

NEWSPLUS

Black Thursday in Ilesa

From MUTIU GANIYU, Osogbo

It was like a scene in an American movie. But then, this was very real. On Thursday, February 25, 2010, armed robbers literally invaded Ilesa and held the town hostage. By the time they left, one life had been lost while cash and belongings running into millions of naira was carted away by the bandits.

It started in the morning. Normal activities were going on within and outside two new generation banks located at Isokun, along Osogbo-Ilesa Road last Thursday. Around 11.30a.m, two vehicles - a white 18-seater bus and a station wagon with no registration number, screeched to a halt in front of one of the banks. 30 young men confidently but briskly got out from the vehicles. They were armed to the teeth with glistening, menacing-looking AK47 assault rifles. In a jiffy, they distributed themselves into two groups and took positions in each of the banks which are only separated by a few metres. To scare away any intruders, the men fired gunshots into the air.

Hell was let loose. The ever-busy road and, indeed, the entire Ilesa town, were deserted within a few seconds. People started making phone calls; warning their loved ones to hide themselves. The dare devils overpowered the security men in the banks with ease. It was gathered that they made their way into the strong-room in one of the banks and emptied the vault. Scared customers were harassed and dispossessed of their belongings in the two banks.

"It was like a war situation. The boys operated for almost one hour without resistance. All the people in the banks, including workers and customers, were thoroughly harassed and dispossessed of their belongings. We thought that bank robberies which were rampant last year in Ilesa had become a thing of the past only for robbers to strike in a commando style this morning," Tola, an eyes witness, lamented.

At the end of the operation, one man was killed and 10 persons sustained injuries. The manager of one of the banks was among those shot. Daily Sun gathered that he was critically injured and is now at the Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital, Ile-Ife.

The man killed by the robbers was identified as a Vigilante man who attempted to confront the robbers as they were escaping. Coordinator of Vigilante Group of Nigeria in the state, Alhaji Hussain Ya-Sallam and the commander in Ilesa West, Mr. Augustine Aina, confirmed the death of their member.

Aina told our reporter: "Ropo was shot by the robbers after he had gallantly shot two of them. He was shot at the back and he died at the hospital. Our boys joined the police to put a stop to the robbers' reign of terror. Ropo had two wives and he was buried on Monday. Our group is even more determined to compliment the efforts of the police to reduce crime in Osun State."

Speaking on the incident, Assistant Commissioner of Police (CID), Ebenezer Gbola Adeyemi, said the police responded to the distress call promptly. The Commissioner of Police, Solomon Olusegun, was reportedly attending a conference at Abuja when the incident happened and he directed the Assistant Commissioner of Police in charge of the CID to brief Daily Sun.

"We responded promptly to the distress calls. We mobilized SARS, Eagles Squad and others from Osogbo to compliment

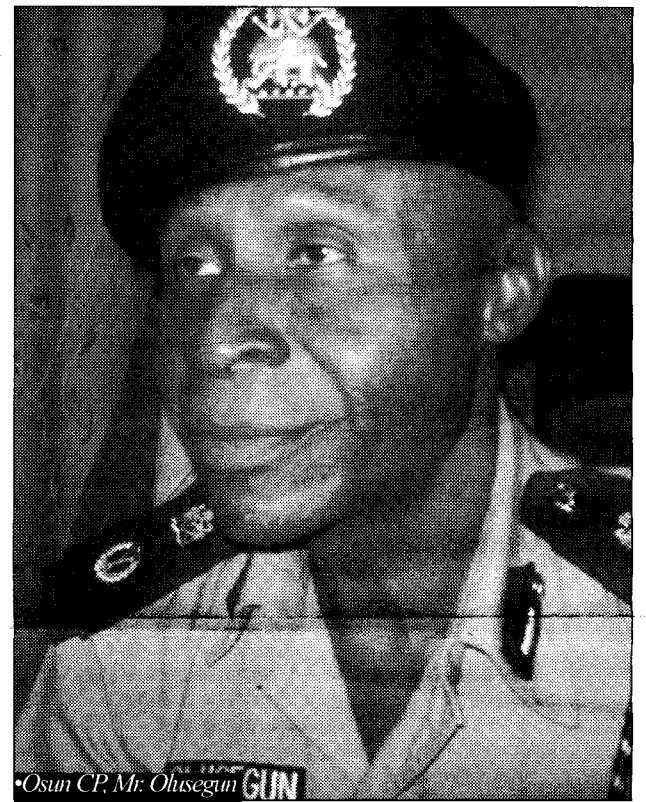
**Two banks
lose millions
as robbers
kill one,
injure 10 in
daylight raid**

