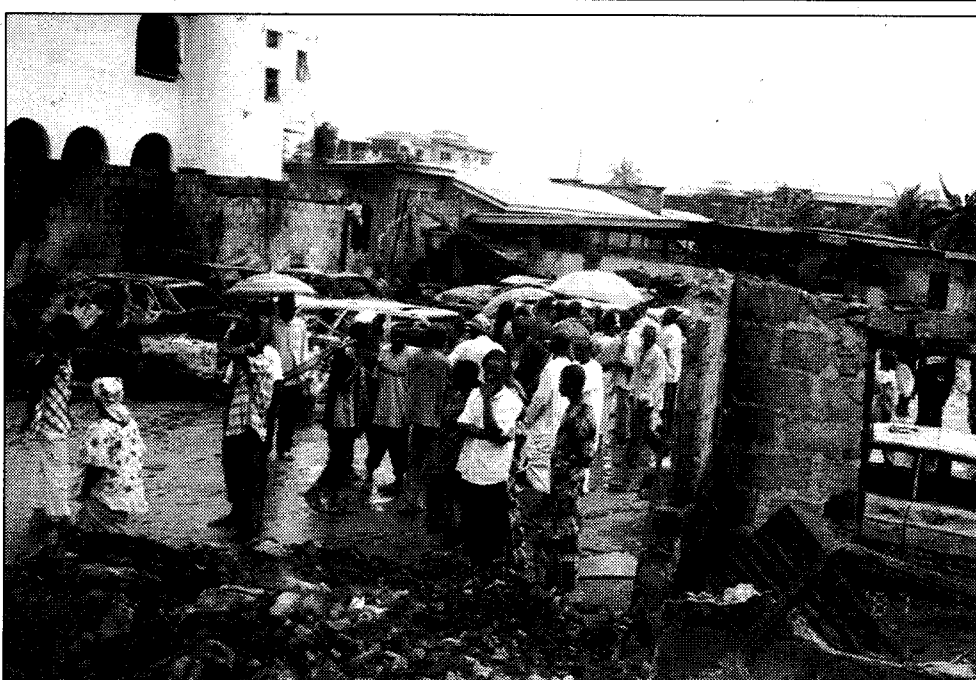
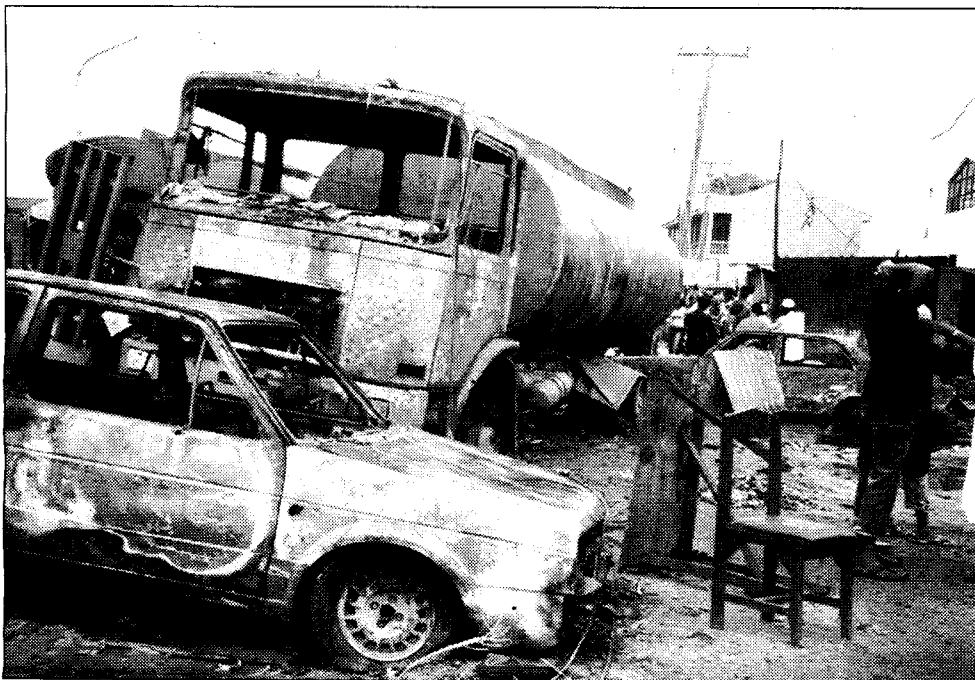




# THE RETROSection

## Many woes that trail fuel tankers

• Residents blame bad road, as fuel tanker fire injures five, destroys 25 cars



• The havoc wreaked by the burnt fuel tanker..Friday

PHOTOS: BERTRAM NWANNEKANMA

PEOPLE in the area said at the weekend they had feared it was only a matter of time for such a thing to happen.

They still remember when something similar occurred, more than a decade ago when a fully loaded tanker fell while the driver was trying to manoeuvre through the nasty pothole-ridden Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Depot Road, Ejigbo, Lagos causing a conflagration that killed many people and destroyed many houses.

