

# Mayhem in Akwa Ibom community

■ Youths invade village, destroy houses, farmland over policeman's death

From JOE EFFIONG, Uyo

**M**rs. Ema Benjamin Solomon Peter sat weeping uncontrollably. Even her elder brothers and sisters who were by her side to comfort her could not help pouring out their own doses of tears.

Anguish enveloped the scene, if not the entire Ediene clan of Abak Local Government area of Akwa Ibom State where a police corporal, Mr. Benjamin Solomon Peter was found dead on his farmland.

Most people in the Ikot Oku Obara village, where the policeman hailed from, believe Solomon was killed on Tuesday last week by some people from Manta village, where the farmland was said to be allocated.

Working on that assumption, the youths of Ikot Oku Obara, Ediene, went into frenzy on Wednesday when the corpse was found. They marched into Manta and destroyed everything they could lay their hands on. Houses, economic trees, livestock and merchandise were their targets. They only stopped when the police began to scare them away by firing into the air.

The distraught Mrs. Solomon told Daily Sun that her husband, who was serving at the Police A Division, Uyo, had told her that he was going to their farm located at Manta village to tend some crops on Tuesday afternoon.

She couldn't go with him because she is heavily pregnant with their second child, the first being about one-and-half years old.

"When he did not return home, I thought that he must have dropped the farm implements somewhere and gone to work since he was on permanent night duty. I had expected him in the morning but till afternoon, we didn't see him. So people decided to organise a search party only to find him dead on the same farmland on which he went to work," the 30-year old widow said as tears cascaded

down her cheeks.

She said her husband was not a troublesome person but a gentle guy who had a humble beginning in life. She noted that her husband lost his parents at a tender age, and as such, was struggling to educate himself and take care of his family.

The wife informed that she was told that the husband had a quarrel with some people from Manta before leaving for the farm which is also situated at Manta, and as such wouldn't know whether there was any link between the quarrel and his death.

"He was a second year economics student at the University of Uyo. Now, they have killed him, leaving me here with nothing. I was trying to learn sewing, but when I got pregnant, he told me to discontinue the training till after delivery. Now how am I going to manage?" she asked rhetorically and burst into another bout of weeping while her elder brothers, who had maintained some stoic mien initially, loudly chorused the wailing.

The deceased policeman's cousin, Evangelist Godwin Peter, who said he was informed of Benjamin's death at his station and had to rush home immediately, corroborated the quarrel angle. But he stressed that Benjamin was a peaceful man who would never hurt a fly.

"In my absence, he was always there to take care of the family. I don't know why anybody would kill him and leave the family in this distress," Godwin said.

He added another angle to the story. According to him, last year, the people of Manta had killed another Ediene son for no just cause, adding that the recent recurrence might have provoked the youths to storm Manta for revenge even though they never killed anybody on their protest mission.

But the people of Manta had a different story altogether to tell when Daily Sun

visited the sleepy but now ravaged community on Friday. The spokesman for the community, Mr Udo Udo Akpan, debunked the allegation that the policeman was killed in a farmland located in Manta, stressing that Benjamin might have been killed by his own kinsmen because the farmland in question is located in Ediene. In his words, the controversial land was a disputed land in Ikot Obong Ediene.

"This is not the first time Ediene people have accused us of killing their people. Last year, they said we killed one of their people and they came here to kill one of our sons, Akparawa Nse Udo-Udo Ikpa, and burnt his corpse here in the village. We did not do anything.

"There is hardly a time that Manta person would go to Ediene and want to return home late that he or she would not be harassed by Ediene youths. Early this year, they tried to kill one Edet Benson Udo. They injured him and he passed out only to be revived later. The matter had been reported to the police. But each time Ediene people molest us, they usually formulate allegations against us to warrant their aggression, but none of those allegations has ever been proved by the law enforcement agencies," Udo Udo Akpan lamented.

He said Manta is a peaceful community that would not want to take the law into their hand. He informed that his community would not even plan a reprisal attack against Ediene "because we believe that the law would take its full course in the latest development."

The spokesman for Manta village vehemently debunked the allegation that the policeman was killed by Manta people because of the fight that ensued between him and one Manta native, Akpan Offong Otu.

Akpan Offong Otu, whose family com-

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L-R: Akpanndem and Asanganeng



The late Benjamin

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pound was burnt down by the Ediene youths on Wednesday, told our correspondent that there was a minor automobile accident on Tuesday where a car rammed into four motorcycles parked by some commercial motorbike operators by the side of the road in Ikot Oku Obara Ediene.

"We, the other cycle riders, confronted the driver, who pleaded with us that his car steering wheel locked up. He even agreed to repair the damaged motorcycles.

"But while this was going on, Benjamin arrived at the scene on his motorcycle and told us the commercial cyclists that we didn't know the highway code.

"I then challenged him that, even as a policeman that he claimed to be, he never had a number plate on his motorcycle. That was my only offence. He came over and slapped me three times while I was still sitting on my bike. It was when he beat me the fourth time that I retaliated and we fought. And one of Manta sons, Kufre Elijah Moses, who witnessed him trying to kill me, stepped in to stop the fight. But Benjamin equally beat Kufre too, threatening that he would make sure that two of us slept in the cell the next day. After that he rode his bike away and I went on with my business.

"We didn't even know that he was going to the farm, and we don't even know where his farm is. We came back to the village to sleep that day in our respective houses. I was taking my wife the next day to her shop which is located at Ediene when I saw a crowd of youths with weapons. I almost stopped but instinct urged me to move away. I didn't even know they were heading for our community to burn down houses. Maybe if I had stopped, they could have killed me and my wife on the spot."

He took our correspondent round their family compound which the Ediene youths alleged burnt down. The invading youths also destroyed economic trees and killed livestock such as pigs, poultry and goats which he said he was rearing as a business.

The Ediene youths allegedly also descended on Kufre Elijah Moses's family compound, burning and destroying everything in sight, thus rendering the inhabitants, including aged parents, homeless. The nearby buildings, belonging to Elder Augustine Iwok Asanganeng, a retired police inspector, and that of Sunday Okon Akpanndem, were not also spared. Nearly all shops in the community were looted by the youth said to have arrived on more than 60 motorcycles.

The two ex-servicemen, while lamenting their losses to our correspondent, appealed to the state to ensure that the law runs its full course in bringing the culprits to book.

For now, the two communities live in anxiety and suspense of further attacks or reprisals. The owners of the property destroyed are left in anguish. The policeman is lying stone cold in the mortuary while his family has been left in quandary.

Right now, Manta community is being heavily guarded by the police, even as the police in Abak say they have not arrested anybody yet in connection with the death of the policeman. But some of those who allegedly committed the arson have now been detained, according to the police.

The state police headquarters, through the Police Public Relations Officer, Mr. Etim Dickson, a Deputy Superintendent of the Police (DSP), has confirmed the incident. But the question still remains, who killed Corporal Benjamin Solomon Peter in his farm on Tuesday?