

Niger Delta militants

Another Battle for Port Harcourt

History repeats itself as political intrigues lead to a resurgence of violence in Port Harcourt

Felix Ogbaudu, the attempt by the militants to gain access to the station was repulsed by his men. From Trans Amadi, they made a detour to the Presidential Hotel at Aba Road, gained entrance through a side door and opened fire on the reception lounge filled with artistes billed to perform in a show: "Night of a Thousand Laughs". A security supervisor was killed and many others wounded, including Timi Dakolo, singer and 2007 *West African Idol* winner, who was leaving the hotel after a show. But it was at the Borokiri Police Station area that the harvest of death flowered in blood. The victims, mostly innocent Christians on their way home from the new year midnight service, were cut down in the crossfire between the militants and the police.

When TELL visited the station last Wednesday, the surrounding areas were barricaded and only pedestrians were allowed passage. There were blood stains all around the station. Five cars were riddled with bullets; a car was smashed, while a burnt jeep stood opposite the station. While eyewitnesses said close to 60 people might have been killed at the station, the police confirmed only 11: three policemen, two civilians and six militants.

locations in Port Harcourt before they were repulsed by the police.

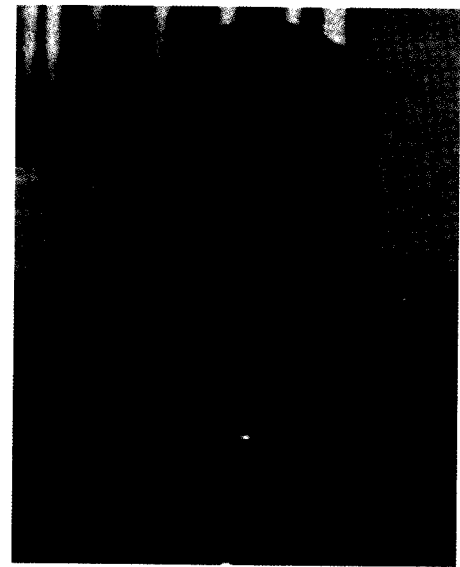
They began at the Garrison Junction where they engaged a police patrol team, wounding two policemen in the shootout. From there, they proceeded to the Trans Amadi Police Station where a shootout led to the death of an inspector of police and a man who the police allege is mentally deranged and was kept in the station by his relatives. According to the state police commissioner,



Tom: Causes mayhem in Port Harcourt

By ANAYOCHUKWU AGBO

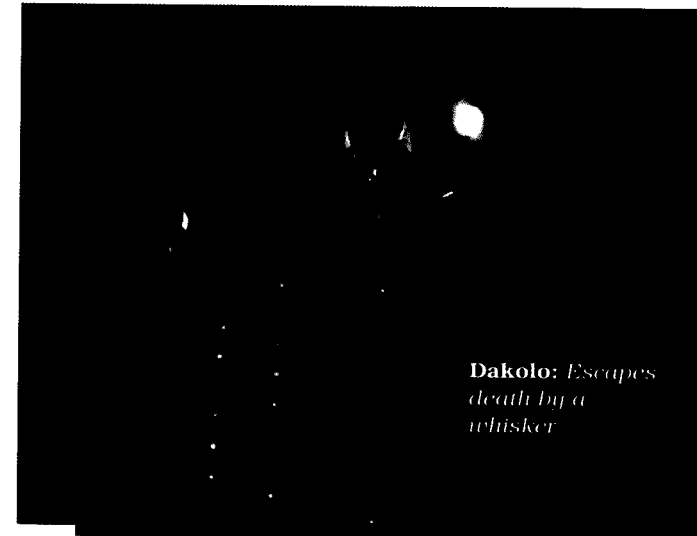
The genie of militancy is out of the box again in Port Harcourt and the whole of the Niger Delta is quaking with fear of the consequences. Ateke Tom's Niger Delta Vigilante, NDV, ushered in 2008 with a trail of bloodshed that may have led to the death of no fewer than 21 people, including four policemen and three militants, and injuries to many others. At about 12.15 am, as Christians were sending off 2007 and welcoming 2008 with prayers and youths were burning tyres and blowing knockouts, NDV militants took advantage of the curfew lifted on December 31, 2007 by Governor Chibuike Amaechi to carry out their first operation of 2008. They successfully carried out attacks on four



Amaechi: NDV wants him to vacate Government House

But a source said, Wednesday, that the militants killed 10 policemen, including all the occupants of an Armoured Personnel Carrier, APC, which he said was demobilised by the NDV militants. The militants are believed to have lost three men, including Tom's personal assistant.