The wonder was that it had taken so long before their worst fears came true.

But it did, as again around 7.30 p.m. on Friday on the same road. A fully loaded 33,000-litre capacity Premium Motor Spirit (also known as petrol) tanker fell and caught fire near Joke's Company. It is about three plots of land away housing several auto-technician shops, food canteens, a poultry farm, feed mill and other businesses.

The victims who were thankful no life was lost, nonetheless bemoaned their loss of property, cash and other valuables estimated at about N150 million.

Three children, Yusuf, Dupe and Amina were severely burnt.

Two people broke their legs while trying to escape the raging inferno.

About 25 cars of different brands including Mercedes Benz, new model Audi, Toyota, Honda as well as five fuel tankers and other valuable property, were destroyed.

But while the victims were lamenting their losses, occupants of a two-storey building besides the compound and the Church of God Mission International had cause to thank the Almighty for, for saving their property.

Owners of the affected vehicles told *The Guardian* they brought their vehicles to the mechanics' yard for repairs just a day before the fire.

By Seye Olumide and Bertram Nwannekanma

However, an auto-technician for the police, Fatai Rufai, who narrated the incident to *The Guardian* said: "At about 7.30 p.m. on Friday, the 33,000-litre tanker was trying to manoeuvre its way along the bad road.

"The driver suddenly lost control when he drove into a ditch and the vehicle fell and immediately, the tanker burst open.

"Fuel started gushing out and forming a long stream that flowed into the surrounding areas, including mechanic workshops and the kiosks of fuel hawkers.

"Soon, there was a loud explosion. The whole area burst into flames. We all had to abandon whatever we were doing and ran for our lives".

He added: "In a twinkling of an eye, the whole cars in the yard were on fire along with other property".

Rufai who was in tears, said he lost over N40,000 cash.

Pointing at a completely burnt station wagon Mercedes Benz, he said:

"The money was meant to buy some parts for the car and my labour. Now, I do not know what to do", he said.

He said seven of the burnt vehicles belonged to his customers:

"I do not know what to do or how to explain to them. Some of them came and simply turned back when they saw the scene."

Another automobile technician Rafiu Azeez who said that he lost N25,000 along with some of his clients' cars, said that the disaster could not have happened if the road was in good order.

According to him, "this is just one of the many disasters that has plagued here lately. All the cases are usually caused by tankers falling along the road.

"The road is bad and it is a shame to the NNPC and the government.

"Consider the number of articulated vehicles that use this road everyday to the depot for loading and yet nothing is done to repair it and make it safe".

Another angry resident and victim told *The Guardian* that besides the potholes and rough, uneven state of the road, "it is also very narrow and most often causes heavy traffic jam whenever the tankers are trying to manoeuvre on the road.

"That is one of the major causes of heavy traffic along Ikotun Road particularly at NNPC Junction to Iyana-Ejigbo.

The managing director of Biola Farms, owners of the affected poultry, Mr. Biola Adeyemi said the NNPC Road "is completely in a bad shape".

Said he: "If there is any road that needs urgent attention and repair, I think it is this road because of the heavy pressure of tankers going to load fuel.

"To us that are affected, these are major losses. The much we have been able to guess estimate, I must have lost about N80 million worth of equipment and other goods."

In his account of the incident, Adeyemi said he closed his factory at about 6.00 p.m. on Friday and ordered his workers to go home.

"About an hour and 30 minutes later, I received a distress call that my factory was on fire.

"When I got here, I only stood in shock, watching how the flame was devouring my labour of many years. It was a sad. Unfortunately, the government is not helping us".

According to him, such ugly incidents have become a recurring decimal, as they happen regularly.

He said: "Last week, a tanker fell and the fuel spilled, but we were lucky that it did not catch fire. If the road had received the needed attention, such incidents would not happen", he said

In a sad mood, one of the wives of the automobile technician, Biola, cried uncontrollably. She said that one of the burnt trucks was brought to her husband on Thursday for minor repairs.

"The owner was supposed to come and take it on Saturday but see what has happened!

"We have been crying over the menace of tankers in this area and the bad state of the road to no avail.

"The owner of the destroyed truck who happened to be my husband's friend, bought it for N4.6 million last week. He brought it for minor repairs", she said.

Relatives of the affected kids told *The Guardian* that the three of them were trapped inside one of the shops when the fire started.

"People around had to break the walls to bring them out. But by then, Dupe and Amina had sustained severe burns and were taken to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja," she said.

Officials from the Nigeria Civil Security Defence Corps (NCSDC), Ikeja, were on hand to assist with rescue operation.

An official of the Corps who pleaded anonymity told *The Guardian* that they were drafted to the scene at about 8.00 p.m. after receiving a distress call.

He said they were there to prevent street urchins who may capitalise on the incident to loot property.

The official said the efforts of the fire and security officers from the NNPC Depot, Ejigbo saved the day as they responded in time and curtailed the fire at about 9.00 p.m.

According to him, many more houses and even the depot itself would have been at risk if they had not responded on time.