policemen on ground at Ilesa. We nearly caught the robbers at the banks. We put all the police formations on the robbers' escape routes on alert and they were hotly chased towards Ijebu-jesa road. We engaged them in a gun battle and they later abandoned their bus and ran into the bush.

Two policemen were injured in the operation, but we are still combing the bush and exploring other avenues to get their identities. We'll soon get them. People should assist us with information that will help us get these criminals," he appealed.

He also informed that one person alleged to be the robbers' informant has been arrested and is currently helping the police in their investigation. The recovered bus has been parked at the police command, Osogbo.

A reliable police source told the reporter that only one of the banks must have lost money in the attack, saying nobody from the other bank has reported any loss to the police. "This is unusual. Maybe the main target of the robbers was the first bank and they only used the other one as a decoy. The bank that has not reported any loss of money also succeeded in activating their special alarm system that linked the bank to the



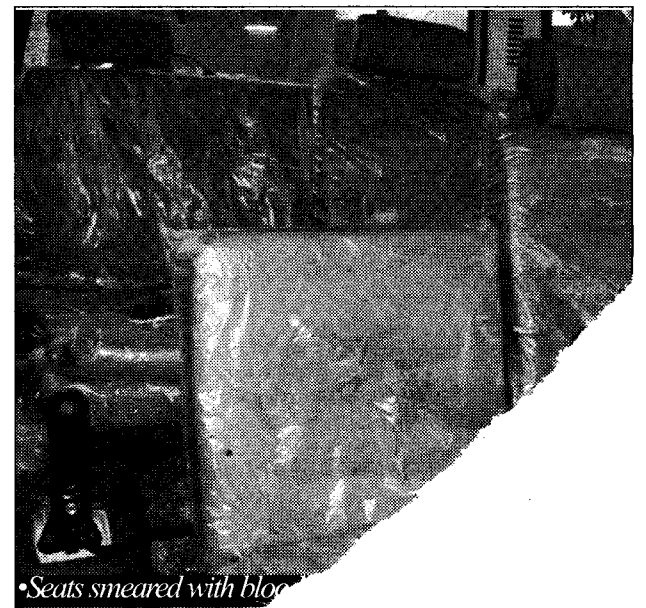
Osun CP, Mr. Olusegun

command's headquarters at Okefia, Osogbo before the robbers left. The other bank is one of the banks that are yet to instal the special alarm system," the police source said.

Another eye-witness told our reporter that the same set of robbers had earlier struck at Edun-Abon before coming to Ilesa that fateful Thursday. Said he: "Around 10 a.m. on Thursday, we were heading towards Ife when the armed robbers, numbering over 20, blocked our path. They ordered the occupants of our vehicle out and collected our handsets and money. Afterwards, our station wagon was driven away. They were young men and they did not use masks. They harassed us thoroughly but nobody was injured since we did not offer any resistance."

Mr. Adeyemi said, however, that he was not aware of any robbery at Edun-Abon.

While urging victims of any crime to always report to the police promptly, he said: "If those robbed at Edun Abon had reported to the nearest police station, maybe the Ilesa robbery would have been foiled. We would have alerted all police formations on the presence of the robbers. Their descriptions and vehicles being used would have been circulated. They would have been cornered, possibly before committing another crime. Policemen are not magicians. People should help us more."



Seats smeared with blood



The bus recovered from robbers with shattered windows and screen