

Killer naval ratings: Police refused to take my report, says trader

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Collins Osagie

Samson Folarin

A spare parts trader, Cletus Ben-Onyejimbe, has revealed how efforts to report an affray that led to the murder of a peacemaker, Collins Osagie, were allegedly frustrated by the police at the Okokomaiko division.

Osagie was tortured to death last Monday by a group of naval ratings led by Petty Officer Awosanya Olufemi of the CND Apapa Naval Base.

Olufemi had bought an item worth N250 from Ben-Onyejimbe at his shop in Iyana Isasi, in the Okokomaiko area of Lagos State.

He wanted to return the item, but the refusal of the trader to refund his money led to a fight between them.

Osagie offered to settle the dispute, including refunding the N250.

His gesture was, however, interpreted as an insult and he was beaten to death by the colleagues of the rating, who were called to the scene.

The spare parts trader, who fled after the incident escalated, told *PUNCH Metro* that he was the prime target of the attack.

The Anambra State indigene said before the rating called his colleagues, they fought each other.

Recounting the incident, he said, “I came back from a market, where I went to restock around 4pm. By 6pm, the officer came and said he wanted to return an item worth N250, which my salesgirl sold to him, because his technician rejected it.

“I told him that he should ask the technician to come and get the right one, because I just returned from the market and I didn’t have any money. I asked him to pick any other thing that was worth that amount. He refused. I begged him to come back for the money, he also refused. He was in mufti, so I did not know who he was.

“When neighbours overheard the argument, they came to mediate. Collins (Osagie), whom I never knew, also appealed to the man, but he refused.

“I took the fuse and put it on his vehicle. That was when he started assaulting me. While I was struggling with him, he sustained injuries in the jaw and people separated us. He then drove out in anger.”

Ben-Onyejimbe said he was later informed that Olufemi was a naval rating, adding that some friends advised him to report at the police station before matters got out of hand.

The 33-year-old said when he got to the Okokomaiko Police Division, the police refused to take his statement.

He stated, “Immediately they heard ‘navy’, they refused to take my statement at the counter. They queried why I would have a disagreement with a naval rating because of N250, and that did I want to cause a war between the two forces.

“They said they could not do anything till the next day. I was embarrassed and had to leave. By then, I had heard that the man had returned with some of his colleagues.

“I hanged around Okokomaiko till 11pm and sneaked in to lock my shop. Some *Mallams* told me that military men had been looking for me. As they were talking, I saw a tricycle coming close to my shop. I suspected it was those people and hid.

“I heard the naval man asking the Mallams if I had returned and they said no. He asked them to call him when they see me. About five minutes later, I started packing my goods into the shop. I was doing this when a motorcycle raced in and I locked myself in. Lo and behold, it was the military boys. I was quiet inside the shop and prayed that they should not break the door.”

The trader said the military men continued to wait for him till around 11.30pm when a fellow trader called him to come out that Osagie had been beaten to a pulp.

He said he was shocked upon seeing the victim motionless by the roadside.

“We used a wheelbarrow to convey him to a hospital, where he was confirmed dead around 2am. I did nothing to the naval rating,” he added.

The trader denied being on the run, adding that he had been communicating with the deceased’s family members and friends.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, Bala Elkana, confirmed that Ben-Onyejimbe reported the incident at the station.

He said, “He came to the police station when he had issues with the man. By the time the police got there, the naval rating had left.

“The man, however, returned with his colleagues to the shop. They could not find Ben-Onyejimbe and that was when they descended on the third party. At that moment, nobody notified the police. We only got to know about it the next day.”

A spokesperson for the Western Naval Command, Commander Thomas Otuji, said investigation was ongoing into the incident.

He noted that Olufemi, who had been taken to the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department, Yaba, would be returned to the naval base for trial and identification of other culprits.