

Killing of DPO, Inspector: How Police sacked Afiesere community

EMMA AMAIZE,
Regional Editor, South South

EVEN if your heart is made up of granite, you would undeniably quiver at the level of destruction that was wreaked on the people of Afiesere community in Ughelli North local government area of Delta State on September 14. Nearly 100 residential apartments and shops were razed while over 5,000 persons have been sacked from the community as a result of the arson. By Wednesday when *Sunday Vanguard* visited the community, only old men and women who could not run because of their frail bodies were sighted alongside some teenage boys and girls who had the four-letter word, fear, audaciously etched on their faces.

Some of the women said they had not eaten in the past five days and begged *Sunday Vanguard* for money, no matter how small, to buy even if it is groundnut and garri to quench their hunger. According to them, they have no place to run to after their homes were razed and consequently, they decided to stay put in the village to wait for death if that would satisfy their enemies. The villagers stated categorically that it was Mobile Policemen from the Delta State Police Command that invaded their community in the evening of Thursday, September 14 in several trucks and set their homes on fire after shooting sporadically into the air to scare away the people. Not even the dead were spared in the madness that was visited on the Afiesere people, as the graves of the mother of Mr. Abel Oshevire, the Senior Special Adviser on Media to Governor James of Ibori and father of one of the Warri-based community leaders were equally devastated.

"I saw them pouring petrol on the houses and shooting thereafter to ignite fire", Pa Samuel Ugbede who said that they came at about 5.30 pm told *Sunday Vanguard* at Afiesere. In his words: "I went to work that day, I came back, I never knew about what was happening but at about 5.30 pm, policemen besieged the village; they were shooting and breaking into homes; setting fire at the same time.

They started from one end of the town and they came to the other end, which is my street, Okwori. I saw them with gallons of petrol, which they poured on the houses. By that time, all those who could run have run away. Some of the people you are seeing now ran away but they came back later to know whether it is safe to stay in the community in the meantime".

Delta State Commissioner of Police, Prince Udom Ekpoudom would not hear of the accusation that the police burnt down the village. He said forcefully that the houses were razed in a communal clash between Afiesere and the neighbouring Ekiugbo community, adding that the combustion was accelerated by the fact that the people allegedly stored petrol in their homes because of the NUPENG/PENGASSAN warning strike. Vice chairman of Ughelli North local government area, Mr. Julius Akpovoka,



•Photograph of a police officer in one of the buildings that was spared by the invading policemen at Afiesere

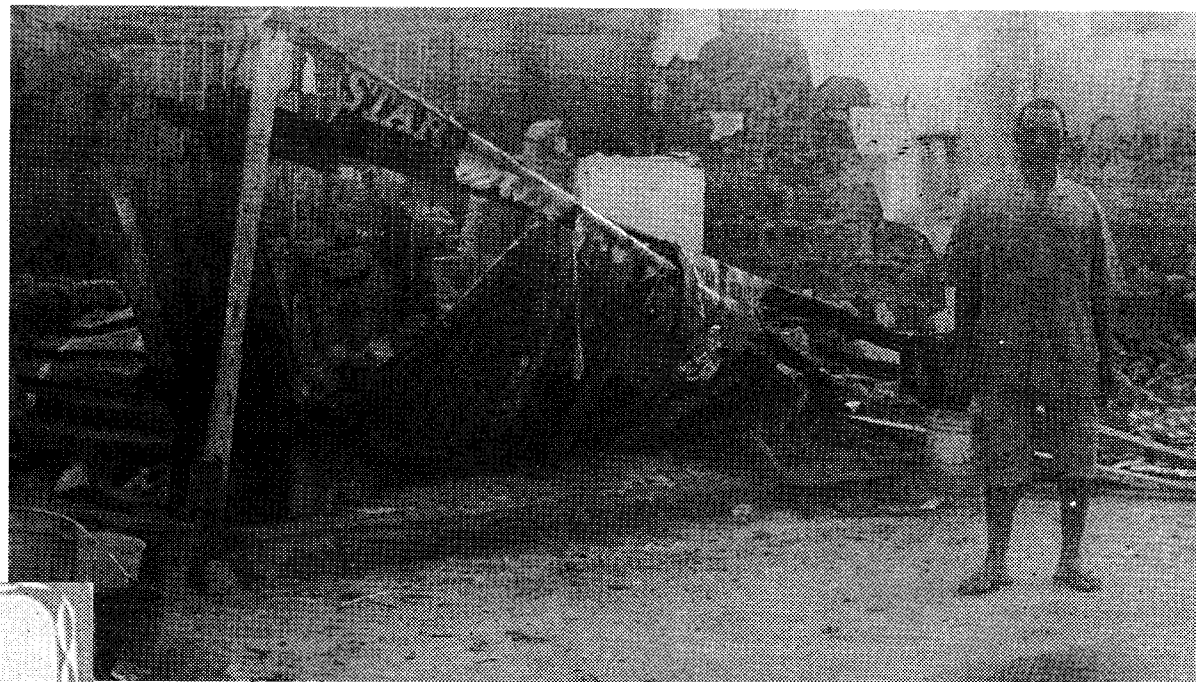
an indigene of Afiesere whose hotel was also burnt in the orgy of violence told *Sunday Vanguard* that he was being terrorized by the police for saying the truth that it was policemen that set the community ablaze. Presently, there are claims and counter-claims between the police and the community and uneasy calm has enveloped the area. But what really happened, *Sunday Vanguard* spoke to some of the victims, leaders of Afiesere, the Ovie of Ughelli kingdom, His Royal Majesty, Oharisi III, the police and others.

