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# 3 soldiers pay the ultimate price for peace in Plateau

By Lami Sadiq, Jos | Published Date Oct 8, 2018 1:08 AM (<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/3-soldiers-pay-the-ultimate-price-for-peace-in-plateau.html>) Twitter (<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/3-soldiers-pay-the-ultimate-price-for-peace-in-plateau.html?share=twitter&nb=1>) Facebook 210 (<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/3-soldiers-pay-the-ultimate-price-for-peace-in-plateau.html?share=facebook&nb=1>) WhatsApp ([https://api.whatsapp.com/send?](https://api.whatsapp.com/send?text=3%20soldiers%20pay%20the%20ultimate%20price%20for%20peace%20in%20Plateau%20https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailytrust.com.ng%2F3-soldiers-pay-the-ultimate-price-for-peace-in-plateau.html)

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*Late CPL Effiong Mbuotidem, Late CPL Isah Ojaghale and Late LCPL Kingsley Aloue*

They are mostly referred to as 'Belarus' in the North East and in Plateau, most people call them the 'fearless bikers' who are assisting in the restoration of internal security in the state's troubled Barkin Ladi Local Government Area.

Officially designated men of the Special Forces Team (SFT), 33 of them were deployed to Plateau from the Defence Headquarters on the 25th of June to boost the capabilities of Operation Safe Haven after the attacks that claimed over 200 lives in Barkin Ladi.

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But following another attack in Barkin Ladi on September 6th, the Special Forces lost three gallant soldiers; the first of their casualties since they were drafted to Plateau and the largest record of casualty in a day since they started operations in 2014.

Recently turned 36, CPL Effiong Mbuotidem; 30 year old CPL Isah Ojaghale; and 28-year-old LCPL Kingsley Aloue, have paid the ultimate price for peace on the Plateau with their lives. Until their death, Effiong was a beloved husband and father of four; Isah had just gotten married in June and Kingsley was preparing for marriage said the Special Forces Commander, Lt. Commander Isaac Terzungwe Akaazua.

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On the 3rd of October, while the three fallen heroes were being laid to rest at the Maxwell Khobe Military cemetery at the 3 Division Headquarters, Rukuba, one of their team mates, Corporal Chuks Onyesi, broke down in tears. "We have been living together since we got to this Plateau. Black Spider (Effiong), Choko (Isah) and I were very close, we

understood ourselves, if there was anything any of us could do to bring them back we would do it immediately,” he said.

They all had coded names, while Effiong was called Black Spider, Isah was known as Choko and Kingsley was fondly called Che-che. On the day they died, the three soldiers and another personnel had been separated from their colleagues while trying to ward off bandits in Barkin Ladi.

Narrating the incident, Akaazua said: “When we were called in, we found ourselves in between the militia and the community so we were pushing them but because of their number four of my men had to separate from the main body and when we withdrew we discovered that they were missing. We started looking for them and found their corps with the fourth person alive but injured.”

Though regarded as fearless and ruthless on battle grounds, Corporal Steven Okoli told Daily Trust that the three were kind, friendly and funny. “They were men and not just men but they were our brothers. We knew ourselves beyond weapons and war, we knew ourselves to the very bones of our families, even our wives and kids wept for their loss.”

Okoli further said, “I was very close to Che-che (Kingsley). He took me as an elder brother and came to me for many things, we had a bond. For Choko (Isah), I served with his father and even when he was injured in Maiduguri I used to communicate with his father on how he was faring. I remember when he wanted to say something funny and I would say ‘sharrap’ he would say ‘Oga you na very senior man, why you go dey sharrap me like that,’ he was very funny.”

“Kingsley did our haircuts and if it will take him the whole day to do it, he never complained. For Corporal Effiong, we used to call him Black Spider because he was very quiet, he would only smile at you, but they were all dedicated soldiers,” he said.

Lt. Commander Akaazua who has been their commanding officer since 2014 told Daily Trust that their death was unexpected especially since as a team, they had faced more, tougher battle grounds.

“We have had so many operations together and we have been in real battles but they didn’t die; we did not expect anybody to die in Plateau because we have been in real battles. We have been in the North East for three years battling Boko Haram who have a lot of sophisticated equipment and we didn’t lose them but it is this one that is like a child’s play and we have lost them. All we can say is that it was their time otherwise they wouldn’t have died,” he said.



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Along with other members of the team, Effiong, Isah and Kingsley were drafted for the Special Forces Training in the Republic of Belarus from 24th April -26th September 2014 which earned them the nick name Belarus. Subsequently, they were inducted into Operation Lafiya Dole from 19th February 2015 – 27th July 2017 and went further to be selected for another Special Forces Training in South Africa from 7th March to 5th May 2018.

However, due to the need to suppress internal security challenges in Plateau State, the Special Forces Team was deployed by the Defence Headquarters to Operation Safe Haven in Jos on the 25th of June 2018. But barely two months later, the three lost their lives.

Under the command of Akaazua the three soldiers and others had performed notable operations in Borno State such as the capture of the dreaded Bitta town, liberation of Dikwa and Gamboru Ngala local government areas, the rescue of the former Corps Commander, Engineer, Major General S.J Davis, the recapture of Gudumbali and many others. “We captured almost all the LG’s in Borno State, and we did it together,” Akaazua said.

Shortly before the incident that led to their death, Corporal Michael Moses said there had been a sign but none of them had realised it until later.

“Choko had a sign but the military job must be done. When he started his bike and climbed it, when he tried to move it, it went off but when another person started it, it moved but as soon as Choko tried to move the bike it stopped. At the end, everyone left and only he remained and another team mate but he just managed the bike to join us. That morning he also paid me back some money he had collected from me,” said Moses.



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Akaazua described the three soldiers as hard working and reliable, adding that, “some of them, like Choko, you can’t spend five minutes with him without laughing even when you don’t want to laugh he could make you laugh. When we were tired in the bush once he was around, we felt alive and he gave us that sense of hope that it was going to be well.”

Recalling some moments with Kingsley, Okoli said, “he used to say the operation in Plateau was not what he had in mind; he felt one couldn’t even get injured here not to mention getting killed. He was a very courageous soldier and he and Isah were the fastest runners we had.”

While paying his respects to the fallen soldiers, Operation Safe Haven Commander, Major General Augustine Agundu, described them as gallant professional soldiers and gentlemen who were worthy sons of Nigeria.

General Agundu said: “These soldiers who are fathers and husbands had died in the search for peace in Plateau State. OPSH and the Armed Forces of Nigeria have lost some of their fearless Special Forces soldiers that exhibited courage and steadfastness even unto death and in the search for peace on the Plateau.”

Until his death, Effiong hailed from Ibiono Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. He attended Utiti Obio Central Primary School Ibiono from 1995 to 1999 and proceeded to Community High School Ibiono, Akwa Ibom State where he obtained the senior secondary certificate in 2002. He enlisted into the Nigeria Army as a member of the 56 Regular recruit Intake in February 28th 2005.

Daily Trust gathered from Army records that late Cpl Isah Ojaghale hailed from Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State. He attended Army Children School Bonny Camp Lagos, from 1997 to 2003 and his secondary school certificate from Army Day Secondary School Lokoja, Kogi State in 2008. He was enlisted into the Nigerian Army on 6th of May 2009 as a member of 63 Regular recruit intake.

Kingsley Aloue hailed from Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State and attended Bua'yeghe primary school Gokana from 1997-2002 and Oshodi Senior Secondary School Apapa Lagos State from 2003 to 2009. On 23rd March 2012, he enlisted into the Nigerian Army as a member of the 67 Regular intake.

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