

# 17 feared dead in robbery attack

Alphonsus Nweze, Onitsha and Steve Okoh, Umuahia

23 April, 2010 02:19:00

It was a black Wednesday for residents of Okigwe in Imo State as armed robbers raided over six banks in the afternoon.

The hoodlums numbering about 30 according to eye witness drove into the town in a convoy of about four vehicles including sports utility vehicles (SUV) and a Hummer bus shooting sporadically into the air apparently to ward off any interception by the police.

A source told Daily Champion that Owerri Road which houses virtually all the banks in Okigwe was literally turned into a war zone as the robbers brazenly celebrated their sophistication.

The operation which started around 3 pm and lasted for about two hours and brought business and other activities in the town to a stand still as residents scampered for safety.

Seven persons including a cashier with one of the first generation banks, and a woman at Pego Street were hit by stray bullets; they reportedly lost their lives in the unfortunate incident.

The victims include two police men earlier gunned down by the rampaging criminals at a road block at Umuna Okigwe, as they wounded their way towards Okigwe.

Reports also have it that the hoodlums started their shooting spree at Ihiala, Anambra State via Orlu and Isiala Mbano in Imo State where they had earlier killed 10 persons including two soldiers, five policemen and three civilians as they headed for Okigwe.

Another woman was said to have fallen off from a moving motorbike and was rushed to an undisclosed hospital having sustained serious injuries.

Vehicles, motor-cycles and buildings along Owerri Road were also hit by stray bullets as the gun duel raged on.

When contacted, the Area Commander in Okigwe, Mr. Paul Aliu, an Assistant Commissioner of Police, simply said: "Please I am in the bush for operation, I don't have anything to say now."

Meanwhile, the wife of former governor of Anambra State, Chief Chukwuemeka Ezeife, Mrs. Onyedi Ezeife was on Wednesday kidnapped by an armed robbery gang which snatched her car and abducted her to an unknown destination.

The robbers were reportedly escaping from Imo State after a robbery operation.

According to a source, the hoodlums who operated in two sports utility vehicles (SUV) operated in Orumba of Anambra state, where they have said to have killed two mobile police men at a check point.

The robbers were said to have proceeded to Uga in Aguata council Area, where they killed one police man, while another police man lost his life to the rampaging robbers at Ezinfite also in Aguata council Area of the state.