

Atiku's aide shot dead

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AMID the stand-off between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice-president Atiku Abubakar over allegations of corruption, one of the vice president's aides was shot dead yesterday by the police.

Atiku Abubakar Organisation gave the name of the victim as Victor Okonkwo, one of the State Security Service (SSS) operatives attached to the vice president.

The police confirmed the incident, saying the vice president's aide was killed because he brought out a pistol provocatively during an encounter with the police at a checkpoint along Abuja-Keffi road.

The victim was said to have been driving to Keffi to write an examination at Nasarawa Polytechnic where he was undergoing a part-time diploma programme when he ran into men of the Federal Highway Patrol at the checkpoint.

The three versions of the incident as narrated by the Atiku Abubakar Organisation contradicted that of the police. The statement by the vice president's campaign machinery read: "An incident involving the Nigeria Police and Victor Okonkwo, a bodyguard attached to the Vice president, Atiku Abubakar, has led to the shooting to death of the State Security Service (SSS) personnel."

"Three versions of the story were being peddled on Saturday afternoon, all of them leading to the one inevitable conclusion that Victor had been shot and killed. He drove an 'operational vehicle' which is not marked by a number plate, to Keffi on Saturday morning to write an examination

*•He provoked us
with his pistol
— Police*

at the Nasarawa Polytechnic, where he was undergoing a part-time diploma programme.

"One version of the story says that the bodyguard failed to heed a warning by the Federal Highway Policemen on patrol, one of which officers shot at the run-away vehicle. Another version said Victor had actually followed the arresting party to the Police Station at Keffi. He showed his service ID card and offered to leave behind the car at the Police Station for a chance to be allowed to go and write the Saturday morning examination.

"A source said an attempt to force the deceased into a cell in the station led to a scuffle, in the course of which a policeman's hand felt Victor's service pistol on his body. The next thing that happened was that a policeman reached for a rifle and fired at the Presidential bodyguard.

"The third version of what happened was of course that in the course of his encounter with the police, Victor allegedly brought out both I.D and his service pistol. A policeman, it was said, reacted by firing at him. The deceased bodyguard was both firm and humble at his duty post. He was in his mid 20s and hailed from Anambra State. He had served in the vice president's security for five years. Victor had a huge frame, in spite of his age, which made him an asset in crowd control around the vice president. He was unarmoured.

"Opinion around the vice president last night was that this

may have been an unfortunate incident that may have caught just anyone. But only a thorough investigation may reveal the real reason behind his death, hoping that it may not, in anyway be linked to the tense situation in the Villa.

"The late Victor was accompanied by a fellow student, who may have provided a correct account of how the incident happened but he, out of fear for his safety, had been reportedly taken to a safe custody by good Samaritans, just in case somebody was thinking about eliminating traces or evidence of what happened. By late Saturday afternoon, efforts were being made to transfer the body of the deceased from the General Hospital in Keffi to the State House Clinic, Abuja."

The Police in Abuja confirmed yesterday that an SSS official attached to Atiku was killed at a check point in Keffi, but explained that he was shot because he brought out a pistol provocatively.

A senior officer who preferred anonymity told *Sunday Vanguard* in a telephone chat that the SSS operative was driving his car and, on getting to Keffi, was stopped by a Police Highway Patrol team for routine checks. The official was said to have expressed annoyance that the police could stop him resulting in a heated argument.

He was said to have refused to identify himself while also refusing to produce documents of the vehicle resulting in the police insisting they wanted to search the car. When the furious operative now decided to bring out documents, according to the source, he opened the vehicle and instead brought out a pistol,