

Custom officer dies in clash with smugglers

IN what an eyewitness account revealed may have been a business deal gone awry, a Customs officer was killed and five others injured early last Tuesday morning in a gun battle between operatives of the Federal Operations Unit (FOU) of the Customs Service (NCS) and some suspected smugglers operating along the Seme border end of the Badagry Expressway.

Daily Champion learnt that the deceased Customsman, Buba Kure Babale, and the five wounded officers had accosted the suspected smugglers at the checkpoint they had mounted at Agbara stretch of the expressway.

The incident, it was gathered, has thrown up a number of issues.

When the smugglers got here they went to meet the Customs for 'settlement,' but the Customs refused to collect the usual money. They claimed that it was too small. After much argument, the smugglers tried to pass without doing as the Customs said and the Customs opened fire at their vehicles," recounted an eyewitness.

The NCS Public Relations Officer, Chief Superintendent Wale Adeniyi, confirmed the incident.

Adeniyi, however, denied that the confronta-

tion had any linkage to alleged disagreement over gratification between the Customs officers and the suspected smugglers.

The NCS spokesperson explained: "What happened was that the men of the Federal Operations patrol accosted a bus loaded with textile materials at Agbara checkpoint, and, when they wanted to effect seizure, the smugglers became violent and opened fire on them."

Adeniyi had refused to either give or confirm the name of the dead customsman, claiming that it would be improper because the service was yet to notify the deceased's family.

Meanwhile, 52 suspected hoodlums have been arrested in a joint operation by the NCS, Nigerian Army (NA) and the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to track down the fleeing smugglers who are suspected to back Benin Republic across the border through Seme with their textile cargoes after the firefight with the Customs team.

Adeniyi told *Daily Champion* that the service was sustaining the anti-smuggling onslaught to ensure that the fleeing smugglers and their ilk face justice.

"Investigations have commenced and proceeding earnestly," he said.