Who burnt the houses?
Investigations by *Sunday Vanguard*, which was corroborated by dependable sources showed that the burning of the houses was carried out by Mobile Policemen who allegedly received instructions from above to deal with the gangsters that killed the policemen. They stormed the community from two major entrances shooting menacingly into the air.

Their intention for shooting in that manner was to scare the daylight out of the people. They succeeded in doing that, as virtually all the able-bodied men and women ran for their dear lives. After that, the Mobile Policemen embarked on a destruction spree from house to house. Only the houses that were quickly identified to belong to policemen and other law enforcement agents in the community were spared.

As at the time *Sunday Vanguard* left the community on Wednesday, the families of some of the law enforcement agents from the community placed the photographs of their serving uniformed sons in front of their homes on benches and stools. Besides burning down the houses, the police returned, last Saturday, according to the people to break into some homes that were not burnt to loot the property of villagers.

However, the Delta State Police Public Relation Officer (PPRO), Olabisi Okuwobi, an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) told *Sunday Vanguard* emphatically on Thursday that it was not policemen that razed the houses. She said the villagers set the shanties and mud-



•A building burnt at Afiesere

houses ablaze to cover up the killing of the DPO and Inspector by the armed Afiesere youths believing that the state government would give compensation to those whose houses were razed once they say it was the police that burnt them. Pointing out that some of the houses in the village were not burnt, she asserted that if it were the police that carried out the arson as alleged, none of the buildings would have been spared. Immediate cause of the offensive

Police were provoked into the premeditated action by the cold-blooded murder of the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) in charge of 'B' Division, Agbara-Otor, Ughelli, Nnamdi Ngwakor, a Superintendent of Police and Allison Elias, a Police Inspector by some armed youths, believed to be from Afiesere community. The DPO, according to Commissioner Ekpoudom was cut down while on lawful duty.

His account: "The area commander of Ughelli got information that there was to be fracas, people trying to fight, two communities known as Afiesere and Ekiugbo. Two days earlier, some men from Ekiugbo were alleged to have beaten up a man from Afiesere, a case of assault and because of that, the youths from Afiesere went to retaliate. What they did was not even going to beat up Ekiugbo people, they commandeered very many vehicles including vehicles belonging to Oceanic Bank, blocked everywhere.

"Because of this the area commander asked the two DPOs near him, the DPO, 'A' Division and 'B' Division, Ughelli to send reinforcement to help quell the riot and the DPO, 'A' Division decided to move from the area commander's office with his men and the reinforcement. On the way, they were ambushed, the DPO, one Inspector were killed on the spot and their arms taken away from them".

The area commander, Jubril Aminu, an

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) in his summation of the incident to the senator representing Delta Central senatorial district, Olorogun Felix Ibru when he came calling, last weekend, said the late officers were trying to make peace with the boys when they suddenly sprang up in an attempt to disarm the officers, adding that the DPO and the Inspector were fired from behind by their killers.

