

Police, Okada Riders Clash That Claimed Five Lives In Ile-Ife

By Gbenga Faturoti
CORRESPONDENT, Osogbo.

On Sunday April 5th, 2009, violent clash erupted in the ancient city of Ile-Ife, Osun State. The clash broke out between the police and commercial motorcyclists popularly known as *Okada* riders during which five persons were allegedly killed and about twenty others severely injured.

The Moore Area Commander office of the police was burnt while part of the State Security Service (SSS) office in Ile-Ife located few metres to the Police station was also affected.

There was destruction of property across the length and breadth of Ile-Ife and people were running helter-skelter for safety. All the major streets of the ancient town were deserted when reinforcement of anti-riot policemen from the MOPOL 39, Osogbo entered Ile-Ife as they were shooting into the air sporadically to scare away people.

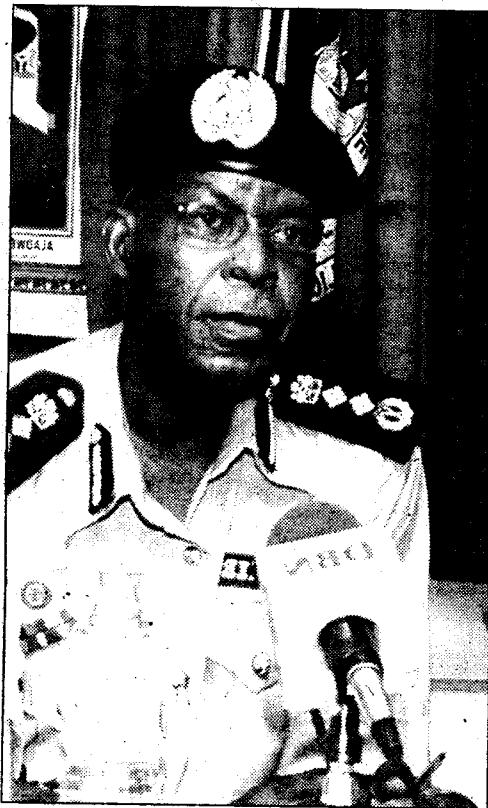
The involvement of some youths known as 'Great Ife' (those that assisted in prosecuting the protracted Ife/Modakeke communal war) made the situation worse. Majority of these youths were said to be members of *Okada* riders in the town.

The violent crisis between the *Okada* riders and police broke out in the state when accusations and counter accusations was the order of the day between the ruling party (PDP) and its arch rival, Action Congress (AC). The PDP had accused the AC of planning to disrupt the peace of the state if the Court of Appeal judgment did not go in its favour while the AC denied the accusation saying it was figment of the PDP.

The AC on its own said it has uncovered plans by the PDP to incite its leaders as for the burning of the Ife/Modakeke war, which spread fire recent in the state.

Details of the cause of the crisis were not immediately known but it was gathered that it was as a result of disagreement between the commercial motorcyclists' operators in the town and the police.

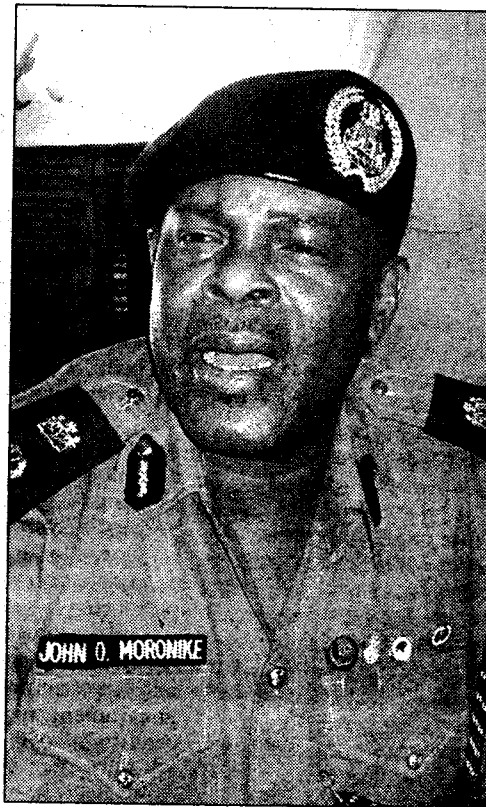
A number of policemen were said to have gone to conduct a raid on some beer and hot drink joints at Irewo in the ancient city during which a



•Okiro

heated argument ensued as the police wanted to use the opportunity to extort money from the operators of the joints who were reportedly having a nice time at the spot.

The arguments, it was learnt, resulted in fistcuffs between the police and those ground and in order to suppress the situation, the policemen shot severally into the air to scare people but unfortunately a stray bullet allegedly hit one of the *Okada* operators who were some few metres away from the scene. The *Okada* rider was a victim of the gunshot was said to have given up the ghost instantly.



•Moronike

The development sparked off violent protest from the commercial motorcyclists operators in the town who mobilized their members from everywhere to join in the struggle.

In an attempt to douse the situation through reinforcement of more troop from the MOPOL 39 and police stations from neighbouring towns to Ile-Ife and Osogbo, the state capital, more casualties were recorded and the death toll increased to five as at the last count.

Some of those that sustained injuries during the fracas were rushed to the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital Complex

(OAUTHC) Ile-Ife and Seven-Day Adventist Hospital, Ile-Ife while others were taken to private clinics.

The angry *Okada* riders stormed the More Area Command Office and unleashed terror on the policemen on duty in retaliation for the killing of their member. All the policemen on duty at first instance fled the station for safety which gave the protesting *Okada* riders the opportunity to wreck havoc on the station.

Unconfirmed report said one of the policemen on duty was killed but the State Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Clement Akinola, denied the report that the commands lose any of its men to the crisis.

While speaking further, Akinola said that the policemen have to apply minimum force when the situation was getting out of hand for them adding that the killing of the *Okada* rider was not deliberate stressing that the command has commenced investigation into the crisis.

The State Commissioner of Police, Mr. John Moronike, said that normalcy has returned to the ancient town of Ile-Ife, explaining that three policemen that caused the crisis initially have been arrested and were being investigated in line with the directive of the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr. Mike Okiro, who it was gathered has ordered a full investigation of the crisis.

Condemnations have continued to trail the crisis which claimed five lives and twenty others injured. The Deputy National Chairman (Southwest) of the National Conscience Party) Chief Amitolu Shittu, decried the attitude of the policemen who he said are found of extortion despite their improved salary and allowances.

Chief Akinola, who said that the police force is maintaining the peace of the country, added that bad eggs within the force must be flushed out so as to bring sanity to the establishment for the sustainability of the democracy.

"The nation's democracy cannot witness any drastic change without the change in attitude of the policemen in the country. The policemen are the most corrupt in the nation's setting and if this is not checkmated, it will not augur well for this nation", her said.