

# **I watched in horror as our abductors shot eight captives dead inside Oyo forest – Kidnapping victim**



Kunle Akinrinade May 11, 2024



**On Wednesday April 17, four men left the Ilogbo area of Ogun State to attend a burial in the Saki area of Oyo State, but only two of them returned home alive following their**

**abduction by a deadly gang of herdsmen on the highway. In this interview with KUNLE AKINRINADE, one of the victims, Nurudeen Olaitan Salami, who was later freed by the kidnappers, shares the heartrending encounter and narrow escape from death in the den of the kidnappers.**

**You were abducted by gunmen on April 17 alongside three others while returning from a burial. How did it happen?**

It was an all-night final burial party of the mother of the chairman of Ilupeju Igbusi Ilogbo Community Development Association. As landlords and members of the community, I together with three others, namely Omogbolahan Olakunle, Rafiu Oriade Jolaiya and Ernest left work on that day to honour our chairman with our presence at the party.

After the party, we stayed back for a few hours on Thursday, April 18 to relax before boarding a minibus en route Lagos in the afternoon. It was a nine-passenger bus, and before it took off from the motorpark at Saki, some of our acquaintances who also came from Lagos gave us two loaves of Bokku bread and four soft drinks.

When our bus finally left the park around 3.30 pm, our expectation was a peaceful and exciting return to our base in Ogun State while savoured the bread and soft drinks our hosts gave to us. But about an hour later, the bus we boarded screeched to a halt at a checkpoint mounted by five AK-47 clutching herdsmen around the Maya axis of Lanlate-Eruwa Road.

Like a scene from a movie, the bandits dragged all the passengers out of the bus and led us into the forest, while they left two teenage Fulani passengers and the driver of the bus to continue the trip.

**What then happened in the forest?**

The first thing they did to us was to beat us and collect our bread and soft drinks, which they ate and drank in our presence. From there, we became the recipient of brutality and assault as they hit us constantly with sticks, and the flat ends of cutlass, and also slapped us repeatedly. They had on them a phone that looked like a satellite phone which they charged with a solar panel and used it to communicate with their contacts and family members of victims.

They didn't want to see any iPhone at all. So the iPhones they seized from us, including mine, were all smashed on the ground and destroyed.

## **Apart from you and others that were seized from the bus, did you meet other victims in the forest?**

Yes. Only seven of the nine passengers in our bus were kidnapped while two Fulani passengers and the driver of the bus were allowed to go. But inside the forest, we met no fewer than 11 other victims including a woman and her three young children kidnapped from their residence when the herdsman could not get her wealthy husband, who was their target.

Among the captives was also a commercial motorcyclist otherwise called 'okada rider', who was abducted in Saki. He later escaped from the forest when he asked to be led to a stream to fetch water but they ran into some soldiers who opened fire and killed one of the herdsman who led him to the stream.

## **How were you and other victims moved from one point to another inside the forest without running into people living in villages around the forest area?**

They led us through thick forests and made detours to avoid running into villagers nearby. They were five in number but one of them was shot dead by soldiers attached to Operation Burst during an encounter the

day after they led us into the forest while another member of the gang suffered a gunshot wound on his leg.



What happened was that they sent one of them to lead a victim, an okada rider, to fetch water from a stream when the soldiers who were on routine operation killed one of the herdsmen and wounded another while the victim escaped.

On the same day, at about 8 pm, they went in search of the one that suffered a gunshot wound on his leg, and that gave one of my kidnapped friends, Ernest, an opportunity to flee. That was how he escaped and contacted the police.

Ernest told us that he ran as fast as he could and that he slept in a thick forest overnight, contacted the nearby police station very early in the morning and was taken into custody.

## **How did you regain your freedom?**

It was a narrow escape from death brought about by almighty God, who put it in the heart of the wicked herdsmen to set me free without any ransom paid. At about 7 pm on a Sunday, the leader of the gang told us that he would release us because he was expecting payment of ransom from a family whose three

members were kidnapped. He however threatened to kill us if the operatives of Amotekun Corps attacked them in the forest.

Then suddenly, we heard sounds of gunshots from a distance. The shots were fired by a combined team of policemen and soldiers and the bandits returned fire too to scare the law enforcement team.

