

Robberies: 100 Killed and Still Counting...

From what appears to be a lull in their operations, armed robbers have again been on the prowl, maiming, killing innocent people, police officers and dispossessing Nigerians of huge sums. Even churches are not spared. Eugene Agha writes

In the past four weeks, bandits are having field day in most cities across the country, killing no fewer than 100 persons in the process. Several other persons were injured, mostly targeted at financial institutions across the nation. Among those who were cut down by the bullets of these notorious gunmen were policemen posted to banks.

Even though the Police high command in Abuja said it was on top of the situation, the attacks are becoming too frequent. Recently a gang of armed robbers desecrated Cannanland, the headquarters of the Living Faith Church otherwise known as Winners Chapel, located in Otta, Ogun State, during which four banks located within the premises were attacked. Robbers also killed two policemen on guard.

The Canaanland incident occurred at about 11.30 am after about 15 armed men stormed one of the banks shooting sporadically. Those who witnessed the shooting said that customers in the banks were held hostage as the robbers went about their business. The bandits later moved to the other banks in the area, shooting two workers following their refusal to open the vault. One of the staff of the bank who was shot later died before any help could come to him. According to the witnesses, those who were killed attempted to resist the robbers, but were easily outnumbered by the robbers who had more sophisticated weapons.

Policemen who were killed in Surulere, Lagos, were ambushed at NEPA bus-stop along Aguda road. The robbers were said to have opened fire on the patrol van with registration number NPF 9542 B immediately they sighted it. The blood-stained van which the policemen used before they met with their death was however sighted at Aguda police division when THISDAY visited. The van had bullet holes on the windscreen and bonnet.

A few days after the policemen were killed in Surulere, another gang of robbers attacked a bank in Ketu, Kosofe Local Government leaving no fewer than twelve persons, including two policemen, dead, while several others sustained injuries. According to police eyewitness, the incident happened at about 12 pm and threw the entire area into chaos. However, a member of the robbery gang was also reportedly killed in the operation in which the robbers carted away a yet-to-be-ascertained amount of money in their get away vehicle. The money was alleged to have been stacked in three 'Ghana-Must-Go' bags. The armed robbers were said to have robbed the bank in a commando style as they fired indiscriminately. In the process, three policemen on guard at the bank and an adjoining bank were killed. One of the civilians killed was said to be coming out from a drycleaner's shop. An irate mob, in reaction torched the Kosofe Police Post to protest the killings.

Reacting to the attack on the Police Station by the mob, Governor



• Okiro

Raji Fashola of Lagos State vowed that his administration would do everything possible to combat armed robbery, adding that positive steps had been taken towards achieving the desired result. Fashola was said to have stated that the families of the slain policemen would be adequately compensated, an action which drew instant applause from other serving policemen.

This they said had never happened in the history of the police force. They were quick to point at the shacks which families of deceased policemen live after they were allegedly booted out of their apartments in the barracks by those who want it at all cost. The bodies of the victims have since been deposited at various mortuaries in Ikeja and Lagos Island, while those who sustained injuries were receiving medical attention as at press time. One of the dead policemen, whose body was conveyed to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja, in a police van with Lagos registration PF 5423, was identified as Sergeant Elisha Maneh of the Mobile Police 20 Unit.

Robbers also struck in Osogbo, the Osun State Capital where several banks were robbed. The police, for the first time, gave the figure of those who died in an armed robbery operation in the state as five, including a police sergeant. It said that eight others were injured in the incident which occurred at the Ereja Square, on Tuesday, February 12.

A trader at Ereja market square, who was at the scene of the incident, said he saw more than 12 bodies around the bank premises. Another witness said the robbers killed about 15 people. The Public Relations Officer of the Osun State Police Command, Mr. Joshua Olayemi, was

quoted to have said that the robbers arrived at the bank premises between 10.30 a.m. and 11.00 a.m. in three vehicles, a bus and two cars. The robbers, according to him, were armed with sophisticated weapons and were led into the bank by their leader who was dressed in a police officer's uniform and fired sporadically to scare away people.

As they gained entry into the bank, they carted away some money. It was gathered that the robbers also attempted to rob another first generation bank located in the same vicinity, but were unsuccessful. The PPRO, who confirmed that five people were killed including a police sergeant, said that eight others were receiving treatment.

A few days after the Osogbo robbery attack, at least 10 persons including seven police officers were said to have been feared dead in an early morning raid launched by a five-man robbery gang in Ibadan. The victims were reportedly shot dead on a Saturday morning by the armed bandits at Ibadan end of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital.

The spate of armed robbery attacks sweeping across the country, went up one notch on February 12 with the killing of no fewer than 11 persons, including a member of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and school children, when a 10-man robbery gang stormed a first generation bank in Afikpo, Ebonyi State. The killing of the 11 persons brings the death toll of the victims of the robbery operations that took place in Osun and Ebonyi States within two days to 23 even as police investigation into the attacks has been ongoing.

The gang was said to have also carted away a whopping sum of money said to be close to N15 million from the Afikpo bank. An eye witness account said the robbers arrived the bank at about 10.30 am in two V-C Land Cruiser jeeps, and shot sporadically into the air in a bid to scare people away. While about 20 persons are said to be wounded in the operation that lasted till 12 noon, sources said the NYSC member killed was billed for her passing out parade Thursday of that week, as she was said to have carried out her primary assignment, as one of the assistants to the chairman of Afikpo North Local Government Area, Mr. Obinna Agha.

With the attacks on two members of THISDAY staff and others on February 13, in Lagos, there seems to be no hiding place for Nigerians as the men of the underworld are relentlessly on the prowl.

RECENT ROBBERY ATTACKS	KILLED	INJURED
February 1, Port Harcourt	4	---
February 9, Sango Ota	2	5
February 10, Aguda, Lagos	2	---
February 10, Ketu, Lagos	2	---
February 11, Edo	3	5
February 12, Osogbo	10	several
February 13, Abakaliki	11	several