

# Bloodbath At Border Town As

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 HEAD, CRIME DESK

Thursday, November 23,  
 2006, had started like every  
 other day for residents of

Owode, Yewa in Ogun State. The town in its usual bubbling and bustling serene is known for its famous neck-breaking speed of smugglers coupled with the movement of illegally imported fairly used vehicles popularly referred to as *Tokunbo*.

Early on the fateful day, the atmosphere was conducive and this was reflected by the early rise of the town's inhabitants, who had gone about their normal daily businesses without any idea that such a joyous mood could be shattered, especially as the day coincided with the town's market day, which often witnessed large attendance of people from far and near.

In this mood, the people went about the act of buying and selling and did not envisage any unfavourable turn of events.

And then suddenly, all these changed. All of a sudden, people started scampering for safety, drivers and commercial motorcycle operators, which are largely in use, abandoned vehicles and motorcycles, traders closing shops, while market men and women ran into each other in their bid to get out of the market square fast, leaving behind their wares. Alas! This hitherto boisterous city became desolate. Though, still early in the day, but darkness seemed to have enveloped the entire town. Danger lurked and the town suddenly became empty and the resultant effects saw blood flowing while property yet to be estimated were destroyed. The town was shattered while human bodies lay motionless.

What started as a little bit of human carelessness,

provocation, unsolicited interference and uncontrolled anger, blossomed into full-scale war, where guns and other dangerous weapons were freely used.

During the time the "madness" lasted, the situation defied any form of control as the entire town was engulfed in the violence.

What could have been resolved without much stress while allowing reasons to prevail blackened the day. The violence defied age, as both the young and old were not spared.

All scampered for safety as shops, offices and residential quarters had their doors and windows hurriedly shut.

Visitors, who were transiting to their respective places and passing through the town, had to alight from their vehicles and made for different hiding places. Some hid in the bush until they could return to embark on their journey. What could have led to all these, you may ask?

But nobody could have imagined that the police, saddled with the responsibility of providing security as well as maintaining peace would ever be a party in the "theatre of war". Though, it is a rare occurrence, but it happened.

Butchers engaged the police in an open but bloody confrontation where weapons were freely used against each other. While the

police made use of their rifles in what was regarded as self-defence, the butchers and their sympathisers in addition to using suspected guns, also brandished knives, cutlasses, axes, and every available weapon they could lay their hands on.

Though, the confrontation reportedly started from the marketplace, according to an eyewitness, the real battle, however, took place at the Owode Police Station, which eventually became the battleground. And when it was over, virtually all the valuables, including vehicles at the station had been destroyed, some beyond repairs. Casualties were recorded on both sides.

In the ensuing melee, havoc was wreaked. Police bullets reportedly hit four persons, killing two instantly while the other two, who included a primary school pupil, are currently on danger list.

On the side of the police also, 11 persons including the Divisional Crime Officer (DCO) and two Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASP) had a sorry tale to tell as they were inflicted with machete cuts. The officers reportedly sustained various degrees of injuries as two of them are said to be on danger list at an undisclosed hospital where medical doctors are battling to save their lives.

Daily Independent investigations revealed that among the officers injured

were Ajayi James (DCO), Sunday Sam and Ayodele (ASPs), Fatai Abolade, Osahan Amiede, Joseph Nnenna, Balogun Femi and Taye Olafimihan.

They were initially rushed to the King Cross Hospital from where they were transferred to another hospital.

Though, the whereabouts of a Constable, Agbaje Olalekan, was yet to be ascertained as at Wednesday, as he had been declared missing by the police authorities. The affected constable was believed abducted by the rampaging armed men, who reportedly stormed the police station in a fury.

One of the civilian casualties was 26-year-old Kehinde Idowu, who was reportedly preparing for his freedom after completion of four years apprenticeship. The deceased was said to have visited a barbing saloon in his neighbourhood in company of his friend when tragedy struck.

Kenny, as fondly called by family members, friends and well-wishers, was gunned down allegedly by police bullet.

Other civilian victims, who were reportedly receiving treatment at a private hospital, included one Mr. Mosudi, a resident of No. 37, Owode-Idiroko Expressway, Alapara quarters, and a 12-year-old pupil of Yewa-South Local Government Primary School, Alagbon, Owode.

Daily Independent discovered that there were different accounts of what led to the bloody clash involving the two sides.

But an eyewitness, who craved anonymity, told Daily Independent that trouble started when a team of plain-clothed policemen went into one of the town's major markets ostensibly to effect the arrest of some miscreants, who were said to have been terrorising traders and visitors at the market.

The young men were also alleged to be in the habit of smoking weeds suspected to be Indian hemp openly.

