

Day Police Burnt Houses In Enwang Over Missing Checkpoint Loot

• Continued from Friday

By Clifford Thomas
CORRESPONDENT, Uyo

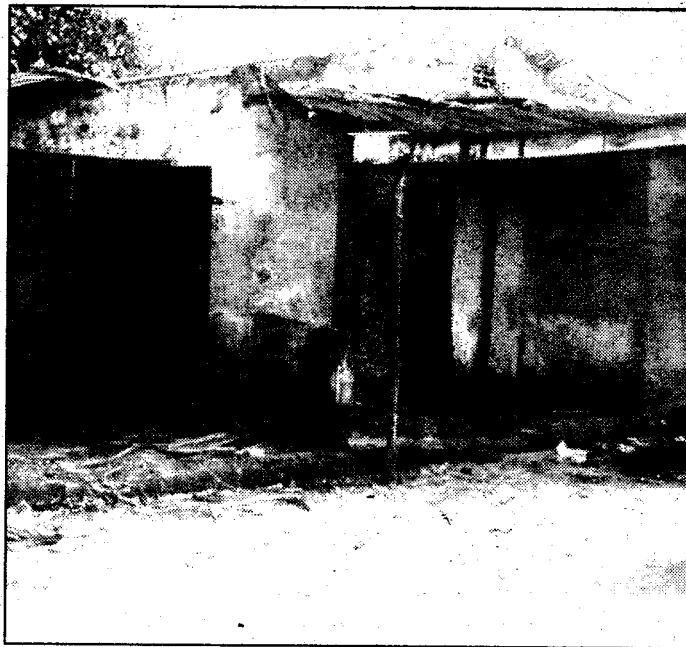
The seizure of the motor bikes was like improved robbery scene. The police used the authority of their uniforms and the raw inflammable power of their guns to seize the motor cycles with the accompanying particulars.

On realising the enormous seriousness the police attached to the accusation, the youths mobilised and peacefully marched towards the Police Division in the area to lodge their complaints with the Divisional Police Officer (DPO). The complaints could not be formally filed because gun-wielding policemen intercepted the peaceful demonstration, aborting the peaceful conduct of the protest by firing at point-blank

range. Our source said two of the protesting youths died from gunshot injuries, while over five were seriously injured.

Beyond the charred remains of the lady who was burnt by fire that resulted from what people described as explosives used by the police when they attacked the community, other corpses could not be seen, except people who claimed they were injured during the attack. But the damage on houses and other moveable and immovable assets was well evidenced. Grieving family members narrated their ordeals, and some of them vowed to retaliate the attack on their people.

Aggrieved beyond placation, the youths had concluded that "war" had been declared by the murder-prone policemen,



• One of the burnt houses

ventilated their anger by capturing two policemen after which others took to their heels taking cover in the nearby Naval base.

Police sources, though unofficial, think differently. They alleged that "hoodlums and miscreants" from the community attacked policemen who were performing their lawful duty, and in self-defence, the police had waded off the attack by "applying minimum force against the assailants." Another source within the Divisional Police station in Enwang said that the assailants were armed robbers residing within the community who had hoped that in creating such confusion, they "can steal Police firearms," which

would then be used for robbery attacks in the area and elsewhere.

But the people said the "police are shameless liars." Nyong Ekpenyong, a commercial motorcyclist whose motorcycle was burnt by the policemen said: "They are looking for excuses. We want the Inspector General of Police to investigate this matter."

The two guns allegedly seized after policemen flee the rampaging youths was said to have been returned to the police authorities while the two policemen captured were released, according to another corroborating source in Enwang.

Apparently licking their bruised ego from the unexpected resistance of the armless community, and fuelled by a

deliberate distortion of subsisting facts with a view to attracting sympathy from their colleagues and superiors, particular from the State Police Command Headquarters in Uyo, the police mobilised and invaded the Enwang Community on Sunday night. In the attack, houses, motorcycles, bicycles, household items and several valuable goods were burnt or vandalised by the police, our source said. And some people died in the arson by the policemen.

Though our police source said if people died, the police were not aware of it as it was not their intention in the first place. He informed our correspondent that the police officers and the live police arms that the community took away were the reason for the attack and not to kill anybody.

But another source in one of the villages that make-up the Enwang Community noted that no fewer than three persons died in one of the burnt buildings and he wanted the police to be held responsible for it.

At the State Police Command, no official statement has been made to confirm or deny the incident. Both the State Police boss, Moses Anegbode and the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Gabriel Ngbam, have remained elusive for comments on the crisis.

While various authorities in the state, national and international are creating entry points of intervention into the crises, the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly has set-up a five-member committee to investigate the matter, with Jack

Udota as chairman. The committee has promised to get to the root-cause of the matter.

Moved to the point of tears while placing the matter on the floor of the house to discuss and intervene, Mrs. Alice Ekpenyong, who represents Mbo State Constituency in the State House of Assembly, wanted urgent intervention of both the State and Federal Government, and to ensure that those arrested (put at about 43) are released unconditionally while compensation be paid immediately to affected community members.

Those who spoke with *Daily Independent* had a common position; that it was a self-induced and unprovoked attack on the law-abiding people of Enwang. And they want a direct intervention through an administrative panel of enquiry to unravel the cause, and proffer suggestions that would stem a recurrence of such problem.

Human rights and civil society groups have been meeting to review the situation. The Secretary of Media Practitioners for Good Governance Project (MPGGP), Nigeria, Aliyu Sani in condemning the action of the police, insisted that the Inspector General of Police, Mike Okiro, summon the DPO of the Area, the State Commissioner of Police and the Assistant Inspector General of Police in charge of Zone 6, Calabar, to Abuja to explain their respective roles in shielding the culprits who claimed that their bribe proceeds were stolen by the youths.



• Another burnt house

• Concluded