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Police Officers Quizzed over Lagos Banker's Death

By Yemi Akinsuyi and Eugene Agha, 10.03.2008

Barely two months after the murder in suspicious circumstances of a member of THISDAY's Editorial Board, Mr. Abayomi Ogundeji, another killing, that of Chief Alade Odunewu's son in-law, Modebayo Awosika, on Tuesday night is already causing ripples in the police force.

The Lagos State Police Command are at present interrogating policemen attached to the state anti-crime outfit, Rapid Respond Squad (RRS), on patrol of Lekki area of Lagos on the day Awosika was killed.

The deceased, a banker, was shot dead at Lekki roundabout after his car, a KIA Optima, allegedly ran into the police patrol van.

But someone who claimed to have witnessed the incident told THISDAY last night that policemen attached to RRS killed the son-in-law of the veteran journalist, Odunewu.

According to the eyewitness, one of the policemen attached to RRS pulled the trigger on Awosika after he mistakenly ran into their patrol van at the Lekki roundabout and they all zoomed off after the deceased car veered off the road and fell into a ditch.

Speaking with THISDAY over the telephone last night, Kunle, the younger brother of the deceased, also said that after checking his brother's corpse, he saw a bullet hole on his forehead, stating that despite police's claim that he died from an automobile accident, there was no scratch on his body.

He said: "I received the report of my brother's death with shock. He died on Tuesday night along Lekki Expressway. Police claimed that he was involved in an auto accident with the police RRS vehicle attached to Lekki. According to the police, my brother's car hit theirs while on a top speed, somersaulted four times before the car he was driving caught fire. "When we got to the scene of the supposed accident, we found out that the car which was said to have somersaulted several times before catching fire did not have a dent on its body. Not even the glass was broken. Even my brother, who was fair in complexion, there was not a single scratch on his body. The shock of it all is that there is a hole on his forehead suspected to be bullet hole. We are still waiting for the autopsy that is expected to take place tomorrow (today)."

Kunle confirmed that his brother's corpse had been transferred from the military hospital where he was confirmed dead to Ikeja General Hospital mortuary where the autopsy would be carried out.

"We would not leave the autopsy totally in the hands of the police. Our own family doctor will represent us so as to get to the root of my brother's death. We are still waiting for the autopsy report before taking any further step or decision," he said.

Before family members of the deceased saw the hole on his forehead, residents of the Lekki area had pointed accusing fingers at the police patrol team members.

Some of the residents, who preferred anonymity, said they heard the police on patrol on the fateful night shooting sporadically and by the time they got to the scene the following morning, the banker had been killed.

In the police's preliminary report, it was stated that Awosika, who is married to Odunewu's first daughter, Ebun, was killed in an auto accident that involved him and the police patrol team.

Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Frank Mba, said the RRS patrol team members are being questioned over the death, but refused to say that they were arrested.

"As I am talking to you, investigators are at the military hospital where the body of the deceased was earlier taken to. Because of the coroner's laws of Lagos State, we are trying, along with the family of the deceased on how to transfer the corpse to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) for autopsy. As a matter of fact, we will not want to talk about it, since we do not want to create any wrong impression about the circumstances surrounding the case," he said.

Mba said the command headquarters had contacted the deceased family, adding that all policemen along that route on the day of the incident had been summoned and are currently being interrogated by a team of investigators.

Mba, who debunked claims that an independent body had been commissioned to investigate the killing, stated that the police could not abdicate its responsibility to anybody or group of persons.

But, according to the eyewitness, one of the RRS men believed to have pulled the trigger alleged that he sustained injuries following the collision between the late Awosika's car and their patrol van, adding that he was annoyed that after the collision, the deceased did not wait to ascertain the extent of damage to their van.

"The victim, from the look of things was heading towards Ajah or thereabouts and was actually negotiating the turn at the first roundabout when the incident happened. The RRS men drove off with the speed of lightening towards Ajah end of the Lekki-Epe Expressway after they discovered that the man had died," the witness added.

According to him, the traffic was light as only very few people were on the road.

He said those who were around fled as soon as they heard the gunshot. The witness, who claimed he works at the Lekki Phase I Estate, told THISDAY that from his position, he saw that one or two of the policemen disembarked from their van, took a peep into the car, hastily jumped into

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their vehicle and sped off.

A member of THISDAY Editorial Board, Ogundeji, was killed in August around Akowonjo close to a police checkpoint.

Accusing fingers were pointed at the policemen at the checkpoint who allegedly disappeared after the incident but police authorities vehemently denied their men killed the journalist, saying he was a victim of an armed robbery operation.

ThisDay question

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