



CASE-FILE

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By Rotimi Williams,
HEAD, CRIME DESK

It was 11:45 a.m. as pupils of Assurance Nursery/Primary School located inside Kirikiri Security Prisons barracks in Lagos State were set to proceed on lunch break. They had just finished singing praises to the Lord – “Some had food but could not eat, some could eat but had no food, we have food and we can eat, glory be to the Lord!”

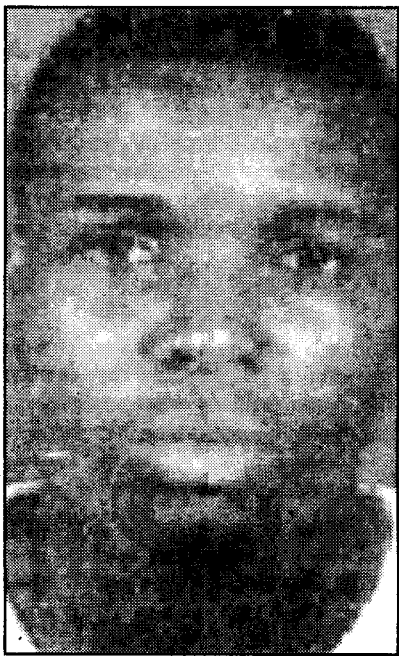
This was the song of praise rendered by the innocent children, but unknown to them danger was lurking.

About 15 minutes later, the school children together with their teachers and Headmistress were thrown into confusion following sporadic gunshots allegedly fired indiscriminately by naval officers. The pupils scampered for safety to seek refuge in a nearby bushy school garden, according to eyewitness. Unknown to them and their teachers, some naval officers had already taken cover in the school's garden.

“Some were standing between plantain trees,” an eyewitness said. “Unfortunately one of the schoolteachers, Mr. Femi Babatunde, who was making frantic efforts to rescue the pupils, paid the supreme price; he was hit by a bullet allegedly fired by one of the naval officers. He fell and died almost immediately. “Nobody could assist him because almost everybody was running for dear life,” the eyewitness added, explaining that no one was able to ascertain the immediate cause of the attack.

Trouble, however, started about 11 a.m. when a naval officer allegedly parked his vehicle by the security post at the gate of the Medium Security Prison. Sources said that though the naval officer was dressed in mufti, he refused to comply with instructions that no vehicle was allowed to park at the place.

“He came and we told him to respect the instruction that no vehicle is allowed to park here. He ignored us and went away to make phone calls. We did not challenge him beyond that. Surprisingly, he came back, walked into the security post and said, ‘where is that officer that was challenging me? Do you know who I am? The prison officers did not respond to the challenge, but merely told the affected naval personnel to remove his vehicle from the restricted place, irrespective of who he was,’ the prison security officer, who was at the scene of the



•Babatunde

Naval Men Terrorise Warders, Pupils

•Teacher, Unidentified Person Killed



•The late Mr. Babatunde

altercation said. While the argument lasted, two other naval officers allegedly came in and fuelled the misunderstanding. “They asked whether we wanted to fight their oga. Suddenly one of them slapped our man from behind and they started fighting, after which our man sustained injuries as a result of the severe beating. That was how they left and went into the Navy Town only to reinforce,” the eyewitness said.

The brutal attack on the prison warders was evident just as there were signs of smashing of doors and windows at the security post. The louvres were also not left out as several of them were damaged.

Daily Independent learnt that the naval men, who reside at the Navy Town at the same Kirikiri area, allegedly went into their enclave and called for reinforcement. Over 300 officers allegedly marched through the Kirikiri gate chanting war songs. They allegedly pounced on warders even as they torched official quarters and residents.

A female member of the armed squad of the prison service, one Mrs. Henrietta Kwapet, who was brutally assaulted by the fierce naval officers, said she was returning from the bank when she saw the naval officers coming in groups. “I immediately came down when I saw them between the prison and navy gate. I told my boys that nobody should fight. When they come we should be able to speak with them and sort things out amicably. We were still there when two of the officers came with their men. They marched from their gate to our own gate. Immediately they came one of the officers, who knew me by name, called ‘Henrietta! Henrietta! Come here’. I immediately went. He then asked, ‘where is our man that you people seized?’ I told him welcome, oga, this is not the time for this kind of harassment, please, if we can sort this misunderstanding out amicably, the better for us. We want peace. Please, let's sort things out, it is the same Federal Government we are serving. Let us speak well so that it would be good for us.

