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Bullion van robbery: JTF sacks 10 communities in Abia

[E-MAIL](#) [PRINT](#) [MOST POPULAR](#) [PDF](#) [XML](#)**The Nation**
January 26th, 2009

ALL was quiet at the weekend in 10 villages in Abala Autonomous Community, Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State. Residents have fled, sacked from their homes by operatives of the Joint Task Force, JTF, which invaded the area on January 21.

The troops burnt down homes in what is believed to be a reprisal attack over suspected bullion van robbers, who overpowered security agents and burnt down five of their vehicles last Tuesday.

The incident happened on Port Harcourt/Aba Expressway. The suspects were said to have gone to a boundary farmland on the outskirts of the community to share their loot.

The farmland is located at the boundary between Abala, Akrika in Ikwa West Local Government Area and Ikot Akpan Anwa village in Ika Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

But security agents, comprising the Army, the police and the Abia State Vigilante Service, trailed them to the farmland. A gun battle broke out. Five of the six patrol vehicles which went for the operation were burnt.

Apart from the houses affected by the action, Orie Abala, a major market, was torched. Residents, including children, women and the aged fled into the bush for safety.

Domestic animals were not spared; many were killed, it was learnt.

None of the 10 villages that make up Abala Autonomous Community was spared by the angry security operatives, who accused them of harbouring criminals.

The soldiers raided Umuibe, Umuokorokpo, Nkpukpu Okoro, Umulelu and Umuachilefa, Umu Ogbuji, Azu Ahia, Umu Oparaoku, Umu Chuewunna and Umughoria.

Community sources said over 30 houses belonging to former security officers from the area were burnt down.

Specifically, the homes of the late Mr. Samuel Ekwebye, a former Deputy Commissioner of Police, his brother, the late Mr. Onyike Ekwenye, a former Superintendent of Police, and Mr. Chidi Nwulu, an Assistant Commissioner of Police in Awka, Anambra State, among many others, were burnt.

A woman from Umu Oparaoku village, one of the Abala communities, who gave her name simply as Godslowe, said trouble started when a "big" bus carrying several men sped through the community on

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Celebitchy.com January
22nd, 2009

Amy Winehouse isn't just spending her time in St Lucia stealing cocktails and playing on the trapeze - she's also hanging out at the [\(read more...\)](#)

Tuesday and headed for Akrika.

Not long after the bus disappeared along the winding narrow road to Akrika, six patrol vehicles loaded with heavily armed soldiers, riot policemen and Bakassi Boys, arrived at the village.

On getting to the market square, said the woman, the security operatives chased some of the youths, who hawk petrol and diesel, parked several jerry cans of the products into their vehicles and sped off towards Akrika.

Barely 10 minutes after the security vehicles left towards the neighbouring community, Godslove said she heard heavy shooting, which was reminiscent of the Nigerian Civil War days around Akrika community.

She said: "The shooting was so frightful that people started running aimlessly, looking for where to hide their heads. We have not heard such gunfire, since when federal troops entered Aba during the Civil War.

"After several hours of shooting, the area became quiet again and one of the patrol vehicles that went on the trail of the big bus returned and headed back to Aba on top speed."

A petrol seller at the community market square said security operatives, who trailed the robbers to the area, stopped at the square and chased them away, packing jerry cans of petrol and diesel into their vehicles.

He said: "We were here on Tuesday when policemen and soldiers came in six vans and chased us away and packed several petrol and diesel jerry cans into their vehicles and drove away.

"Later, we heard heavy shooting from Akrika. One of the vans came back while we learnt that the others went up in flames when they were fighting with armed robbers."

Another resident, Edwin Enyinna, said he returned from Aba about 7.30 pm to see that the community had been deserted.

When he got to his house, he discovered that his wife had fled into the bush with another woman, who had come to visit them. When the wife heard his voice from where she was hiding, she came out and they fled to his maternal home.

He said: "Immediately we got there, we saw one of the security personnel, who came from the scene of the fighting with the robbers. We brought him into our home.

"He asked us, 'Am I safe?', and we assured him that nothing will happen to him. We gave him warm water to take his bath and food but he refused them.

"He slept and the following morning, we gave him chewing stick and bathing water and later assisted him to transport himself to Aba. He told us that he would not know what would result from the attack on them.

"When he got home, he called us to tell us he arrived safely. But later that day, the soldiers and policemen came and burnt down the whole house and chased us into the bush."

Abia Police spokesman Ali Okechukwu, confirmed that the command deployed six patrol teams to the area on a rescue operation after the bullion van robbery.

He said the robbers, numbering over 50, attacked the bullion van conveying money from one of the first generation banks to Owerri.

He said: "They dislodged the policemen, killed one of the armed escorts, the driver of the bullion van.

"When the command got the information, we sent a reinforcement, including an armoured personnel carrier, but surprisingly, the robbers attacked the APC with dynamite and demobilised it.

"They succeeded in carting away unspecified sums of money and barely an hour after; we heard the hoodlums were sharing the loot somewhere in Abala.

We mobilised our men again in six vehicles; I'm talking about Police Joint Army Patrol, including the vigilante services of the state and they rushed there to apprehend them.

"But very disappointing, the people ambushed the security operatives,

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dislodged them and with the help of some of the youths from the community, burnt down five of the six security vans deployed for the operation. This is what we have been tackling during the past week.

"You cannot talk about the entire community. We are talking about the hoodlums and the youths from the area, who take to crime as a way of life. In the past, we have traced some armed robbers to Abala area and sometimes, when robbers succeed in their operation, they often go to the area to share their loot.

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