

# As Armed Robbers Terrorise Kano Residents

*Continued from yesterday*

By Augustine Madu-West and Madu-Jerry Nmeribeh, Kano

Five persons, including a police sergeant and a middle-aged woman, were said to have been shot dead in the encounter that brought business in the state capital to an abrupt end. But the police, however, denied knowledge of any death on account of the confrontation. Apart from the police sergeant, who was reported to have been shot in the head by one of the armed robbers at a close range, others were believed to be victims of stray bullet. Over 10 people who sustained different degrees of bullet wounds were admitted at Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital (AKTH) and Murtala Mohammed Specialist Hospital where they are being treated. Shops, commercial banks and other public places were hurriedly shot when news of the encounter spread and sound of bullets rent the air.

The robbers stormed the market at about 4p.m. holding sway along Igbo Road from New Road Junction to Bata Junction. Residents were forlorn for several hours as vehicles and human beings ran helter-skelter taking cover from the sporadic gunshots that ended several hours. Many, it was learnt, fainted as a result of the echoing gunshots coming from garrulous firearms hung over by 10 young men and women triggering fear and terror on hapless Nigerians on a broad day show that lasted unchallenged.

According to one of the victims, "they raided five gold shops and made away with gold and cash, robbed customers, ransacked all the shops and made away with gold and raw cash worth over 200 million."

Mansur Sani, another victim who spoke to our correspondent said they packed all the gold and jewelries in his shop including cash worth over N30 million. "We do not have security in this country. What happened today has shown that the police are helpless. The armed robbers operated unchallenged for three hours. A lady on black suit came into the shop and released several shots of bullets in the air while the men followed. They were not in a haste as they raided all the five shops and



• Kano residents running helter-skelter during a recent daylight robbery

escaped without being caught," the poor young man lamented, asking rather rhetorically if it was a crime for a young man to settle down for a genuine business, "in a country you call your own, pay tax to the government; yet your security and that of your business is never guaranteed."

Some dogged young men, we learnt, barricaded Igbo Road / France Road junction while the robbers were still raiding the market, in a bid to, at least, delay them from escaping. "But with their sophisticated rifles, they were able to have their way before the police arrived; but the truth is that there was no way the police could have matched the armed robbers. They were trained and were carrying sophisticated weapons. It could have been suicidal for the police to have engaged in a serious gun duel with the gang. If you were there, you could have noticed the difference even with the sound of police gunshots which came later and that of the armed robbers who held the market hostage for three hours, you will know that the police were not having the required weapon to combat the robbers. If the truth must be told, the Federal

Government should review the arms and ammunition of the force, if they can be seen to be fighting crime. It is practically impossible to use a plank against some one who is armed with an arrow," said a witness who did not want his name in print.

However, the Police Public Relation Officer (PPRO), Baba Mohammed, told journalists later in the day that seven vehicles, AK 47, a Barreta Pistol, Live Ammunitions as well as some of the stolen jewelries were recovered from the robbery syndicate. He also confirmed that the 10 gunmen escaped as he said there was no arrest made as at press time. However, an indication that some of the robbers may have suffered serious bullet wounds from gun shots emerged from the huge blood stains in one of the abandoned vehicles.

In a similar attack last month, gunmen invaded Hajj Camp Gold market on a Saturday, and made away with gold and jewelries worth over N15 million, killing one.

The armed robbers numbering about 10 came in three KIA jeeps, all driven by smart-looking ladies. They brandished sophisticated weapons,

firing several shots in the air.

A witness said they opened fire immediately after the 4p.m. Muslim prayer, "ordering everyone to lie low. They drove in through airport junction when the prayer was on and waited until after the prayer. Immediately after the A'sallaim'u alaku chorus, one of them raised his voice ordering everyone to lie low as he shot sporadically in the air."

The robbers raided about five shops in an operation that lasted 25 minutes. They packed expensive gold and jewelries inside a sack as they ransacked shop to shop. It was gathered that they shot an unidentified commercial motorcyclist who ran into them on their way going at the Hajj Camp junction, close to the Kano office of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

"They had finished their operation without hurting anyone as all of us were lying faced down. But on their way going, they ran into an unsuspecting commercial motorcyclist and shot him on the head. He died instantly," our source said.

One of the victims who spoke to our correspondent said he had smelled a rat because, "about 30 minutes before they came, a young man on blue shirt came to price gold. He entered into four shops, that is from shop seven to shop eleven and they attacked all the shops when they came." Chairman of the market association, Yusuf Hussaini, described the incident as a bitter experience. "I must tell you that this is the first time we are witnessing this kind of thing in the history of this market. It is a big blow on us and we hope that government will come to our aid in terms of security and support."

The same style of armed robbery attack was recorded in Kano money (Bureau De Change) market some time in April this year when armed men and women invaded the market on a Sunday evening, killing two and made away with both local and foreign currency running into millions.

Also recently, two police men of the Kano State Police Command were killed by armed robbers at Gwarzo Local Government of the state during a gun duel after an operation in a filling station in the town. The robbers, who stole the sum of N190,000 from the petrol station, were confronted by a team of policemen

who arrested one of them. Sources have it that the robbers had to regroup to rescue their own and thus engaged the police in a gun battle. It was during this shoot out that bullet fell on the two police men who gave up at the scene of the incident. Spokesman of the Kano State Police Command confirmed the incident, and described the death of the two police men as unfortunate.

He, however, promised that the police would do everything to clampdown on the robbers that wrecked the havoc at Gwarzo.

Meanwhile, acting governor of Kano State, Engr. Abdullahi Tijjani Muhammad Gwarzo, has described Thursday's armed robbery attack as unfortunate, and appealed to security agencies to fish out the robbers through joint effort. Gwarzo, in a statement made available to newsmen on Friday, urged residents of the state to remain calm. The acting governor, who expressed sympathy to victims of the attack on behalf of the state government, reiterated that the state government had already proposed to set up a joint military/police patrol team to checkmate armed robbery menace within the state and its environs. The acting governor had earlier solicited for the support of the military through the General Officer Commanding (GOC), One Division, Nigerian Army, Kaduna, Major-General Moses Benson Obi, who paid him a courtesy visit, less than 24 hours before the latest robbery attack in the state.

Residents of Kano and the state government as well, have registered their displeasure over the state of insecurity in the state. To them, the best and only way to rescue Kano from the clutches of gunmen is to equip the police. They observed that the police need more weapons, the kind that could match that of the robbers. The Kano police Command needs an improved workforce, more vehicles and communication gadgets and there is a nagging need for the Federal Government and police high authorities to make Kano's case a special one, just as Governor Shekarau has appealed.

• Concluded