

Edo mobile policeman kills father of three during kerosene dispute

... We can't find the killer policeman – Edo Police Command

Fidelis Soriwei

Pa Solomon Aissien, found it hard to come to terms with the loss of his son as he sat in the midst of sympathisers staring into the void. The tragic death of 34-year-old Ebenezer right behind the family home in Benin, he said, was as shocking as it was painful.

Hard as he tried, tears would not stop rolling down his cheeks. The retired army captain knew that things would never remain the same for his modest family after Ebenezer's sudden death from the bullets of a mobile policeman at the Mega Station of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation in Benin on Monday.

To add salt to injury, the police were also alleged to have arrested and detained another son of the octogenarian, Raphael (an employee of the Federal Road Safety Commission) and his nephew, Everest Aissien, over the gruesome killing of their blood relation.

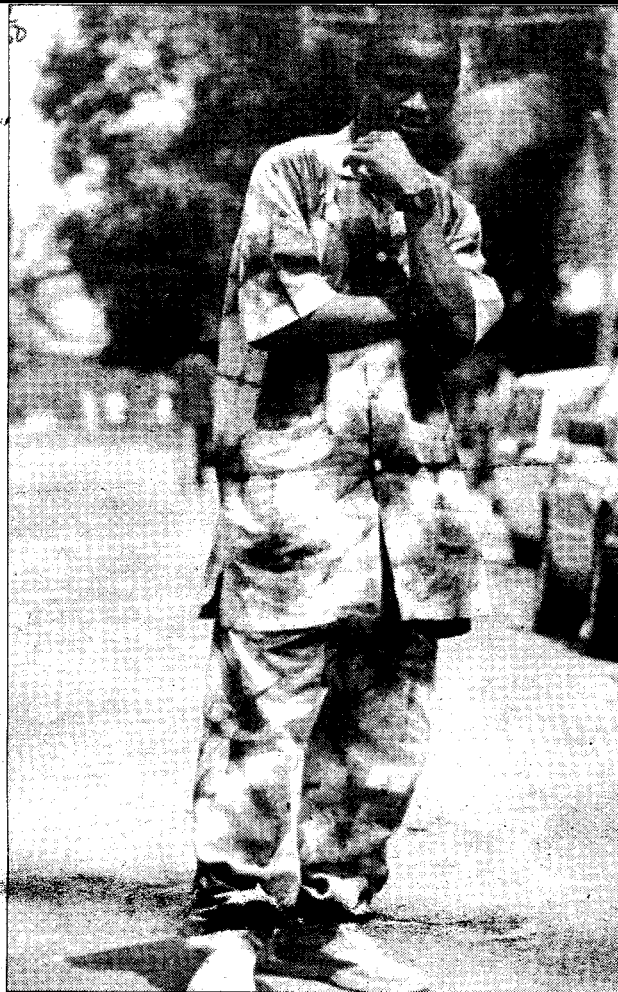
Ebenezer, who until his death was a taxi driver, was yet another victim of kerosene scarcity in Benin, which has since turned the mega station into a battle ground for those who desperately seek the scarce commodity. Desperate consumers besiege the station with heaps of jerry cans on a daily basis and form queues that result in serious traffic jam along the Warri-Sapele Road.

Speaking to journalists barely one hour after the tragic death of his son, the bereaved octogenarian said Ebenezer, a father of three, had gone to the mega station to buy diesel for his car when he was shot dead by the police over a matter he had nothing to do with. Although the retired army officer said he was not at the filling station and so could not capture the exact circumstances in which his beloved son was shot dead, he called on President Umaru Yar'Adua, the Inspector General of Police and other appropriate authorities to investigate the shooting and bring the culprits to book.

Investigations conducted by *Saturday Punch* however revealed that Ebenezer was cut down in his prime by a mobile policeman over the flourishing trade in kerosene in Benin. It was gathered that the disagreement that culminated in the shooting and the resultant violence that rocked the mega station started when some youths from the Ogbelaka part of the city went to the station in search of kerosene. A source who spoke on condition of anonymity said the youths whose community hosts the mega station had an agreement with the management of the mega station to allow them buy the product every Monday. It was therefore in fulfillment of the terms of the agreement that they had thronged the station to buy kerosene. But they were prevented by the manager of the station from doing so.

