

## Suspected Benue war veteran, farmer's killers remanded after PUNCH report

By Tessy Igomu, 8th January 2023

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David's house burnt by the vigilance group (Punch Investigations)

*Seven months after PUNCH Investigations reported about the extrajudicial killing of a war veteran and farmer in Benue State, no fewer than ten suspects allegedly linked to the atrocious act have been charged to court. TESSY IGOMU reports*

**Punch Investigations**, in a **report titled – ‘War veteran, farmer murdered in cold blood as vigilantes hold Benue community hostage’**, published on May 28, 2022, detailed how two kinsmen, David and Jonathan, were gruesomely murdered in cold blood by members of two vigilance group in Agerabul-Mbamo, a community in the Kpav District, Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of the state.



Late David and Jonathan, a farmer and war veteran respectively, were members of a large, extended family known as Nyior-Kalagba.

Based on eyewitness' accounts, the two men were allegedly killed by the Ashe Atyoo, known as Community Watchers and Mba Asimov, the Benue State Livestock Guard on April 16, 2022.

*PUNCH Investigations* reported that they were inflicted with life-threatening injuries, shot and had their throats slit.

Based on eyewitness accounts, it was noted that the blood-curdling scenarios that played out on that fateful day, made other members of the family to go into hiding.

It was gathered that they are still scattered across various communities where they went to seek refuge.

*PUNCH Investigations* detailed how seven houses belonging to members of the family, farm implements and foodstuffs were allegedly set ablaze by the armed men, who were majorly youths from the TIV-speaking community.



*The late war veteran, David Nyior, allegedly killed by a vigilance group (Punch Investigations)*

Henry, a member of the family, who witnessed the carnage, revealed seeing “extreme form of bestiality displayed by the vigilantes with impunity.”

The man, who is in his 50s, said he escaped death by a whisker and gave graphic descriptions of what actually transpired, noting that it played out like scenes from a horror movie.

The man also made available to *PUNCH Investigations*, disturbing visuals of the dead men lying in grotesque positions.

A traumatised Henry, who resides in Jos, Plateau State, had visited the Agerabul-Mbamo community to spend time with his elder brother, David and other family members.

He recalled being on the farm planting groundnut and yam seedlings with David, his wife and four children, when he (David) got a call that the two vigilance groups were on rampage in the village.

Henry said the caller, who refused to disclose his identity for security reasons, claimed the armed men were on a revenge mission and had already burnt houses belonging to the Nyior-Kalagba family members, and were heading for David's house.

He said as soon as the call ended, a disturbed David told his children to rush to the house and remove valuables that included motorcycles, a pumping machine and generator.

The man noted that they succeeded in taking some things to the farm, adding that when they went back with their father for other valuables, the vigilantes surrounded the house.

He said, “After waiting for about 20 minutes and not seeing them, I walked to the house because it was not far from the farm.

“On getting there, I saw the vigilantes with guns, machetes and sticks surrounding the house. One of them said I was not a known face and asked if I lived in the house and I replied yes. He asked if there were other people on the farm and I said no.”

Henry added, “They pushed me into the house, where I saw my elder brother, his children and wife lying on the ground. They had cuts and bruises all over their bodies and were bleeding. The men were kicking and beating them with machetes and clubs. I had to tell them that I was a visitor, but even at that, they beat me mercilessly.”

Henry said the men dragged them outside and lit bundles of raffia grasses with which they set David's house on fire.



*The late Jonathan, who was allegedly killed by a vigilance group during the attack (Punch Investigations)*

He said as the flames gathered momentum and ferociously licked through the building, which consisted of four blocks of flats, the vigilantes continued with their brutality.

"It was like a horror movie. My elder brother was bleeding terribly. He watched as his house burned," he said in an emotion-laden voice.

Henry said that when he was ordered alongside those identified as visitors to move to a corner of the compound, he used the opportunity to sneak out and ran away. The man said he rushed to the Katsina-Ala Divisional Police Division, to make a report and get help.

It was reported that efforts made by Henry to get help from the Nigerian Police (Katsina-Ala Divisional Police Division and the Police Area Command, Katsina-Ala), proved abortive.

However, when Henry later returned to the community to bury his dead family members, he was devastated at the level of destruction wreaked by the vigilantes.