Remote cause

Available information indicate that there was a misunderstanding between a supposed ritualist maternally related to Afiesere and a young man, who found the former performing a ritual with a half-naked woman in the dead of the night. The boy regarded as the kingpin of a group of gangsters reportedly challenged the native doctor on the grounds that the ritual was becoming too much. As the argument between the duo heightened, the "intruder" queried why the native doctor would frequently come to the junction near his abode to perform his-called rituals and why the sacrifices were not being done in his own hometown. The altercation soon degenerated into fisticuff during which the juju man was beaten black and blue.

According to reports, the native doctor contacted the youths in the area he was residing but was told that they do not have the nerve to confront his attacker. He was advised to contact his maternal people at Afiesere. The juju man reportedly went to the Afiesere motor-park at Ughelli, where some boys were mobilized on a revenge mission.

We know nothing about the killing of DPO, Inspector - villagers

An elder in the community, Mr. S. Company narrating to *Sunday Vanguard* what happened on September 14 said: "What happened was that there was misunderstanding between some boys at the motor-park and some boys at

Ekiugbo, which resulted to fighting and nobody knew when the fight started. Later we heard that policemen were on the side of Ekiugbo boys but the information was not explicit and that in an ensuing commotion, the police shot one boy dead. And the youths returned fire for fire and instantly, the policemen shot three of them dead. So after that, they ran away.

Then around 4.00 pm, the policemen came to Afiesere, started harassing everybody, shooting, burning vehicles along the road, right from Upper Afiesere down to the town Ihuagbonmwan. So everybody ran for his or her dear lives. In the evening again, they came. When they came they started looting, most of the houses that were not burnt, they forced them open and removed some of the property and went away with them.

Now it is mostly women that are still lingering around. All the men and boys have run away except some of us that are a bit old with our elderly man, Kakichie by name sitting here by my left.

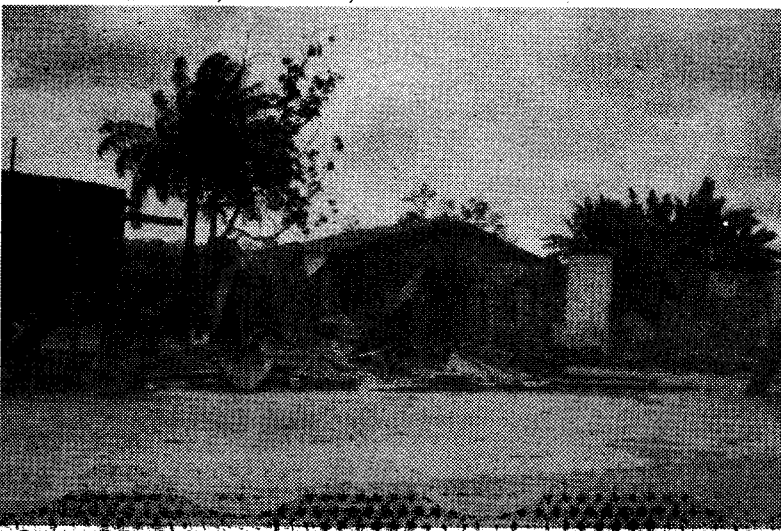
When they saw that the people fled, they started burning the houses

So, Afiesere has nothing with the policemen. The battle was fought at Ughelli, not at Afiesere main town. So the allegation that Afiesere people were storing gallons of petrol that led to the burning of the community is false and an unfounded rumour.

We saw policemen burn our houses - Afiesere elders

Mr. John Akpovoka said he arrived from Ughelli between 2.00 pm and 3.00 pm on the day of the incident where he went to buy materials for his work: "As I was just discharging the materials, I come to hear that there is a fight at Ughelli. In one or two hours' time, the police came from Agbara side and Ughelli side and began to shoot and start burning houses. This is the bag (showed it to *Sunday Vanguard*), which I came with from Ughelli, the receipts of what I bought are inside. As they were burning and shooting from both sides of the town, I had to run into the bush. My wife and children I don't even know where they are now, they have run to different directions. It is because I heard that the deputy governor, Chief Benjamin Elue is coming today (Wednesday) that I came out of hiding. It is the police that burnt our homes and property. I saw policemen burning our houses. They were many. My house was totally burnt by them.

The vice principal of Government College, Ughelli, Mr. Josiah Mukoro whose house was burnt by the police said he was told that some youths clashed with the police and that two policemen and three youths were killed. He said the



•Some of the buildings burnt at Afiesere

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incident worried many people but some hours later, the police stormed Afiesere community in Hilux vehicles and started sporadic shooting between 3.00 pm to 4.00 pm. "When they saw that the people fled, they started burning the houses.