However, the alleged miscreants were also said to be smart enough to have escaped from the scene before the arrival of the police team.

It was gathered that on their arrival, the police team sighted a young man who was busy defecating very close to the



• Assistant Superintendent Sunday Sam



• Kehinde (left) with his twin brother, Taiye, when he was alive.



• Police Constable Joshua in hospital



• Body of K. hinde Idowu



• An exhibit vehicle



# Police, Butchers Clash

## Cops Wounded

spot where the fleeing miscreants reportedly harassed innocent businessmen and women.

The young man, whose name could not be verified, was instantly suspected to be one of the wanted miscreants. It was gathered that the police, who had acted on a tip-off by one of the market leaders, reportedly attempted to arrest the young man, but this was resisted by market women, who were attracted to the scene by the insistence of the young man that he was innocent. What was initially a minor disagreement between the market women and the police team eventually snowballed into hot exchange of words. Though, the policemen were said to have freed the young man and also left the area, this, according to eyewitness was temporary respite.

According to eyewitness account, the policemen were unhappy. They simply would not have any of what they got. Pronto! The officers were said to have gone back to the market reinforced.

It was learnt that when the officers with the reinforcement got to the scene, probably sensing they might not be allowed to make further arrests, they reportedly fired canisters of teargas to disperse the market women, who seemed to have envisaged the return of the cops. It was learnt though, that the women scampered for safety, but this was temporary as they started gathering again ostensibly to prevent any arrest by the team of policemen.

The eyewitness account said that trouble, however, started when the policemen started firing live bullets into the air, probably to disperse the crowd, which was said to have become unruly.

At this stage, hell was let loose.

What snowballed into the bloody battle started at this stage.

*Daily Independent* gathered that one of the live bullets fired reportedly hit a butcher simply identified as Kamoru on the leg. This allegedly sparked off a protest by the butchers, who were occupying a section of the market.

It was learnt that Kamoru's friends, who became

apprehensive, having sighted him in a pool of blood, were said to have taken up arms against the policemen, who by then realising the danger in confronting the butchers, who were there in their hundreds, headed for their station.

The act of chasing each other engulfed the entire town, miscreants and other persons, who seemed to be waiting for an opportunity like this to vent their anger, reportedly joined in the fray, unleashing terror on the town, smashing every valuable on their way.

The "violent" crowd, which seemed not to be satisfied with the havoc wreaked on the town, reportedly moved to the station, this time to deal with the officers who were believed, in their estimation, to have started the crisis. At the end, the mob invaded the police station and nothing tangible was left untouched. No fewer than nine vehicles including three belonging to visitors were vandalised.

The mob was also said to have descended on the policemen found at the station including some officers, who reportedly suffered severe machete cuts. *Daily Independent* gathered that the mob became so ruthless that it did not spare portraits of important dignitaries hung at the station. They were all smashed.

At the end of the bloody attack, both sides were left to count their losses.

While taking a roll call of their men, the police discovered that Constable Olalekan could not be found at the station where he was performing his duties before the "invasion" by the rampaging mob. The cop, it was learnt, was also not found in the hospital, neither was he seen at home.

It could not be ascertained at the time of filing this report if the alleged missing officer had been found.

Ironically, movement of the everbusy illegally imported fairly used vehicles (*Tokunbo*) was temporarily halted. The drivers, known for their notoriety especially on the road, were provided compulsory rest while the violence lasted.

The mayhem led to the immediate visit by the

Deputy Governor of the State, Alhaja Salmot Badru, and the state's Police Commissioner, Mr. Joseph Apapa, to assess the extent of damage and also possibly visit the injured in hospital.

During their visit, the duo inspected all affected areas including the police station and the King Cross Hospital, where the injured especially the cops were recuperating.

Though, while briefing the visitors, the DPO, Mr. Oyeyemi Adejare Oyeniran, denied that his men fired live bullets that culminated in the death of two persons and two others injured.

This, however, ran contrary to claims by people, who were interviewed by the top government functionaries that visited the town in the wake of the bloody battle.

For now, it was learnt that the state's Police Command has arrested no fewer than 25 persons over the incident. They had since been transferred to the State Criminal Investigation department (SCID), Elewera, Abeokuta, where they are undergoing interrogation over their perceived roles in the mayhem that engulfed the once peaceful border town. The town is gradually picking up the pieces, however, the scars created by the onslaught could be felt by anybody visiting the border town after the bloody encounter.

A police officer, who spoke with *Daily Independent* on the basis of anonymity, said the reinforcement of the police officers to the market was made in annoyance when the market women allegedly stripped the first set of officers naked.

This, the officer said, was considered humiliating enough, culminating in the deployment of more men to the scene.

