

DAY OF INFAMY

By NGOZI UWUJARE

IF you are a resident living in Port Harcourt but travelling from that city to other places or from other parts of the country to Port Harcourt, please, beware of the thick forest between Uzohia and Ubima while embarking on your journey. If you can help it, don't take the route during your journey. Kidnappers and other shady characters now operate with impunity on that section of the road.

Some travelers that include female passengers that did take that route recently all had sad tales to tell. Not only did kidnappers strip them of their valuables — smart phones, ATM cards, money, clothes, shoes, they subjected female passengers among them to sordid acts of rape.

The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Inspector General of Police Monitoring Unit, Mr. Benneth Igwe, who revealed this to *Saturday Sun* said that the ugly incident happened on March 18, 2019 when a nine-man gang of kidnappers waylaid and hijacked a 14-seater bus belonging to TRACAS (Transport Company of Anambra State), which was travelling from Port Harcourt to Onitsha, and held the passengers hostage for two weeks. It was a horrible experience they will never forget for the rest of their lives especially the four female passengers of the bus who they repeatedly raped for two weeks while waiting for their families to pay N15 million they demanded from each for their release.

The rescue operation

But the hostages ordeal came to an end when the Anti-Kidnapping Squad led by Edward Shedrack (Superintendent of Police) in conjunction with IGP Monitoring Unit led by Benneth Igwe, in a joint security operation, stormed the forest in Ikwerre Local Government Area on March 28, 2019 and rescued the victims after about two hours gun-battle.

In all, 13 passengers, including the four female victims were rescued. In the course of the operation, the security operatives also killed five out of the nine kidnappers while others escaped with various degrees of gunshot wounds. During the operation, they recovered one AK-47 rifle, one magazine loaded with 25 rounds, one locally made pistol, eight live cartridges, two pump-action rifles and two machetes. The rescue attempt followed intelligence information provided by one of the passengers who escaped from the forest.

Igwe disclosed that the four female victims who were rescued unhurt, during the gunfire, were debriefed before being released to their waiting parents. Since then they have been undergoing medical attention. Two of them, Miracle and Cecilia (surnames withheld) spoke to *Saturday Sun*, on their hellish experiences.

Victims recount their ordeals

Narrating her ordeal, Miracle

Businessman, female victims recount experiences in kidnappers' hands ...As one dies in fight over sharing of ransom money



MIRACLE AND CECILIA

who confirmed while keeping that they were indeed raped by the nine kidnappers. She said that they boarded the 14-seater bus en route Onitsha, from Port-Harcourt before the incident took place at about 1pm. "We warned the driver not to take the route leading through Uzohia but he was adamant," she said. "He got there only to see the kidnappers suddenly appear from the bush, armed with guns and cudgels. They commandeered our bus and drove it deep into the forest. They collected all our valuables and held us hostage for two weeks. They took our phones and called our parents to demand for a ransom worth N15 million before we could be released. During the period of hostage some of the passengers had their hands and legs tied with ropes. Later, one of us escaped from the thick forest. While we were there, the guys took turns in raping us every hour until the police stormed the thick forest and exchanged fire with them. It was in the process we were rescued by police operatives."

Cecilia added that "it was a terrible incident that one should not pray to experience again. After our encounter with them, they tied some of the male passengers with



RETRIEVED CASKET OF THE KILLED KIDNAPPER

ropes, flogged them and demanded for their ATM cards and collected their money. The female victims saw hell: they collected our

phones and started calling our parents and demanding for N15 million from them. They threatened to kill us if the money was not paid

to them. We were beaten, raped and humiliated by the kidnappers. We saw hell. It was through God's intervention that some of the male



THE END



THE SUSPECTS AT THE BURIAL