An argument then ensued between the youths and the management of the station when the former insisted on seeing the Director of the facility, one Mr. Edmund Akhigbe. According to an eyewitness, the crisis that could have been nipped in the bud escalated when some security operatives at the station ordered them out of the office of the director. The tension was said to have snowballed into a full fledged crisis when a chief of the community (name withheld) allegedly ordered the police to shoot the reluctant youths if they disobeyed the order to vacate the place. The source added that one of the mobile policemen on duty consequently fired some shots in order to disperse the crowd, but he ended up shooting one Imafidon in the hand and gunning down Ebenezer who had arrived the station in search of diesel. The erring policeman was said to have fled the scene immediately.

An employee of the station and younger brother of the deceased, Joseph, who spoke with our correspondent on Tuesday, confirmed that the agreement between the youth and the management of the station had existed for months. According to him, it was initially agreed that the youths be allowed to lift kerosene on Sunday, which later had to be changed to Monday due to a disagreement on the sale of kerosene between the NNPC and Total Nigeria Plc, the two companies that run the station. According to sources,



•Late Ebenezer

the management of the station decided to dishonour the existing agreement after some elders of the community wrote a petition to the station's authorities, asking them to stop the sale of the product to the youths. The elders were said to have insisted that the youths were not the true representatives of the community and so should be prevented from lifting the product. Expectedly, the killing of Ebenezer triggered a violent reaction from the youths in the area who invaded the facility in anger, destroying the pumps and the glass partitioning in the offices at the station. The filling station was turned into a theatre of war as a detachment of policemen from Adesuwa and the men of the Nigeria Civil Defence and Security had to engage them to restore sanity.

Commenting on the issue, the Public Relations Officer of the Edo State Police Command, Mr. Peter Ogboi, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, denied the claim that the riot and vandalism of the mega station was caused by the shooting that took place on the fateful day. He argued that the policeman was forced to shoot when the youths, who according to him had already left the station, mobilised themselves and attacked the station in a large number.

He also claimed that the youths almost overwhelmed the police and were throwing missiles at them, which prompted the shooting.

His claims were, however, dismissed as untrue by some members of the community. The police spokesman, however, admitted that the riot could have resulted from the breach of the said agreement between those in charge of the facility and the youths to lift kerosene from the station every Monday as members of the host community.

Curiously, the men of the Edo State Command of the Nigeria Police were yet to indicate the whereabouts of Ebenezer's killer. In fact, there were indications that the police were yet to apprehend the erring officer. In a telephone interview with our correspondent three days after the unfortunate incident, Ogboi said the command had only received information from the Commander of the Mobile Police Force in Benin that one of his men was missing.

Members of the Aissien family and other concerned



•Pa Aissien

members of the community have said they would pursue justice against the killer of their son to a logical conclusion. The family on Tuesday staged a protest to the palace of the Oba of Benin, Omon Oba N' Edo Uku Akpolokpolo Oba Erediauwa, to complain formally on what they described as the murder of their son. It was learnt that the Oba of Benin endorsed the family's call for an investigation into the circumstances that led to the death of the young man.

The Oba, it was learnt, invited the Commissioner of Police in Edo State, Mr. Chris Dega, the Director of the Mega Station, Mr. Akhigbe, and one Mike to a meeting on the issue on Thursday. As at Thursday, the mega station remained under lock and police protection as the agitated members of the community continued with the protest against this costly price of kerosene in the state.

DISCLAIMER



MR. TAYLOR. Sanni Aremu

This is to inform the general public that **MR. TAYLOR. Sanni Aremu. Senior Sales and Marketing Officer of PUNCH NIGERIA LIMITED** {whose photograph appears above}, has been dismissed from the company with effect from September 8, 2008, for acts of gross misconduct.

Any person who transacts any business with him on behalf of the company does so at his or her own risk.

Signed:
Management