“Immediately I said that, before I knew what was happening I started receiving punches on my jaw from one of the naval men. So, I told him, look at what this man has done to me. Immediately, two other people came behind me, hacked me down and started beating me with their gun butts,” she narrated. Displaying how she was physically assaulted and

brutalised by the naval officers, Henrietta said, “I managed to get up and one of them said they should take me away in their car boot. That was when I held his uniform and pulled him down,” she said.

According to the female prison officer, the naval man brought out a chemical substance suspected to be teargas and sprayed her with it. “So, I shouted and one of them came again with his gun and said if I refused to move he would shoot me. I knelt down and raised my hands and dared him to kill me.”

An eyewitness told *Daily Independent* that the naval officers attacked the Medium Security Prison blocks including the female inmates section, vandalising the windows. The Deputy Comptroller of Prisons (DCP) in charge of the female section, Bamidele A.O., confirmed the attack on prison officers, saying the naval men came in through the Training School, firing gunshots indiscriminately. “In fact, it was like a war front situation,” she said. The training school of the prison service located opposite the female section was not spared either. Evidence of gunshots shattering the doors and windows of the school were prevalent.

The Commandant of the Prisons Training School, Mr. Oguntuase, who witnessed the attacks, told *Daily*

Independent: “They (naval men) spread across the field of the school as if they were at the war front.” Over 15 expended cartridges were picked up within the corridors of the administrative block of the school. This was also in addition to evidence of gunshots, which he claimed caused severe damages to the school's windows and doors. “It was a terrible experience,” he said.

The proprietress of Assurance Nursery/Primary School, located a few metres away from the Prisons Training School, Mrs. Felicia Osobamiro, said when she heard the sporadic gunshots, she advised the pupils to remain in their classrooms while she investigated what was happening. “I never knew naval officers had taken over everywhere. Some of them were standing between plantain trees within the school's premises, hiding.” She explained that when the pupils ventured out, one of the teachers, Femi Babatunde, who had made efforts to control them, was hit by gunshots, which was suspected fired by officers of Nigerian Navy, who happened to be their next door neighbours. “They were shooting indiscriminately while all women and children were running into the bush,” she added.

Attempts to get the reaction of the naval personnel were rebuffed, as the

officers claimed they had no authority to speak to the media.

Though the teacher, Babatunde, was officially confirmed dead by gunshots allegedly fired by the naval officers, reports indicated that one other person who could not be identified was also shot dead.

Four prison officials, namely: Akeem Oshila, Adeshina Adeyemi, Shola O. and Adem Odey, were feared kidnapped during the bloody battle. It was, however, not clear if the paramilitary officers had been released.

Also, efforts to confirm if the pistol with 10 rounds of ammunition allegedly snatched from a senior prisons officer by the rampaging naval men had been returned, was rebuffed by naval authorities.

Daily Independent learnt that such bloody confrontation involving naval personnel had become a recurrent decimal in the area.

It was learnt that a police officer attached to a nearby police station was recently shot by some naval personnel while on official duty.

It was also learnt that the naval officers were in a commercial vehicle, which the policemen reportedly waved down for alleged over speeding. An argument ensued between the naval officers and the policemen at the checkpoint when the military men reportedly ordered the commercial bus driver to ignore the instruction of the policemen and move on. Efforts by the policemen to arrest the offending commercial bus was reportedly rebuffed by the naval officers, one of whom was said to have brought out his pistol and shot one of the policemen on the chest.

Daily Independent also learnt that the situation was brought under control by the police authority, which reportedly cautioned its officers against taking any retaliatory action.

The police Area Commander for Apapa, Mr. Femi Oyeleye, an Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), confirmed the latest bloody clash.

The Director of Naval Information, Captain Obiora Medani, has condemned the clash.

“The incident is regrettable. But it is an issue we shall resolve. We are making efforts to identify, apprehend and punish our men who responded to the shooting,” he said.

The Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Bode Ojajuni, said that nobody had been arrested over the matter.



•Mr. Babatunde in the pool of his blood before he died