All the vehicles parked were burnt. Afiesere has no previous problem with Ekiugbo. Since the 14th of September, they have been coming here and shooting at random", he added. Pa Samuel Ugbede who resides at Okwori Street in Afiesere said: "I saw policemen with my two eyes pouring petrol on the houses and setting them ablaze. They came with gallons of petrol and I was really shocked when I saw them burning our homes".

The Ovie of Ughelli kingdom, Oharisi III said: "I was in Port Harcourt when I heard that there was problem between some group of youths from Afiesere and Ekiugbo and the one from Afiesere ran to his people, and in the process of gathering themselves together for retaliation, they ran into police hand and instead of them to behave like civilians, they killed the DPO and the Inspector that was coming to settle the matter. That is what brought the matter in Afiesere".

We sympathize with the police – Ughelli Monarch

On whether it was the police that burnt the houses at Afiesere, he said: "When we look at what people say, one will offend the system and you know the system is like that. Government system—we have to take care of it because we are the grassroots government. We will not look at what people say but everybody should know that it is because of what

happened, something can happen. So we will not say why did the people burn houses but what brought the burning; that is what one can say. But everybody knows that what happened is what caused what is going on now. So that is my own view of it. We sympathize with the people, particularly the Commissioner of Police who lost his DPO and Inspector; we also sympathize with the families of the victims and also with my people who died in the crisis. It is not a one-sided loss but what really brought about the death was that there was an argument. I sympathize with them and pray that such a thing should not happen in this kingdom again because it is so painful".

Trouble-shooting mission

The senator representing Delta Central senatorial district, Olorogun Felix Ibru was one of the first prominent personalities that visited Afiesere to see things for himself. He condemned the killing of the policemen and the wanton destruction that followed and sued for peace. The managing director of the NDDC, Mr. Emmanuel Agwariavodo was aghast as to how youths in Ughelli would kill a DPO and an Inspector.

The deputy-governor, Chief Benjamin Elue who was accompanied by the Secretary to the State Government, Dr.



•One of the burnt cars at Afiesere

Emmanuel Uduaghan, Commissioner of Police, Mr. Udom Ekpoudom, director of State Security Service, Mr. Adebayo Babalola, commissioner of inter-ethnic relations and conflict resolution, Mr. Ovouzor Macaulay and others came calling on Wednesday. He appealed to the villagers who fled the community to return home but nothing had been said about compensation to those whose houses were burnt assuring that the police would not arrest them. The deputy governor who inspected the burnt houses said the arson and killing of the two policemen were unfortunate.

Afiesere motor-park or den!

AWe were reliably informed that the September 14 carnage could have been averted if due care was taken to dislodge the boys who were operating the Afiesere motor-park along Warri-Ughelli road. The armed boys are



•A female villager fleeing Afiesere with her belongings

said to have constituted a menace to motorists in the past few months. A concerned villager hinted that the garage was an armed depot and that the police would not claim not to know all this while that the boys were hiding arms and ammunition in that park. "Everybody knows but nobody could speak out because the boys are very deadly", he added.

"It is unfortunate that the police have allowed these boys to set up illegal motor-parks at Ekiugbo, Afiesere and neighbouring towns. They harass motorists and you dare not pass them with passengers without dropping money for them, they would seize your vehicle. Some of them claim to be highly connected to some politicians and I don't know if that is why the police regard them as untouchables until now. One of their leaders is among the three persons that were killed on September 14 after they killed the DPO and Inspector of

Police", he said. From our findings, the state government has to take a definite step towards disbanding the illegal motor parks at Afiesere, Ekiugbo and other parts of the state to avert a replay of a similar incident in future.

Nagging questions

In spite of the strong denial of the police, it was evident from our investigations that it was policemen, and not Ekiugbo youths that set the houses at Afiesere community ablaze. Though, the Delta State Police Command is reasonably justified to be irritated by the cold-blooded and senseless murder of its DPO and Inspector, as well as snatching of their weapons, it was an act performed by some notorious motor-park touts who are from Afiesere and the incidence did not take place in Afiesere main town. The police reportedly gunned down the leader of the gang and two others. They also knew that the boys that engaged them in the gun battle are from Afiesere and that was why they mobilized and stormed the village in the evening.