

How Soldiers Felled The ‘Gentle Giant’

Chukwuma Madu, 31, was callously beaten and stabbed to death on Wednesday, August 29 allegedly by some soldiers for ‘reckless driving’ along the Badagry Expressway, Lagos. Now, his family is up in arms, seeking justice and punishment for his assailants.

BY ONYEDIKA AGBEDO

WEDNESDAY, August 29 broke like any other day for 31-year-old Chukwuma Madu. A trader in electrical and electronics materials at Olori Plaza, Jankara, Lagos Island, Chukwuma was on his way to his shop from his warehouse at the popular Alaba International Market, off Badagry Expressway, Lagos, where he had gone to pick some goods before he met his untimely death in the hands of some soldiers attached to the Ojo Military Cantonment.

The soldiers allegedly beat and tortured him to death over yet-to-be proved reckless driving. But Chukwuma's relations are up in arms against the soldiers over what they consider the callous murder of their son.

The soldiers had accused Chukwuma of reckless driving for almost knocking down one of their colleagues who was in mufti and riding a motorcycle, with his bus. The soldier who immediately descended on Chukwuma, beckoned on his colleagues. Together, they attacked Chukwuma and in the process, he died.

Fondly called ‘gentle giant’ by his business colleagues in the market for his amiable personality, family members and friends are yet to come to terms with his passing and the circumstances surrounding it.

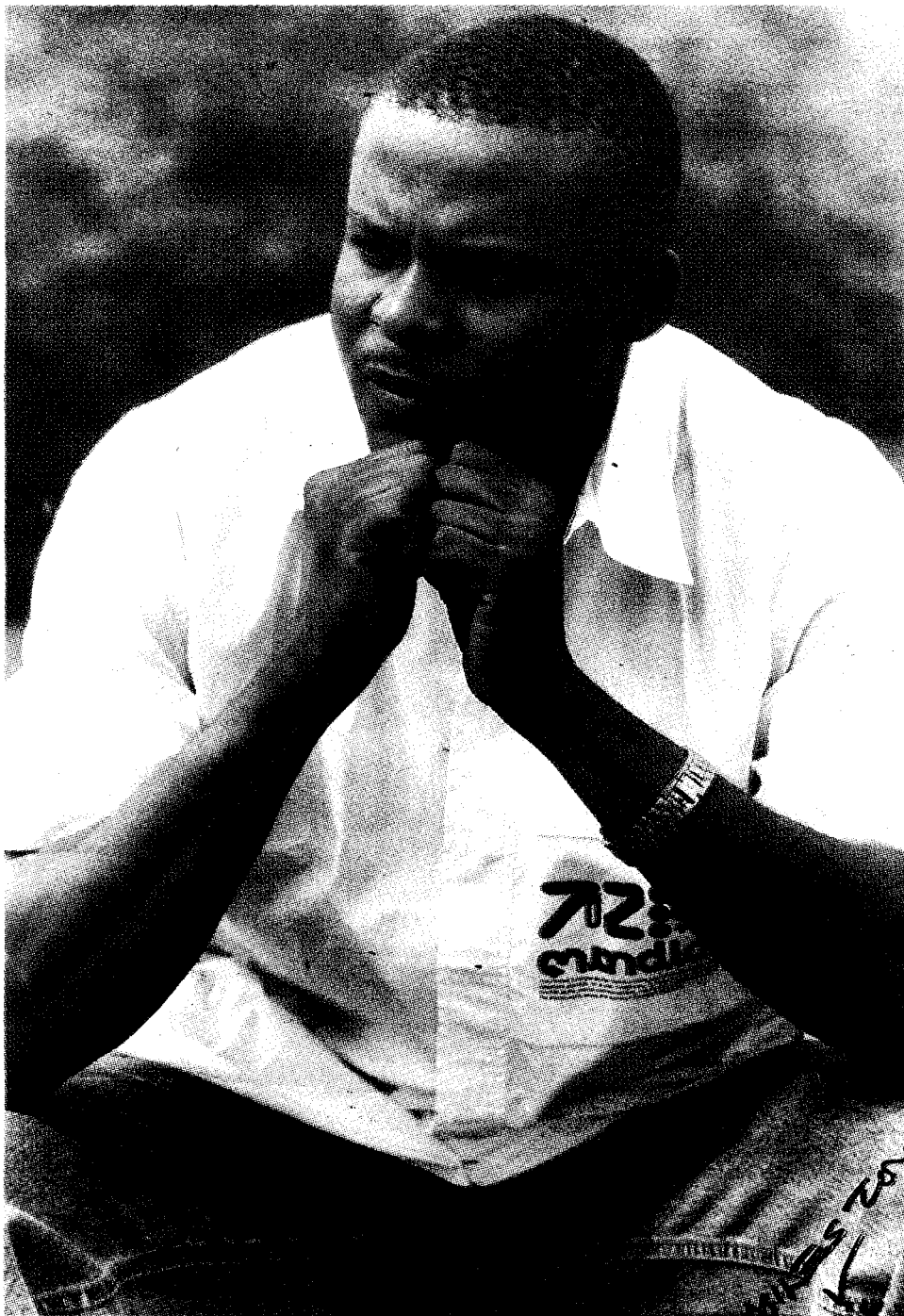
His elder brother, Ugochukwu, who mentored him in the trade and had business discussions with him shortly before he embarked on the ill-fated journey from the warehouse, is still distraught.

