

KILLED ON CAMERA: HOW AN UNARMED YOUTH WAS SHOT BY THE NIGERIAN MILITARY

Reuters and Bellingcat analysed rare video footage of a young detainee summarily slain by a military gunman on the day of a battle against insurgents in Nigeria's northeast. Three experts in international law deem the 2015 shooting a war crime. The U.S. State Department is calling for an investigation. Nigerian officials previously have denied committing abuses in the conflict.

THE slaying of the unidentified young man might never have come to light. But the 2015 incident was captured on a 25-second video obtained by Reuters from two independent sources who said it was taken on an army operation in Nigeria's northeast in a battle against the Islamist insurgent group Boko Haram. The footage was passed around among troops, as videos and pictures of battlefield conquests often are, but has not been released publicly before.

Analysis of the video by Reuters and Bellingcat, a Netherlands-based investigative journalism group, verified that it was filmed just inside the Abogo Largema Military Cantonment, a barracks south of Biu town, in Borno state, on Jan. 14, 2015, around midday. Abogo Largema is home to the 231 Tank Battalion and the 331 Artillery Regiment, parts of the Nigerian Army's 3 Division. Both were involved in repelling an insurgent attack on the military barracks that day, according to social media posts about the battle and three witness accounts.

The uniform of the shooter and the location at the base indicate he was a member of the Nigerian military, likely an army soldier. At least 17 bodies were laid out at the base later that afternoon and captured in photographs that accompanied internet posts touting the military victory. Some of those images were posted by the military itself.

Among the dead was a young man in blue shorts, most likely the youth shot in the video, according to a Bellingcat visual analysis.

The video provides gruesome documentation of tactics Nigeria's military has used in its ongoing 14-year war against Islamist insurgents. It also furnishes rare, direct evidence of an extrajudicial killing at the hands of security forces – one that three experts consulted by Reuters deemed a war crime. Killing the youth in this way violated the Geneva Conventions, they said, because he was clearly unarmed and in

custody, posing no immediate threat to the military. In legal terms, he was "hors de combat," or outside of combat.

The video undermines the Nigerian military's assertion in an interview with Reuters in December that it has adhered to domestic and international laws protecting civilians and others not actively engaged in combat during its fight against Islamist insurgents in the northeast.

"This video captures a war crime, no doubt," said Luis Moreno Ocampo, a former chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague and one of the experts in international law who reviewed the video for Reuters. "It is a willful killing."

<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/nigeria-military-slaying/>