the school where he was teaching. About an hour after he left home, I sent him an SMS. Ten minutes later, he called me back and told me that they had found a vehicle to travel in at Anka Junction and that they were moving at that moment. He had initially moved from Maru to Anka Junction. After about 30 minutes, I called him again to know if he had got to the school, but it was someone else who picked the call. He was like a Fulani. He told my husband, 'Talk to her, talk to her.' Then I prayed—'Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un'—and asked, 'what happened?' Then Mustapha said, 'Amina, they have kidnapped us. We are in the hands of bandits. Tell Mallam.' He meant his colleague, Mallam Nura, so that he would inform the school. At that point, I was no longer in my senses. I started shouting.

"Within that week, I communicated with my husband twice. He was also speaking with his brother, Mallam Kabiru."

The widow spoke on the bandits' demand for N50 million as ransom as they were communicating with her brother-in-law. She said that after a week, they reduced the ransom to N3 million and told the family to bring it within a week or anything could happen.

"My brother-in-law, Kabiru, appealed to them that he and my husband were orphans, and he (Mustapha) was the only one the family was depending on. When we asked them to give the phone to Mustapha so that he could tell us where he kept my ATM card, they refused to hand it over to him and started abusing and cursing us. They were shouting at Kabiru. Kabiru begged and said the money would be brought to them.

"When they got it, they said it was not complete. They kept it and demanded the rest with an added amount. After getting the money, they called Kabiru and said they had killed Mallam Mustapha because it was raining and he and two others were tied but tried to escape."

Saying that banditry and kidnapping had been frequent, particularly on the Anka Road, Hajiya Amina described her husband's untimely death as shocking and painful.

She said, "I still can't believe he's not coming back. And until the end of my life, I will never forgive the bandits. I will not stop cursing them. They will never live in peace and will rot in hell. Even today (Friday, May 29), I have sent children to the mosque to curse them during prayers."

Also speaking, the Head of Department, Science, in FGC, Anka, Hajiya Maryam I. Gusau, referred to the deceased as a "man of the people" who had staff, students and everyone in his heart. "I never saw him quarrel with or have misunderstandings with anyone in about 12 years he had been working in the school as a teacher. He was hardworking, and I have not come to terms with his demise. It is still very fresh in my heart," Hajiya Gusau said.

She appealed to the government for the relocation of the Federal Government College from Anka to Gusau. She spoke on the awareness of some prominent people's determination to retain the school in Anka because it's an institution that is breathing life into the town.

Saturday Tribune gathered that banditry and other security issues had reportedly chased First Bank out of Anka even before the situation escalated to its current level. A Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) in the General Hospital, Anka, also left.

The HOD said: "I don't know why they are still keeping us in that place. The bandits operate along the road to the school everyday, attacking two, three, four vehicles. When going to Anka, your chance of making it there or not is 50-50."

Saturday Tribune also contacted Lawal Marafa, Anka Local Government Area Secretary, who confirmed the killing by bandits, saying: "Just as you were told was how we heard the incident happened." He admitted the large number of the bandits terrorising the citizens and how they used to go round villages to kidnap and extort the people. He stated that many of them had been arrested, while many others died during exchange of gunfire with security forces. Unfortunately, he said, others who escaped still continued their criminal activities.

The chairman of Anka Local Government Area, Hon. Bashar Musa Anka, in his comment, said he heard the news of the shooting of Summayah and Mallam Mustapha's abduction, but was not told that the girl was dead and the teacher was murdered by bandits after collection of ransom, either from the families or the school.

He disclosed that the information about the abduction prompted a security meeting, during which he was advised to clear the trees along the road 100 metres away from the roadside to ensure visibility, which was promptly done.

He said his local government area also made a second arrangement: "From 8a.m. and 5:30p.m. everyday, we have placed two Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) on the road to constantly patrol the area – one from Hokan-Shanu to Mayanchi, and the second one from Hokan-Shanu to Bobo – on a daily basis," adding that there had been no kidnapping since the action was taken.

The Police Public Relations Officer in Zamfara Command, DSP Yazid Abubakar, also said that the police did not receive any information about the incident.

He made it known that the Command's units tackling criminal activities are usually on top of the game: "We do everything humanly possible to ensure that anyone kidnapped is rescued. If an incident happened and it is not reported to the police, there will be no way for us to know. The Divisional Police Officer in charge of the jurisdiction was not informed to take the necessary action.

"I'm not saying that the incident did not happen, but we were not informed. If we were informed, we would have followed the bandits to their den to rescue victims. We would have applied same to the incident you are talking about if we were informed," he said.

He stated further that the command is not in support of giving ransom, as it would be an empowerment for the bandits. He added that it might be the reason the information about the abduction was not given.

He spoke of a village, Fegin Kanawa, where bandits forced the residents to desert, with no single human being left. "Two to three weeks ago, the people returned to their village, with Violent Crime Responsive Unit operatives stationed there, after we cleared about nine camps of the bandits. They are now free to go to their camps," the PRO disclosed.

Urging members of the public to give information that would help in carrying out rescue, the PPRO said that the Command would not fold its arms and watch such crime being perpetrated.