With tear-sogged eyes, Ugochukwu recounted the last moments with his beloved brother: “He was in my office that Wednesday morning and we discussed some business issues after which he went to load some goods from my warehouse in Alaba International Market. When he was leaving the (Lagos) Island for Alaba, it was already evening and I simply closed and went back home. However, at about 7.03 p.m., I received an emergency call asking me to rush down to the Ojo Barracks, that my younger brother had an accident. I asked them the nature of the accident and was told that he had problems with some army people and that he was being beaten.

“I left immediately but before I could get there, my brother was already dead and was kept in a hospital at Ojo Barracks. Amid tears, I asked the two boys with him in the car, Chidi and Paul, what happened. They and a policewoman in mufti in a bus behind the one driven by my brothers were the eye-witnesses. They said that the soldier who started the process that led to my brother's death, was in mufti and riding a motorcycle. They told me that my brother was coming out from the filling station where he went to refuel his bus at the same time a trailer was passing with speed.

“But instead of waiting for the trailer to pass, the soldier tried to pass between the trailer and my brother's bus. So my brother immediately applied the brakes and he passed untouched. But the soldier parked his motorcycle and came back to my brother, who was still trying to join the road and started slapping him on the steering. I learnt my brother wanted to know why he was being slapped but instead, the soldier brought out his identity card and descended more heavily on him. Before long, the scene attracted a crowd and people started begging the soldier who dragged my brother out of his bus and continued beating him, despite continued pleas by the deceased and the crowd.

“However, people continued shouting for mercy but the yet-to-be-identified soldier beckoned on four of his colleagues passing by, because it happened opposite Ojo Military Cantonment, and they joined hands with him in beating my brother. The belt they used in torturing him gave him deep injuries and he was bleeding profusely. When Chidi and Paul came closer to plead for him when they could not bear the sight, the soldiers almost subjected them to the



The late Chukwuma Madu



Ugochukwu Madu

same fate. This scared other people who wanted to intervene and they all watched from a distance. The beating, I learnt, lasted for about 20 minutes, after which they asked him to sit down.”

Now sobbing, Ugochukwu continued: “But

while he was bending to sit down, being already weak, the soldier who rode on the motorcycle just brought out a dagger and stabbed him in the back shoulder. My brother collapsed immediately and died. Blood gushed from his nose, mouth, eyes

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and all over. Immediately this happened, the other four people in uniform, who came to help beat my brother, ran away. But when the soldier tried to escape, a policewoman, who was amongst the people pleading with him to stop beating my brother and take him to the station if he had committed any offence, rushed and held the soldier tightly.

“She told him that he must have to kill her together with my brother before he can escape. When the woman subdued the man, the people around gained courage and rushed to the soldier and wanted to mob him, but the policewoman stopped them and suggested that he should be taken to Ojo Police Station.

“Meanwhile, because my brother was already dead, the hospital said I should come and take his body. So, I arranged for a police report, while the police took statement from the soldier and the policewoman who arrested him. My brother is now in the mortuary.”

Investigations by *The Guardian* revealed that the soldier, who is now being detained at the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID), Panti, Yaba, Lagos, has denied stabbing Chukwuma. Police sources disclosed that he accepted initiating the process that led to Chukwuma's death, which he blamed on the devil. He was said to have fingered a colleague as the person who stabbed Chukwuma.

“He even confessed at the station that the deceased was begging him for mercy, saying that he did not know what came upon him,” a source disclosed on condition of anonymity.

It was learnt that the soldiers were supposed to be in a camp in Badagry preparatory to being airlifted to the United Nations (UN) peace mission to Darfur, Sudan at the time of the incident.

Two soldier who suspected to have partaken in beating Chukwuma to death have been arrested, while their remaining two accomplices are still at large. A source in the Nigerian Army revealed that the authorities were already working to bring all the accomplices to book. He disclosed that they would have to go through orderly room trial before being handed over to the police to face the full weight of the law.

Meanwhile, the Madus have vowed to use all legal and constitutional means to ensure justice and seek redress. For Ugochukwu, no compensation outside justice would be enough to assuage the feelings of the family. “The deceased was my immediate younger brother. I trained him. I want justice to be done and nothing else can be used to pacify the family. Before his murder, Chukwuma was known to be respectful and peace loving. He was gentle to the core and was called ‘gentle giant’ by his admirers. If not for his gentle and peace loving nature, he could have withstood the soldier man to man because he was by far bigger than the soldier in size. I am surprised that he had to die this way,” Ugochukwu lamented.

The state Commissioner of Police, Mr Mohammed Abubakar, confirmed the incident and assured that the case was being investigated.