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Caught down in his prime

■ Sorry tale of youngest Air Force officer killed in Sambisa

By MOLLY KILETE

Flying Officer Duke Linus Toryem joined the services of the Nigerian Air Force for the love of his country, and to defend her from enemy invasion.

He had hopes and aspirations to rise to the pinnacle of his career and make his family proud.

Sadly, all those came to a sudden end when on May 21, members of the Boko Haram killed him right inside the Sambisa Forest where he was on operation to rescue abducted persons kept in the forest.

He was killed exactly three days to his 26th birthday, plunging his family members, including his parents into deep sorrow and pain as they cried their hearts out at his burial in Abuja two weeks ago.

If the depth of pain and volume of tears could turn back the hands of death, the young officer would have made it back to life as all wailed at his burial.

He was born on May 21, 1989 at Gboko, Benue State and trained as paratrooper, and belonged to the Nigerian Air Force Regiment Specialty.

He joined the services of the Nigerian Air Force on his enlistment into the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) on August 16, 2008, as a member of 60 Regular Course, and commissioned Pilot Officer in August, 2013.

When he graduated from the academy where he bagged a Bachelor of Science degree, the deceased young officer was sent on a number of training at home and abroad where he received training on Airborne Course and Commanders Course on Counter Terrorism and was actively involved in the counter insurgency operations against the Boko Haram terrorists until his untimely death.

News of his death hit his immediate family and the NAF like thunderbolt. With the help of people around and some men of God, they made preparation for the burial.

At first the family did not believe the story as the mother said she had just spoken with him and he told her "mummy don't worry I will be back," before they ended the telephone discussion.

And so when she got the news she took it with a pinch of salt until the day of the burial when she with her husband and their other children travelled to Abuja, and got to the National Military Cemetery along the Abuja airport road, when the ambulance bearing the remains of their beloved son drove into the cemetery.

Soon after the arrival of the body of the young officer to the cemetery, accompanied by some of his course mates, dignitaries began to arrive the cemetery for the burial service.

His parents could not bear the pains of losing their first child in his prime as they cried. His mother, Mrs. Kenger Toryem, who watched helplessly as dignitaries arrived the venue, asked the Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshall Amosu, "where is my



Toryem

son, he told me he was coming back," when the chief drove into the venue and went straight to the parents to pay his condolence.

Amosu, who could not endure the wailing of the officer's mother, who could not control his emotion, lost his bravery as military officer as he broke down along other senior officers.

They later went to the father of the deceased officer, Mr. Toryem Udzer, who also wept and consoled him before taking their seats to await the arrival of other guests.

To ensure that it was indeed their son that was in the casket, the parents of the deceased requested to have a last look at the body of their son which was granted as they were escorted by some NAF medical personnel who opened the casket for them to see.

The ceremony that preceding the burial started at exactly 10.04am, when some of his course mates carried the casket bearing the body of their colleague marched in smartly to the graveside and placed the casket on the slab from where the faith service commenced with the

chaplain taking charge.

In his sermon "Where do dead people go to," he said this question is yet to get a definite explanation as no one truly knows where dead people go save for the Bible passage that says the spirit returns to God while the body returns to the dust.

He said many preachers and religions have given different explanations and lies as to where dead people go to and charged those still alive to live worthy lives.

In his address, the CAS said the death of one of its own even though was very painful would not in anyway deter the NAF in continuing with its fight against Boko Haram.

He described the deceased officer as rugged, a brother, colleague and a great hero, who paid the supreme sacrifice of keep Nigeria as one united country.

He prayed God to give the family strength to bear the loss and assured them that the NAF would not abandon them in their time of need.

The body of Flying Officer Toryem was lowered in the grave at exactly 10.41am, after the national flag, his service sword, P-Cap and booths were removed from the casket.

Thereafter, his father took the courage of performing the dust-to-dust ritual, accompanied by his wife and second son, who held his mother firmly and continued talking to her before taking her back to her seat.

Shortly after the casket was lowered into the grave, the Chief of Defence Staff, who was represented by Rear Admiral Austin Oyaga, the director, NAF at the Ministry of Defence, representative of the Chief of Naval Staff, and that of the National Security Adviser, the CAS and a representative of the deceased officer's family, took turns to lay their wreaths by the graveside.

Before leaving the venue of the burial, Air Marshall Amosu, had met with the family members apparently to brief them on the next line of action and by the time he finally left.

