

Soldiers on reprisal sack LG headquarters in Benue, kill one

John Charles, Makurdi

NAKA, headquarter of Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State, was on Thursday invaded by military men who set part of the community ablaze.

It was gathered that the military men invaded the community as a reprisal for the killing of a soldier by some youths on Wednesday.

A cleric, who asked not to be named, told our correspondent that the soldiers stormed the community on Thursday morning, setting ablaze houses, crops, barns and killing an old man, who could not run away from his rice mill where the soldiers met him.

As of the time of filing this report, residents of the town had fled to neighbouring communities such as Adoka, Makurdi and Taraku for safety.

"It is terrible here in Naka; some soldiers stormed Naka this morning, major parts of Naka have been burnt down totally.

"As I am talking to you now, people have run to Taraku, Adoka and Makurdi; some are still in the bush; a few of us are taking refuge in the mission house, praying for God's intervention," the cleric said.

Giving details of what happened in his domain, the traditional ruler of Naka, Fer Tyourchie, Chief Daniel Abomtse, explained that the killing of the soldier by youths in the community was a case of

mistaken identity.

According to Abomtse, hoodlums in military uniform had in the past attacked the community.

"This is a clear case of mistaken identity. What happened was that a farmer went inside the bush within Naka town and saw one army personnel in shorts. And this is a villager, one Sesugh Shamu. The army personnel pursued the villager; he ran and fell and they fought.

"But he eventually escaped from the army personnel.

He ran to the town to raise the alarm that a militia of the herdsmen had attacked him.

"A mob just went and killed the soldier. We later discovered that the deceased was an army personnel attached to the platoon that is stationed here on Naka road.

"You will notice that during the last attack on Gwer West communities that claimed close to 30 lives, some of the militant herdsmen who attacked our villages were dressed as if they were army men; so that is why the people mistook

this particular personnel for a militant herdsman.

"Since his killing, we have been pleading with them to have mercy; that it was a case of mistaken identity. But they did not listen. I was at the 77 Battalion in Makurdi up till 2am today (Thursday) to plead with them and also broker peace.

"They also insisted that certain names that they mentioned should be brought to their office. I went and brought all the names they mentioned, yet they went ahead to level part of Naka town extending towards

Makurdi.

"They also took about two people away alive. So, on the whole, they are holding the five people they earlier mentioned and two others.

"I am also worried because the boy who helped us to bring out the man that fought the mistaken army personnel in the bush was taken by the military but I am begging that they should leave him out because he is of great help to me and the community. They should please not harm him.

"It is a case of mistaken

identity. Before this particular case, our boys, few days back, arrested a supposed soldier who was misbehaving in the town. They took him to the army platoon here in Naka and the army here said he was not part of them. They arrested him and took him to Makurdi.

"So, my people did not mean any harm. We would not deliberately kill the people who are helping us to maintain law and order. Some of the colleagues of the mistaken soldier were posted to the platoon four days ago. Maybe he lost his way, nobody knows. It was a clear case of mistaken identity.

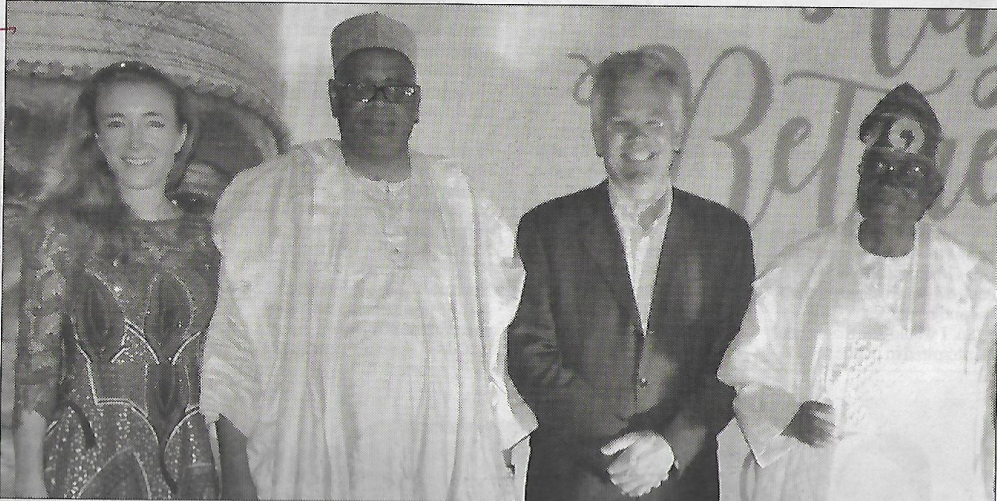
"The people in Naka are living in apprehension; close to 19,000 people who are displaced from six districts of Gwer West Local Government Area sacked by herdsmen are all resident in Naka town which has become a territory of IDPs.

"Though they did not kill anybody while carrying out the arson, like I said, they took two persons alive.

"The soldiers in Naka, who claimed to give us security, have never for once gone to the bush where our people are being killed to help me.

"The killing of the mistaken soldier happened yesterday (Wednesday) evening. The army mentioned names and I personally brought the people to them yet they went and levelled part of the town using explosive devices.

"Since this thing happened, I have been with their commander



• L-R: Non Executive Director, Sigma Pensions, Mrs. Natalie Kolbe; Immediate Managing Director, Mr. Umaru Modibbo; Director, Mr. Mark Collier; and outgoing Chairman, Alhaji Rasaki Oladejo, during a send-off party in honour of Oladejo in Abuja...on Wednesday. Photo: Sigma Pensions

Mace theft: Court stops police, DSS from arresting Omo-Agege