

www.guardian.ng

Controversy trails soldiers' alleged killing of two vigilante members in Enugu

From Lawrence Njoku (Enugu)

CONTROVERSY yesterday trailed the alleged killing of two members of Eke Community Neighbourhood Vigilante by soldiers in Udi Local Council of Enugu State.

Apart from the deceased, two other members of the vigilante are receiving treatment for gunshot injuries in the hospital.

The Guardian gathered that victims had gone to felicitate with their colleagues, who were inaugurated as neighbourhood watch members, when they were hit by bullets allegedly fired by soldiers in the area.

According to a source, four members of the Eke Community Neighbourhood Vigilante had left the venue of the inauguration in response to a distress call that armed robbers had blocked and operating along the only road leading to Eke community in Udi Local Council of Enugu State.

But instead of being confronted by the robbers, they were confronted by soldiers from 82 Division of the Nigerian Army Enugu, who allegedly shot at them severally, killing two, including the wife of one of the vigilante officers and injuring others.

While the name of the deceased vigilante official was given as Ebuka Oke, the dead housewife was said to be riding with her husband from the venue of the ceremony in their motorcycle and was caught by bullets.

Incidentally, her husband is among the three vigilante members gasping for breath in the hospital after the inci-



Another member of the Vigilante yesterday:
PHOTOS: LAWRENCE NJOKU

dent. When The Guardian visited the community and hospital where the three men were receiving treatment yesterday, the victims were in pains following injuries received from the incident.

Some of the villagers interviewed said that the ugly development had thrown the area into pandemonium, stressing that the deceased Ebuka Oke, incidentally lost his father exactly one month ago and had not recovered from the incident.

They condemned the unprofessional conducts of the soldiers, describing it as "barbaric and callous" and called for independent investigation.

The Assistant Chief Security Officer of Eke Security Neighbourhood Vigilante Watch, Emeka Anigbo, who sustained gunshot injuries, narrated their ordeal, in pains, from his hospital bed.

Anigbo told The Guardian that they were at 9th Mile Corner where they had gone to felicitate with their colleagues,



Maj. Gen. Lagbaja

who were being inaugurated as neighbourhood watch members, when they got a distress call that armed robbers blocked the major road leading to the popular Catholic Church Prayer Centre (Ugwudinso) and Eke, from Nigeria Breweries, Ama plant.

According to him, on receiving the call, they abandoned their food and drinks and swiftly drove out with a view to confronting the criminal elements, but due to heavy gridlock occasioned by the blockage of the road, they could not get to the scene with their vehicle.

He said they decided to park their vehicle along the road, and started moving towards the place, but on approaching the scene, three armed soldiers ordered them in a loud voice to stop.

Anigbo said they obeyed the soldiers and stopped, telling them that they were neighbourhood vigilante watch guards. At that point, they were then asked by the soldiers to keep coming.



One of the vigilante officials in hospital bed

"On approaching the soldiers, they started firing at us, killing one of our members and the wife of one of those who were inaugurated at 9th Mile, who was on a motorcycle with her husband going back to Eke. "Despite the fact that we were in our full security uniform and had identified ourselves, the trigger happy soldiers opened fire on us at a very close range, killing Oke, and the woman.

"While I was on the ground, one of the soldiers notwithstanding seeing my Identity (ID) card and my uniform, kept matching me on the chest, saying, I will kill you. In fact, it was

the timely arrival of police operatives from 9th Mile Corner that saved my life. It was the police that stopped the soldier, confirming that we are Eke neighborhood security guards," Anigbo stated.

Another victim, Chinedu Okolo, whose male organ was allegedly shattered by the soldiers' bullets, could not utter a word due to severe pains, while the third victim, Obinna Ofor, was also seen under oxygen support at the intensive care unit (ICU).

When contacted, the Deputy Director, Army Public Relations, 82 Division Nigerian Army, Lieutenant Colonel

Jonah Unuakhalu, described as untrue the narrative of the victims, saying from available information, the deceased woman was killed by a stray bullet from armed hoodlums who engaged the soldiers in a shootout.

He stated that the troops received a distress call that some criminal elements were operating along the Eke road, and immediately rushed to the scene, adding that on sighting the soldiers they opened fire on them.

He stated that the security operatives overpowered them; leading to the arrest of one of them, and recovering of two pump action guns and some live bullets, after some ran into a nearby bush.

The 82 Division spokesperson, who said he has no information regarding the second deceased, added that it was in the course of the exchange of fire between the troop and the hoodlums that a strange bullet hit the deceased's wife, who was rushed to the hospital, "but unfortunately, later died".

"So, there is no iota of truth in the information being peddled around that it was soldiers that killed the deceased."

Police launch manhunt for abductors of Owerri supermarket owner

From Charles Ogugbuaja, Owerri

THE police in Imo State have confirmed the abduction of the owner of Jonny Supermarket / Pharmacy, Ikenegbu Layout, Owerri, John Ugorji.

Ugorji was kidnapped by hoodlums as he was about to leave his business premises on Friday.

Henry Okoye, said: "On June 30, 2023 at about 0200hrs, a distress call was received from an eyewitness at Ikenegbu, Owerri Urban, that he saw armed men dragging a man out of his vehicle and taking him hostage.

"On receipt of this information, operatives of the Anti-kidnapping squad were swiftly marshaled to the

of police operatives. A vehicle suspected to be that of the victim was recovered to the station.

"The victim's family is yet to make an official report to the Police. However, discreet investigations are ongoing for possible rescue of the kidnapped victim as well as the arrest of his kidnappers."

Ugorji, who hails from