

Lagos: A city under the siege of robbers

By Okey Ndiribe

CLOUDS of smoke were still billowing from the burning of Mile 12 Police Post in Kosofe Local Government Area of Lagos when *Vanguard Features (VF)* arrived the scene last Friday. A police armoured personnel carrier with registration number NPF 3007 and some heavily armed anti-riot policemen were stationed in front of the razed post. Another armoured personnel carrier with another group of fierce-looking policemen was placed directly in front of the Mile 12 branch of First Bank Nig. Plc which was raided few hours earlier by a seven-man gang of dare-devil armed robbers. The rear wind screen of a blue car that was parked in front of a building beside the bank was shattered with bullet holes.

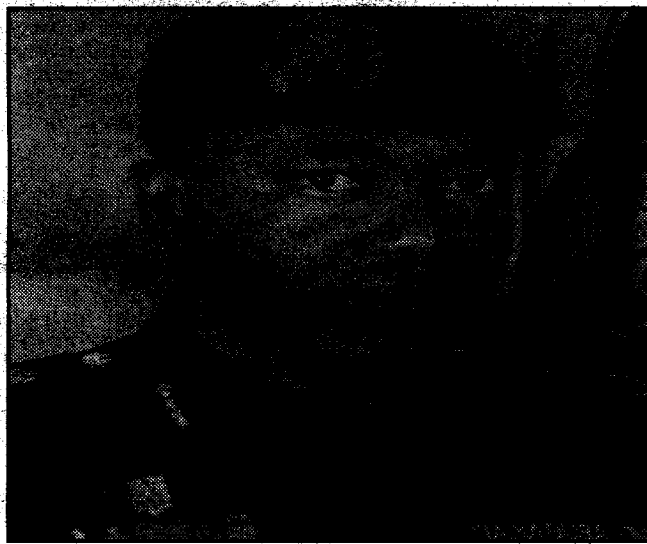
VF learnt that the bandits - which comprised of three women and four men had shot the car that had been riddled with bullets while they were escaping after successfully robbing the bank. It was gathered that some cart and wheel-barrow pushers around the vicinity had angered the robbers by attempting to block their escape route with their wheel-barrow. Wheel-barrow, carts and several other heavy objects had been thrown onto Ikorodu road ostensibly to delay the robbers' escape for police to catch up with them. The robbers were said to have disembarked from their two get-away vehicles - a Mercedes 190 saloon car and a Volkswagen Vanagon bus and cleared the road while shooting indiscriminately. Residents of the area told VF that one of the wheel-barrow pushers was killed during this indiscriminate shooting by the robbers. The bandits were also said to have killed three officials of the Lagos State Transport Management Agency (LASTMA) and one unidentified student while they escaped.

The killing of the wheel-barrow pusher who was believed to have hailed from the northern part of the country was said to have infuriated his compatriots who were already incensed that policemen from the nearby police post could do nothing for about one hour while the robbery lasted. The enraged men quickly mobilised themselves, invaded the police post and set it ablaze. The doors of the cells inside the post were also forced open and all the detainees inside them released. The Divisional Officer in charge of the police post was also seized by the mob and beaten up while he was trying to contact other police formations in the state and call for assistance. He was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was given medical attention.

It is believed that the attack on the police DO may have likely facilitated the easy escape of the robbers who shouted stern warnings



Suspected robbers arrested by the Police.



Abubakar- Lagos State Commissioner of Police.

to the crowd which had gathered while they were escaping. The robbers had noticed that a section of the crowd had attempted pursuing them and ordered them to go back as they (gang) had not come to attack members of the public.

A resident of the area who witnessed the robbers' escape said: "The robbers shouted at the crowd that if they (members of the crowd) had chosen to die in poverty, they (robbers) have chosen not to die like that. They also said they came for a purpose and that the purpose had been achieved."

It was learnt that the robbers had arrived at the bank's premises located within Kayode Fasanya House at 582 Ikorodu Road at about 11 a.m. Policemen on guard duty at the bank were said to have been caught off-guard and disarmed by the robbers who wasted no time in gaining entry into the banking hall where they shot the female manager of the bank. The lady was said to have refused handing over the key to the bank's vault when the gangsters demanded for it. There were unconfirmed reports that she died as a result of injuries sustained from gun shots. An anti-riot policeman who was on guard duty at a branch of the Unity Bank located opposite the First Bank was said to have been shot dead after he posed a serious threat to the robbers by firing at them continuously. At a stage during the

robbery operation, four of the bandits crossed the express road and concentrated their firing on the lone policeman at the bank thereby overpowering and killing him. The bloodbath in the area was said to have continued when police reinforcements arrived the area. A young girl believed to have hailed from the northern part of the country was said to have been shot at the back by policemen who shot indiscriminately.

Last Friday's robbery incident at Mile 12 was said to have been one of several which had occurred in the area in recent times. Residents of the area said in June, robbers invaded a Texaco Petrol Station located at Ajelogo within the vicinity and carted away a large sum of money.

Indeed, residents of the Lagos metropolis have witnessed an escalation in robbery incidents in the last few months. Just last Wednesday, armed robbers numbering 20 reportedly raided a Mobil Petrol Station, Mr. Biggs and other shops along Bale, Wilmer, Idowu and Muyibi streets at Olodi-Apapa area of the city.

The manager of the petrol station, said that he was informed by his security men on duty that the robbers who were about twenty in number came at about 1 a.m. with a bus, car and motorcycle but could not gain access to the office where the safe was kept.

The robbers damaged the

petrol pumps and several other items at the station valued at about N450,000.00. The operation lasted about three hours.

The robbers later went to a nearby Mr. Biggs eatery and several other shops along Bale, Idowu, Muyibi and Wilmer streets. The walls of several shops along these streets were broken with sophisticated equipment. The robbers broke into the safes of many of the shops and made away with undisclosed sums of money.

Policemen from Trinity Police Station, who later went to the area regretted that the armoured vehicle that was brought to repel the robbers had flat tyre.

The Police further said that the armed robbers were shooting from Boundary area of Ajegunle. Three weeks ago, a gang of robbers had in two successive days invaded a popular fast food eatery and a bank located at Isolo area of Lagos.

A new dimension has emerged in the increasing spate of robberies in the nation's commercial capital. Many residents of the city have become victims of robberies while trapped inside the ever-present traffic jams in many parts of state. For instance, penultimate Thursday, many motorists were robbed at about 8.30 in the evening in front of *The Guardian* Newspaper along the ever-busy Oshodi-Apapa Express Way. A staff of *Vanguard Media Ltd.* Mr. Chuks Finian had to abandon his car along the express road while the robbery was on. Finian said he was on his way home but was trapped in the usual heavy traffic jam which began from Toyota Bus Stop. He suddenly heard the sound of gunfire that sounded very close and immediately dashed out of his car. He went to get his car the following day.

Robbery attacks on motorists trapped in traffic jams were so frequent at Mile Two area of Lagos until recently when the new Lagos State Commissioner of Police in the state had to direct Divisional Police Officers under whose jurisdiction the area falls to deploy special police teams to monitor the activities of hoodlums at the sprawling bus stop.