After the gunshots ceased, the leader of the gang returned to where we were kept in the forest and shot eight of their captives dead, including a 13-year-old boy. My friends, Omogbolahan Olakunle and Oriade Jolaiya, were also among the eight captives killed by the leader of the herdsmen.

Two members of a family abducted in their residence and the driver of a Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) previously abducted were set free.

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One of the two siblings kidnapped was a seven-year-old boy. His 21-year-old sister and their mother were abducted from their residence. Their mother died from exhaustion in the forest while we were being led around by the bandits. They were hitting us with sticks and blows.

I was tasked with carrying the wounded member of the gang on my back. To tell you how heartless the kidnappers are, each time I got tired, he would hit me with blows on my head from the back despite the excruciating pain he suffered from his gunshot wounds. We were beaten mercilessly as we trekked in the forest.

We were released around 1.30 am on Sunday, April 21. It happened that an older brother of the two siblings abducted brought the ransom on a motorcycle for the release of his siblings and their mother who he did not know had died in the forest. The woman was left with no strength to carry on and she started seeing blood and died shortly after.

Her older son who came with the ransom had been told by the kidnappers to put his two pointer lights on when coming. They also asked him to buy rice and meat with table water when coming to drop the ransom. So, when he arrived, the kidnappers quickly collected the ransom from him and collected the motorbike which they used to escape from the scene. It was the man that took us to his family residence from where

we were taken by police to their station. We walked amid downpours from the forest to the home of the kidnapped siblings where sympathizers were waiting for us.

The kidnappers cooked rice in pots and ate before us while many victims drank their urine. One of us, Fawaz, was killed by the kidnappers. Another victim called Panko, who drank his urine, died after much exhaustion.

## **Is it true that the kidnappers demanded N50 million ransom for your freedom?**

Yes. Initially, that was the amount they threatened to collect or they would kill us. However, after pleadings and negotiations, they agreed to collect N 2.5 million.

## **Was the negotiation for the reduction of the ransom smooth?**

No. The negotiation and pleadings for a reduction of the ransom came with brutality. When I told them that I had a bus that I had asked my family to sell and bring the money to pay as ransom, the kidnappers said the N1.5 million the bus was to be sold was an insult to them, and that they could only reduce the ransom if the value of the bus was N14 million. Hence they subjected me to merciless beating, hitting me with the flat side of a cutlass for trying to raise N1.5 million ransom.

Similarly, we were beaten after Alhaji Saheed offered the kidnappers the sum of N400,000 for our freedom. At a point, I pleaded with them in Hausa language to reduce the ransom to N2.5 million and this again incurred their wrath as they further beat me mercilessly.

## **Did you find out if any ransom was eventually paid to the kidnappers for your release?**

It was just the grace of God that I enjoyed as no ransom was paid. What happened was that ransom was to be paid and money had been mobilised for the purpose. The chairman of our landlords association. Mr Saheed, whose mother's burial we were returning from before our abduction, was to bring the sum of N2.5 million, and he had been told by the kidnappers to take the money to a certain spot and wait for them there.

However, I quickly used the mobile phone of the man who came to drop the ransom for his siblings to contact Saheed. I told him that we had been freed and that he should not bother bringing any ransom to the kidnappers. I told Saheed to flee from the spot where he was waiting for the kidnappers because they were already on their way to the spot after collecting N2 million to free the two young siblings among us.

The ransom for the driver, Fawaz and Panko was raised by their family members and was to also be paid by Saheed whom the kidnappers mandated to collect the money and bring to them. Panko was hypertensive, so he died from the intensity of the gunshots fired by the leader of the kidnap gang when he shot other victims dead.

## **What happened to you after your release?**

As soon as one of my aunties learned that I was freed by the kidnappers, she came to Ibadan and brought me back to Lagos. I landed in the hospital where I received treatment for days because my body was badly brutalised and I was already very sick.

## **Going by your experience, would you honour another invitation for an interstate party?**

Never, I will not attend any party that involves travelling to another state. Instead, I would rather send money to the organiser. I don't pray to suffer the same fate again in my life.