

# Murder At Midnight

The police in Rivers State are still battling to resolve the puzzle over the killing of six persons in Eleke Afara, a village in the state

**By Godfrey Azubike and Victor Ugborgu**

**T**HE PEOPLE OF ELEKE AFARA and Ozuzu communities in Etche Local Government area of Rivers State are still counting their losses following the violent attack on them recently by suspected Fulani herdsmen. *Newswatch* learnt that more than 50 herdsmen dressed in military uniform stormed the area on Sunday, August 27, at about 8 pm with dangerous weapons and unleashed terror on the natives.

Six members of the communities were said to have lost their lives in the attack. Among the victims were some Christians who were holding a crusade that night at the primary school, Ozuzu. One Thank God Anokwuru, a 10-year old boy and the only son of the parents was among the dead. Many others received machet cuts and varying degrees of wounds.

Silverman Olobo, a pastor and one of the survivors had a deep machet wound on his forehead. He was later rushed to one of the clinics in Igwuruta, a neighbouring town for treatment. He told *Newswatch* that the attackers took them by surprise while the crusade was going on. "When the gunshots became unbearable, the crusade was stopped abruptly and worshippers scampered for safety. Some could not get home alive while others were seriously wounded. The assailants thought I was dead because I was unconscious. They removed all the money and other valuables and left me to my fate," he said.

Edith Amadi, another survivor and a nursing mother said she escaped death by the whiskers. "I was in my room when I heard gunshots outside. All of a sudden, the assailants forced their way into my bedroom and started hitting me with machetes. All my plea to be spared fell on deaf ears. They later collected the

N36,000 in my room and left," she said. Others are yet to recover from the shock they suffered.

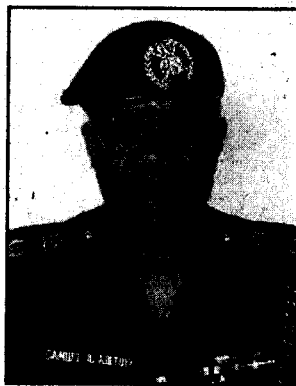
*Newswatch* gathered that the August 27 attack was the climax of the acrimony that existed between the natives and the cattle rearers. Some few weeks ago, indigenes of the two communities complained of the invasion and destruction of their farm products by the animals belonging to the herdsmen. They also made frantic efforts to stop the animals from grazing in the areas, but the herdsmen resisted such attempts.

*Newswatch* learnt that the bubble burst when a woman who spotted the cattle grazing on her crops raised an alarm which attracted some youths from the area. Before the youths could reach the troubled spot, the Fulani cattle rearers were said to have stabbed the woman with their knives for raising the alarm. The action of the herdsmen was said to have angered the youths who descended on the animals, killing eight of them. The meat was distributed among members of the communities. This marked the beginning of the problem.

In a reprisal attack, the cattle rearers stormed the communities at dusk on that fateful day. Some Hausas in Ozuzu Etche were

directed to leave the town for their safety. They took refuge at the Ike Nwachukwu barracks, Obinze, Owerri in Imo State.

This **Adetuyi**



explains why some indigenes of the affected communities accused the soldiers of complicity in the attack.

Eze M. R. Amaechi, the traditional ruler of Ozuzu clan condemned the slaughtering of his subjects by the assailants. He said the incident was a big surprise to him. According to him, it was unfair of the strangers to have killed innocent citizens at the slightest provocation.

But the police report on the incident appears conflicting. Report from the police in Etche said the incident was a case of 10 armed robbers that invaded the communities with machets and guns. It also claimed that only three persons died in the robbery. They include, one Peace Akor, a police sergeant attached to Olu Obasanjo police station in Port Harcourt, Ike Aguguom of Umuoye Etche and Fidelia Amadi of Ogida Etche. The police said the corpses of the deceased persons were deposited at the Okomoko General Hospital, Etche for autopsy. In all, the police claimed that only two thousand naira was stolen in the robbery incident.

But the people of the affected communities are insisting that the attacks were from the Fulani herdsmen. The people said the police claim that the raiders were armed robbers was a mere cover-up of the gruesome murder committed by the raiders. Moreover, some of the herdsmen who participated in the attack were known to them.

However, Iregu Barasua, Rivers State police public relations officer, PPRO, told *Newswatch* that the matter was still under investigation. She said the matter has been transferred to the State Criminal and Investigation Department, SCID, to determine what actually happened on August 27 in Etche. Samuel Adetuyi, commissioner of police, Rivers State Command is said to be interested in getting to the root of the case. ■