

Gunmen storm Owerri court, free kidnap kingpin

— 28th January 2017

From **George ONYEJIUWA**, OWERRI

What played out yesterday at the premises of the Imo State High Court, Owerri was straight out of the script of the Hollywood octane movie “Hard Way the Only Way” of the 80s, when gang members of one of the most notorious kidnap kingpins in the South East, stormed Owerri High Court.

Henry Chibueze, popularly known as the Vampire, was rescued from the court to the astonishment of the armed squad of the prisons as six gunmen shot their way through, and bolted.

The action-packed scene saw the city of Owerri, the capital of Imo State practically shaken, with sporadic gunshots by members of the deadly gang, who shot their way into the courtroom and snatched their leader standing trial.

It was learnt that the gang had already laid siege at the premises of the court, unknown to the prison officials who were conveying the suspect and other inmates to the court.

Immediately on arrival and as the notorious kidnapper alighted from the vehicle, his gang members opened fire. Vampire was immediately whisked into a jeep and they fled the premises of the court.

During the drama, which lasted about 10 minutes, one of the prison officials was shot dead, while several others were injured. Also shot was one of the prosecution witnesses.

An eyewitness, Emeka Basil, told *Saturday Sun* that he saw the jeep entering the court premises, but did not know its mission, adding that it was when the people in the jeep started shooting that he knew something was wrong.

Another eyewitness blamed what happened on security lapses, adding that an Army checkpoint was located few metres away, while the police headquarters was also few metres away from the court, but that none came to assist the prison officials, who were under attack by the heavily armed hoodlums.

However, the Public Relations Officer of the Imo State Prisons Command, Mr. James Madugba, who later briefed the press, said nobody was killed during the attack.

He said that the command was alerted to the presence of some unidentified persons, which they suspected to be members of DSS.

It would be recalled that the notorious armed robber and kidnap kingpin was on July 26, 2015 paraded before newsmen at the DSS office in Owerri, after being trailed for several weeks and apprehended in one of the hotels in the capital city. He has since remained in the custody of the Imo Prisons.