

GRUESOME

Police in Abuja mourn the death of an SP whose body was found in a soak-away pit after he was brutally murdered by unknown persons

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Residents of the Apo Mechanic Village in Abuja are yet to come to terms with the gruesome murder of Mr. Adewale Onatemowo, a superintendent of police, on February 9.

Onatemowo's wife, Emem, recalled how on that fateful morning, her husband had told her that he was going to drop his friend at the Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport, Abuja. The friend, it was gathered, had been with them for two days and was returning to his base in London. "Go in peace," Emem, whose name means 'peace,' told her husband. But though the man actually went in peace, he never returned. He died.

And the wife did not know until the following day. Emem was not at peace with herself when at about 11 pm of the fateful day, her husband had not returned. The incessant cry of her children, who, it was gathered, were fond of their father, did not help matters. "Go and sleep, your father will soon return," she repeatedly told the trio of Ade (7), Bisola (5) and Bimbola (7 months). While the toddler was said to have slept after the mother sang her some lullabies, the other two insisted that they would not sleep without seeing their father. The mother had to pick her telephone and called her husband.

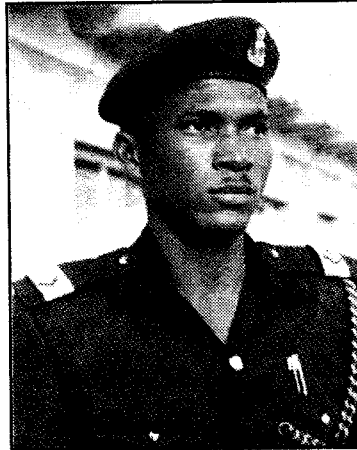
Emem recalled that around 11p.m. that Friday night when she called his line to find out where he was, as they spoke, she heard music in the background as well as excited voices of people who seemed to be having fun. That made her to assume that he was probably having fun with his course mates, more so as she was aware that his course mates and friends in Abuja used to have such outings periodically, particularly on Fridays. Moreover, her husband did not sound as someone in distress, and that made

her to think all was well. She went to bed thereafter.

The following morning, she was astonished that her husband had not returned home. She went outside and paced up and down the compound anxiously. Later that morning, she noticed many of her neighbours were avoiding her, and that increased her anxiety. Not long after, the Commissioner of Police, in charge of the Federal Capital Territory Command, Mr. Lawrence Alobi, and a few other officers walked in. The CP asked after Emem's husband. According to her, given the fact that such a high-powered delegation had never visited their home since she got married to her husband she got worried and thought he was probably in trouble with police authorities. She, therefore, lied to the delegation that he had gone out in the morning. The team departed.

But there were ominous signs that something terrible had happened to her husband. Emem recalled that each time she stepped out of the family house in the early hours of Saturday, February 10, to look down the street in the hope that her husband would drive in, she observed that her neighbours wore mournful looks and avoided talking to her. Apparently, they already heard about the fate that had befallen her husband, as she was to learn later that his body was recovered on the street that leads to their home.

It was a tragic piece of news that the police authorities did not know how to break to



Emem. They resorted to telling her that her husband was attacked by unknown persons and was in a coma. By Sunday, she was finally told the tragedy that had befallen him.

Saturday Punch gathered that Onatemowo's body was found in a soak-away pit on the road to his residence. The corpse was said to have been discovered about noon on Saturday, February 10, by

some neighbours who saw sticking out of the soak-away pit, the legs of a man who appeared to be lying still. Although no gunshot wounds were noticed on him, his hands and feet were said to be tied, while his head appeared to have been hit repeatedly with a heavy object. His face also bore marks of torture. His purse was found lying open by his side and his police identity card lay on the road, suggesting that his assailants might have deliberately kept it there for the purpose of identification. The neighbours who stumbled on the corpse invited the police, who identified Onatemowo as one of their own.