*Daily Independent* learnt that controversy is also brewing over the real killers of the two victims. The police claimed they knew nothing about the killing that took place.

The state's Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Femi Awoyale, a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), who confirmed the arrest of the suspects, said that investigations were still going on over the suspected roles of the detained persons.

Awoyale stated that the police should not be blamed for the crisis, insisting that despite the "provocation" they never made use of live ammunition throughout the period the bloody

confrontation lasted.

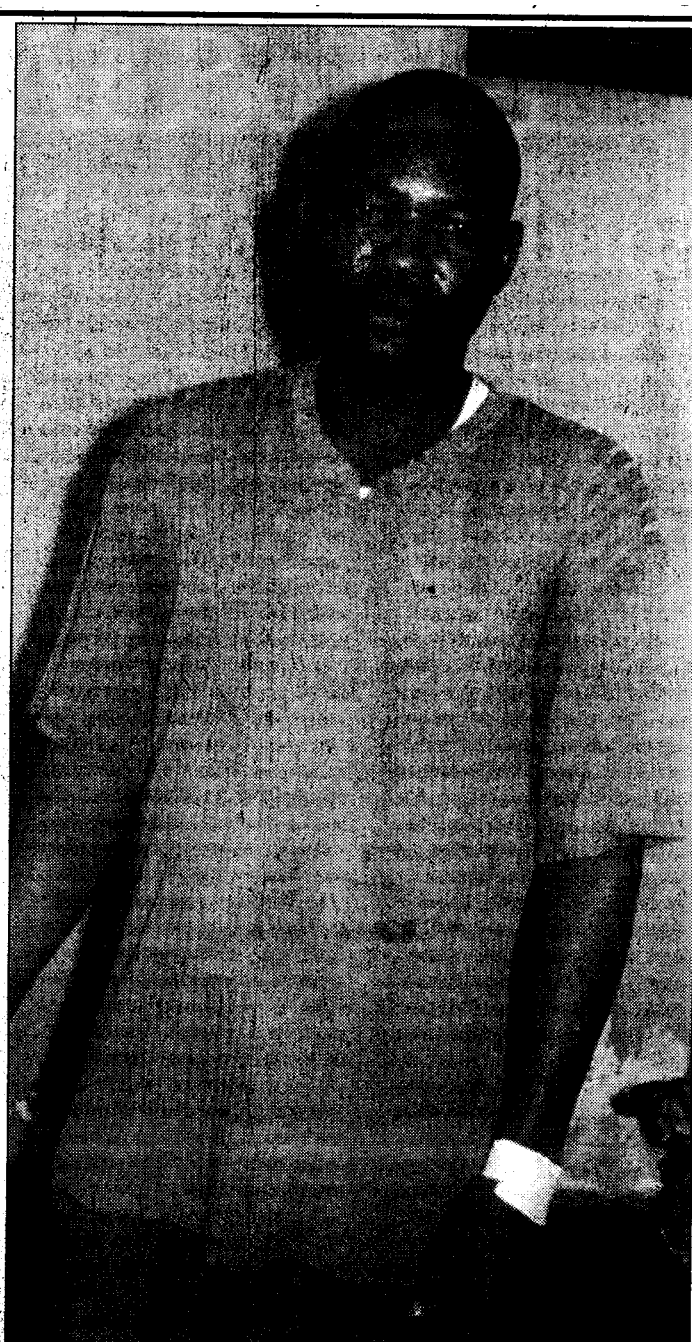
He said, "The police at Owode did not shoot or kill anybody. Instead it was those who attacked us that were firing from all angles, attacking policemen with every dangerous object you can think of."

The PPRO stated that, "On that fateful day, the station received a report concerning two persons and two policemen were detailed to invite the men mentioned. Unfortunately, our men were obstructed from performing their statutory duties and were assaulted and stripped naked. These officers, whose lives were in danger, made efforts to get across to the station, informing their superiors of the situation. Some police officers were sent to the scene to free the detained cops from their attackers."

"The police officers were also attacked and injured at the scene. The officers, who had every means to defend themselves, did not do so."

"Instead, they found ways of escaping from the scene and returned to the station. But this assault on the law enforcement agents was not enough, as the attackers moved with dangerous weapons straight to the police station, shooting and maiming officers and men, they destroyed virtually everything at the station including the police patrol vehicles. Other cars were not spared as vehicles belonging to visitors were equally vandalised."