He recounted, "It was as if there was a communal clash. Houses belonging to my brother, uncles and nephews were burnt and foodstuffs worth millions of naira destroyed.

"Yam barns and seedlings, bags of groundnuts, soya beans and guinea corn were burnt. The vigilantes poured dirt inside our well and contaminated it. That was the only source of potable water for the clan.

"I was told that when my elder brother was shot on the waist, he kept asking them what he did. His throat was slit in the presence of his wife and children. The same thing happened to my uncle."

In a barely audible voice, Henry said he was later brutalised by the vigilantes for daring to bury his relatives.

He also revealed that two of David's children were being treated for multiple fractures in an undisclosed hospital.

"Our lives are at risk. No one can guarantee our safety, not even the elders because they are also afraid of the vigilantes. This is my village. I don't have anywhere to go if I leave Jos," he said with apprehension.

However, justice seems to have begun to take its full course as most of those allegedly involved in the extra-judicial killing have been arrested, arraigned and remanded in prison custody pending when their fate would be decided by the appropriate court.

The arrest followed a petition written by the family to the Benue State Commissioner of Police and the Department of State Services over the extra-judicial killing.

According to a copy of the petition obtained by *PUNCH Investigations*, the family, among other things, asked the security outfits to carry out a discreet investigation into the extra-judicial killing and bring the perpetrators to book.

Attached to the petition was a printed copy of *PUNCH Investigations* report, published in the *Saturday PUNCH*.

It was gathered that so far, ten suspects were brought by the police before the Magistrate Court, in Makurdi.

According to the charge sheet obtained by *PUNCH Investigations*, the suspects are Taghga Michael, Myuega Oryiman, Chiahemen Iorundu Tsebee, Terna Kerfefa, Comrade Iorchivir Orapine, Mson Avaa, John Arwa, Terzungwe Mbatsoron, Iorundu Tsebee Abuku and Terfa Tsaper.

The court document stated that they were arraigned on a five-count charge that include criminal conspiracy, mischief by fire, inciting disturbance, culpable homicide and act of terrorism.

In the document, it was noted that following receipt of the petition in August, the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department swung into action.

Reeling out findings from its investigations to support the arrest, the police stated that on April 16, five of the suspects, who claimed to be members of the Benue State Volunteer guard, stormed the compounds of the deceased men.

The police noted that the men embarked on burning and destruction of the two compounds, and gruesomely murdered David and Jonathan in the process without any provocation or justifiable reasons.

It was further stated that apart from the killings, other people sustained varying degrees of injuries, while property worth over N772m were burnt, destroyed or looted.

The police mentioned that accomplices of the suspected killers were on the run.

The court document partly read, "During Police investigations, the ten suspects were arrested and investigations into the matter revealed that, the above mentioned persons committed the offences along with Terylla Tsekohol Terzungwe Mbatsoron, Atume Terver, Iorliam Tertsea A.K.A YAGI, Terfa Atov and Anor real names not known among others who are now at large."

It was noted that the offences allegedly committed by the accused persons violated "Section 97, 329, 116, 222 of the Penal Code Law of Benue State 2004 and Section 4(2) of the Abduction, Hostage Taking, Kidnapping, Secret Cult and Similar Activities prohibition Law of Benue State 2017."

## Suspects remanded

Upon their arraignment before Chief Magistrate, Erdoo Ter, the lawyer representing the suspects prayed the court to grant them bail.

Responding, the Chief Magistrate said she lacked the power to grant the accused persons bail because the offences are capital in nature.

She noted that bail applications for those charged with capital offences like culpable homicide and act of terrorism can only be heard at the High Court.

However, she ordered that the accused persons be remanded at the Makurdi Maximum Correctional Centre, pending the next hearing slated for February 15, 2023.

Reacting, Henry, a member of the family, who witnessed the ugly incident, described the development as heart-warming and said he believed that justice would prevail eventually.

“On several occasions, we were forced to settle, but the family insisted that justice would take its full course. We are happy that it has taken a new dimension and some of the suspects are now in custody. We believe in the power of the media and would want the matter and subsequent developments to be closely monitored. We believe in the judiciary as the last hope of the common man.”