Musa Sagir, a lieutenant colonel and an army public relations officer, said that, by the time the Joint Task Force, JTF, operatives arrived at the scene, the militants had escaped through the Ndoki Waterside, one of the notorious watersides targeted by the Celestine Omehia administration for demolition last December but was spared by the Amaechi regime. He confirmed that only one military personnel was wounded and lamented that the lifting of the curfew afforded the militants the opportunity to invade the city. The militants had earlier attacked Okirika police station on



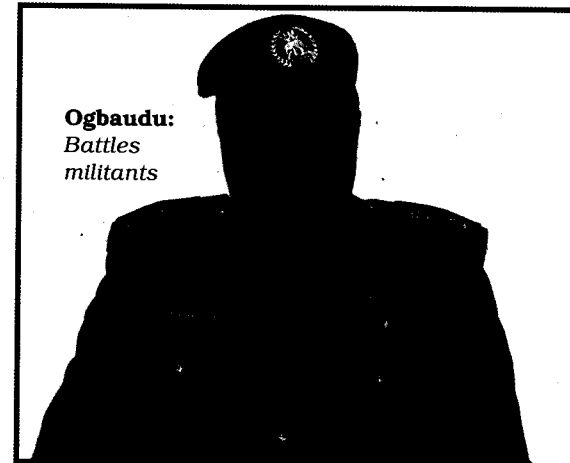
Dakolo: Escapes death by a whisker

December 25. The magazine's investigation shows that the militants might have been on a mission to free their colleagues who were arrested by the JTF in several operations in December and detained in various police cells in Port Harcourt.

On December 12, the JTF carried out a surprise attack on Tom's location at Okirika, destroying most of his belongings. Prior to that, Tom had publicly declared his disengagement from violence and followed it up by sponsoring a football tournament to promote peace in Okirika. He even wrote a letter apologising for his part in previous violence. His spokesman gave the list of what he lost as two houses, two cars, four speed boats, 300 bags of rice, 20 goats, 30 rams, a Mercedes ML Jeep and a Toyota Limited jeep. On December 12, at about 2 pm, the JTF again attacked Tom, bombing suspected targets from the air. After that, Tom said it was an indication that the federal and Rivers State governments were not serious about peace in the Niger Delta. He lamented that carrot of amnesty was a ploy to deceive the militants and subsequently eliminate them serially. Thereafter, he began reprisal attacks which included an attack on NNPC Jetty at Okirika.

But the JTF says it is out to stamp out criminality. Sagir said the task force had uncovered three arms dump at Okirika used by Tom and his men. Similarly, a resurgence of sea piracy on the Bonny Island was allegedly traced to Tom, which his spokesman has severely denied.

Tom says that the mission to kill him is Amaechi's new political project and that the governor has influenced the JTF to eliminate him as a perceived enemy, despite his visible demonstration of goodwill and serious renunciation of violence. Tom is said not to be an enthusiastic supporter of Amaechi's government. A source close to him says he has decided to quit politics because of the raw deal he got from the Peter Odili administration after working for him. It is also alleged that Soboma George, Tom's former second in command turned arch-enemy, who was run out of town by the JTF during Omehia's brief regime, is now working for the government. This has equally been denied. The theory is that, because Tom



Ogbaudu: Battles militants

and Abiye Sekibo, former minister of transport, are friends, he may pose a danger to the state government as Sekibo is suspected to be angling to take over the Action Congress party machinery in the state now that Tonye Princewill is sympathetic to Amaechi. But Sagir told the magazine, Wednesday afternoon, that JTF was not interested in politics but is bent on cleaning the Niger Delta and would continue until it achieves its target.

Similarly, Ogbonna Nwuke, director of press affairs to Amaechi, said, Wednesday afternoon, that the state government was appalled by what happened. On the political conspiracy theory, he wonders

what political value would attacking Tom be to the government. "The issues have nothing to do with politics. We all agree on the common purpose but disagree on the method. The point has been made but the problem of the Niger Delta cannot be solved by carrying guns and (having) free access to illegal oil bunkering... We support the middle course and the NDCC Master Plan". According to him, Rivers State government does not control the JTF and cannot dictate to it what the targets should be. "We want Tom to be like Asari Dokubo and work for genuine peace and have no need for armed struggle," said Nwuke. Onenagiya Erikosima, Dokubo's spokesman in Port Harcourt, said that Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force and Niger Delta Peoples Solidarity Front are not part of the new violence in Port Harcourt, but he admits that Tom was innocent of the allegations being heaped on him by government.

As it is, NDV is making a few demands which it says are supported by the fighting groups in the Niger Delta: that Amaechi should vacate the Government House as he was not elected by the people; that Henry Okah, alleged leader of MEND arrested in Angola, be released; and that all attacks on Tom cease and his destroyed properties replaced by government.

Additional report by KLEM OFUOKWU