"As at the last count, 11 policemen were seriously wounded while two are currently on danger list. We are still trying to take



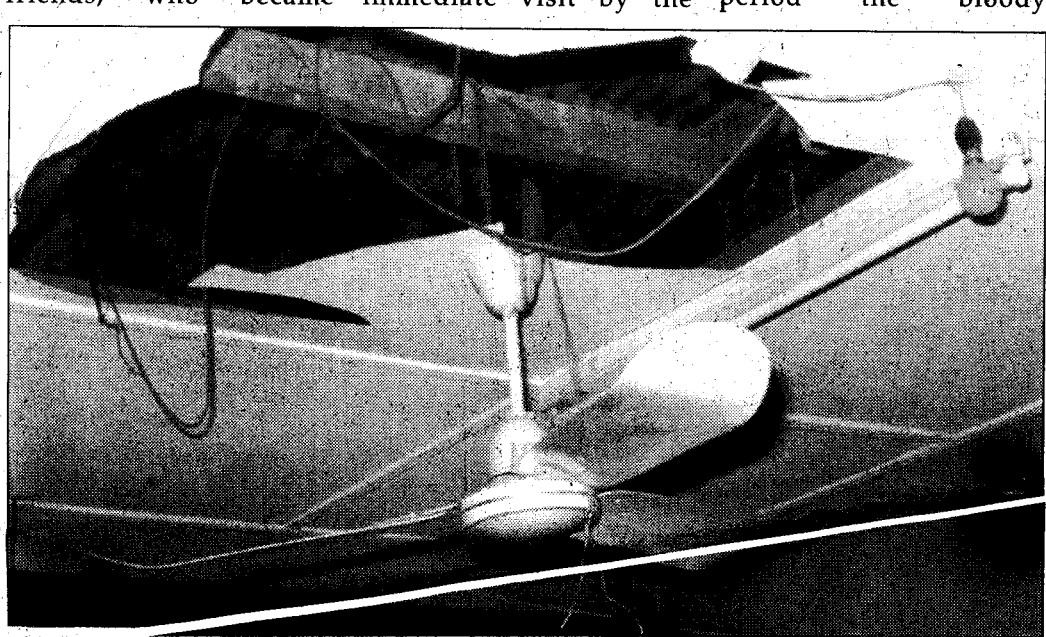
*Injured Corporal Abolade*

inventory of all that was destroyed at the station. That policemen fired gunshot at anybody was out of the question. We are currently monitoring the progress of our men who are on the danger list because they were

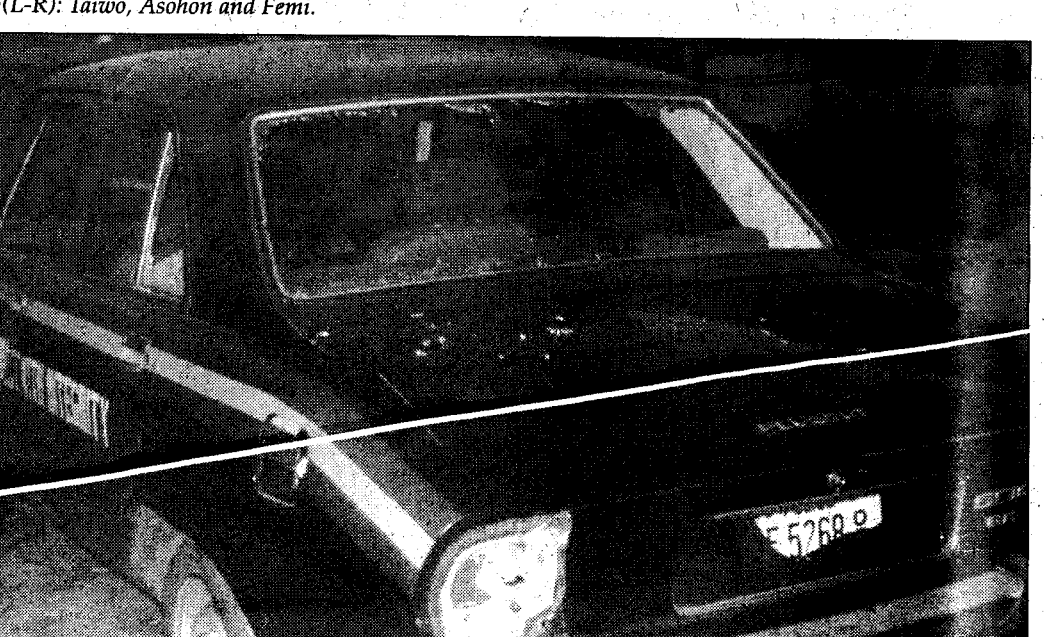
brutally attacked with axes and machetes. That is the extent of the mayhem unleashed on the police. But I assure you, we shall get all those involved in the bloody confrontation," Awoyale said.



*(L-R): Taiwo, Asohon and Femi.*



*Vandalised office of the Divisional Police Officer (DPO)*



*Vandalised police patrol vehicle*