Many of Onatemowo's colleagues say they cannot fathom what could have been responsible for his untimely death. The deceased had just arrived with his family from a one-year course at the University of Portsmouth. It was gathered that on arrival, he decided to settle in his personal house at Apo Mechanic Village. Before his departure for the training overseas in 2005, he and his family lived in the Police barracks at Garki. The colleagues said all through his career, Onatemowo, who graduated from the Ogun State University in 1991, never held any beat job. In other words, he never worked in a police station. Rather, he worked as a desk officer in the administration department of the Force.

So, what could have been responsible for his killing? Police sources proffered some theories. One was that he could be a victim of armed robbery. This is because after he arrived with his family from the training overseas in October 2006 and moved to his residence, armed robbers visited his house. The location became attractive for armed robbers to ply their deadly trade after the demolition of illegal structures that used to occupy the area. The few houses that survived the demolition became isolated.

It was said that when armed robbers attacked his house, Onatemowo, who joined the force in 1995 as an Assistant Superintendent of Police, had called his colleagues for help and a detachment of policemen responded promptly. In the ensuing shootout with the robbers, one of them was killed and the others fled. It was said that since then, there had been no reports of threats against his life or that of any member of his family.

Another theory the police are working on is the alleged row between Onatemowo and the dealer of the vehicle he drove on the day he met his untimely death. The vehicle, which is yet to be recovered, is a conventional Honda car.

On arrival from his overseas training, 38-year-old Onatemowo had bought a Honda CRV jeep from a car dealer in Abuja. However, he was said to have discovered later that the car was converted to left-hand drive

from its original manufacturers' configuration of right-hand drive. Upset by the deceit associated with the transaction, he had confronted the car dealer and insisted on having a replacement. He was said to have struck an arrangement that the Honda CRV jeep be disposed off and the difference in its price and that of the car given to him as replacement by the dealer be refunded to him, since the price of the former car is more than the one he was later given. A comprehensive and effective security system was then installed in the replacement.

It was said that once, after Onatemowo took possession of the new vehicle, an attempt was made to steal it from a parking lot in Abuja. A junior policeman, who works as aide to Onatemowo, had gone to run an errand for him with the car. In the process of parking where he was sent to, he got into an altercation with a female motorist as they struggled for parking space. The matter was resolved amicably. However, while the aide went away to deliver his boss' message, some people made to break into the car. Luckily, the lady with whom the aide had had an altercation was around when the intruders wanted to strike. She observed that the people trying to gain entry into the car were different from the fellow with whom she had quarrelled. She raised the alarm and the strangers fled.

Detectives are working on the theory that the dealer who sold the vehicle to Onatemowo could have resorted to foul means to deny him of both the initial car he bought as well as the replacement car.

As if the death of her husband was not enough trauma for her, Emem is said to have received a death threat via a text message, telling her that she was not safe. Specifically, on Sunday, February 18, two days after the burial of her husband in Lagos, Emem, while at the late husband's family house in Lagos, received a text message worded as follows: "Emem Onatemowo, we are waiting for you. You are the next to go on our list." The message was received around 2:11 p.m.

Onatemowo's colleagues insist that the riddle of his death must be solved. Some of them who spoke on condition of anonymity said it would be "a shame if, again, we fail to unravel the death of this man. Do not forget that another senior police officer in the person of CP Felix Oteka was killed in December, and nothing has happened."

When contacted, the Force Public Relations Officer, Mr. Haz Iwendu, told our correspondent that the matter was being handled at the command. He said although he did not know the details of the investigation, the killers of Onatemowo would not go unpunished.

Alobi, who spoke glowingly of his dead officer, said the police were working on different theories to unravel the motive behind the killing. Given the gruesome manner in which Onatemowo was killed, Alobi said he would want to know if the robbers, who were once dislodged, returned to revenge the loss of one of their own. Onatemowo's hands were said to have been tied, and different weapons, including guns and knives, used to hit him until he died. His head was also said to have been hit with a big stone which shattered his skull. "This is the way the officer was killed and I must confess to you that it is terrible. I was shocked when I saw it," Alobi said.

Alobi said the Force would look at every possible lead to get to the root of the matter.

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