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THIS DAY

Nigeria: Odi Militant Leader Killed in Shoot-Out

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Yenagoa — Twenty-four hours after being arrested by the police, militant leader, Ken Niweigha - the alleged mastermind of the killings of 12 policemen which eventually led to the Odi massacre of 1999 - was killed in controversial circumstances yesterday.

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The police said he died in a gun battle between his gang who came to free him and security operatives at Odi, Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

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Niweigha had been paraded before journalists Tuesday evening, accused of trying to kill the state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Onouha Uka Udeka, and a team of policemen, coming back from Odi.

But, in a twist, Udeka told newsmen yesterday that Niweigha, who had promised to surrender all arms and ammunition in his gang's possession to the police, was gunned down during another battle between his gang and the police in Odi.

Udeka said a team of police officers being taken by Niweigha to his hideout in Odi ran into a trap set by the gang who opened fire on the policemen, resulting in a gun battle.

At the end of the duel, which lasted several minutes, only Niweigha was reported killed. No policeman sustained injury.

According to Udeka, "He promised to take us to his hideout in Odi where he hid his weapons; we did not know that he had arranged with his gang to attack us and possibly get him freed."

The police boss was silent on how Niweigha got the information to his gang less than six hours after he was arrested. The militant was killed at about midnight.

Udeka stated that the police had planned to cordon off the area early in the morning, but noted that his men put up a stiff resistance and shot back at the insurgents, adding that during the exchange of bullets, the militant leader was shot several times before he died, while trying to escape from police custody.

"This was about midnight when his men went ahead of us to remove the cache of weapons in his hideout and ambushed us a second time same day," he explained.

Udeka said an army uniform was discovered when his men finally got to Niweigha's ammunition dump.

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He said a team of policemen were still keeping vigil at Odi in case of any reprisal, especially as Big Ken's men returned and shot indiscriminately a second time.

"So if they want to come we are ready," he said.

There are fears that Niweigha's death is another case of extrajudicial killing, considering the



circumstances surrounding how he was killed, his role as the Coordinator of Bayelsa State Volunteers in Odi town and his relationship with the Governor Timipre Sylva-led administration.

Udeka had told newsmen on Tuesday that Ken would be charged to court for his activities.

Instead, it was his corpse that was deposited at the mortuary of the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa.

Reacting to the arrest of Neiweigha on Tuesday evening, the state Coordinator of the Bayelsa Volunteers (the state-owned security outfit of which Ken was the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government coordinator), Mr. Sunny Isreal Igoli, said the law was clear that "only security agencies are authorised to carry arms and any other person caught should face the music."

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He said it was in the light of this that a police formation, the Anti Vice Squad, was attached to the Volunteer Agency.

He pointed out the militant was under suspension from the outfit before the arrest, following a report from the State Security Service (SSS) accusing Ken of arms running deals and arms possession.

Niweigha's alleged ambushing and killing of the 12 policemen had engendered the invasion of Odi community by the military on the orders of former President Olusegun Obasanjo in November 1999.

Hundreds of Odi villagers were killed in the invasion.

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