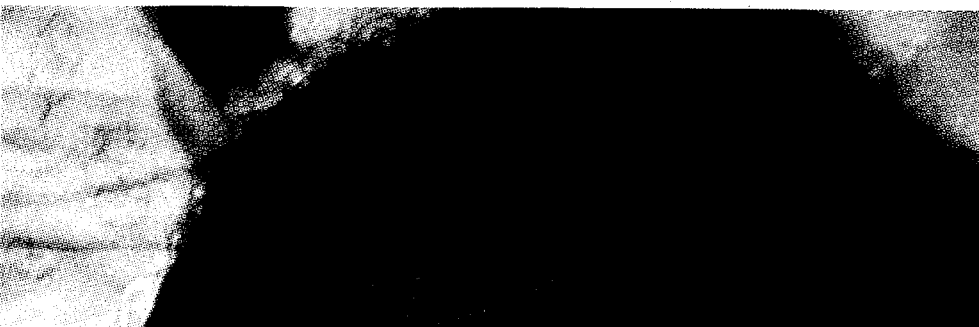


16 killed in P-Harcourt

- *Presidential Hotel, 2 Police stations attacked*
- *7 Policemen killed*
- *Timi Dakolo, Idol West Africa winner shot*
- *Ateke Tom claims responsibility*
- *Petrol tanker explodes, razes 30 houses*



By George Onah &
Jimitota Onoyume

PORT HARCOURT — THE new year began on a bloody note in Port Harcourt early yesterday after gunmen attacked two police stations and the famous Presidential Hotel in the city, killing at least 16 people, seven

of them policemen. A petrol tanker also exploded in the city, razing 30 houses and displacing scores of families.

Some of the victims of the gun attack were on their way back home from new year church service, and warlord Ateke Tom who has claimed

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responsibility for the attacks says he will kill more.

Famous gospel artiste and West African Idol award winner, Timi Dakolo, was wounded in the attack. He was shot as he left the Presidential Hotel after a performance.

The attack came 24 hours after the Rivers State Government lifted the curfew in the city. The gunmen first struck at the Borokiri Police Headquarters, using dynamites which burnt a jeep and dislocated an armoured personnel carrier.

Thick dry blood, apparently of the policemen, smeared the major road, in front of the station, while bullet holes on walls showed the extent of the attack. Damaged vehicles littered the place, causing the security men to block the road, diverting traffic to other streets.

The Trans-Amadi Police Headquarters was said to have lost two men. "One of them died instantly while the other one was carried half-dead to the hospital and we are hearing that he died about an hour ago," one police officer who pleaded anonymity told *Vanguard*.

A massive exchange of fire ensued between the rampaging gunmen and mobile policemen attached to the Presidential Hotel when the brigands attempted to gain entry into the prestigious resort.

Police Commissioner confirms attacks

The Police Commissioner in the state, Mr Felix Ogbaudu, said the militants launched the attack between midnight and 3 a.m. They attacked the Borokiri and Trans-Amadi Police stations.

"At the Borokiri station, three policemen were killed in a shoot-out with the militants. Seven civilians who were either returning from church or milling around their neighbourhoods were also killed," he said.

The Commissioner said the police killed some of the militants, recovered three assault rifles and one machine gun from them, add-

ing that the militants abandoned three vehicles with which they operated.

Ogbaudu said at the Trans-Amadi Police Station, one Police Inspector was killed when same militants opened fire on the station. He said the militants also attacked Presidential Hotel and opened fire on the hotel's lobby, killing a security man and wounding several others.

"We are still collating the casualty figure, but it was indeed a bloody new year eve in Port Harcourt," Ogbaudu said.

Worried by the development Governor Chibuike Amaechi, summoned a security meeting to review the security situation in the state.

A similar event occurred last April when militants attacked the Mini Okoro and Elelenwo police stations in Port Harcourt and killing seven policemen.

In August and on December 25, 2007, militants destroyed the Okrika police station with dynamite, while three policemen were killed when militants attacked the Akinima police station in the Ahoada West Local Government area of Rivers.

Ateke Tom claims responsibility

The Ateke Tom-led Niger Delta Vigilante claimed responsibility for the New Year day attack. Its spokesman, A.E. Pere said: "The Niger Delta Vigilante is claiming responsibility for all the attacks on the military and the destruction of government property and oil installations in the state.

These include the one that took place this morning. Our actions are predicated on the renewed zeal of the Niger Delta people to fight against the oppression and injustices meted to our people by the Nigerian state. This has become our last resort since the government has decided to truncate the peace accord.

"We as a people prefer to die fighting for the liberation of our people than to watch this oppression extend to our children yet

unborn. The NDV will not relent in this renewed quest to fight injustice until the demands of our people are met.

"Even as we fight for this cause, we will start from ourselves. It on this premise that the presence of (Governor Rotimi) Amaechi in Brick House (Port Harcourt) is an injustice against our people because this man did not contest the April governorship election.

"The governorship ticket is not transferable under the constitution, so we demand that, since (Sir Celestine) Omechia's ticket was faulty, the election should be annulled and fresh elections be conducted. We demand a speedy action by the FG to ensure the release of Henry Okar who is awaiting trial in Angola for a crime he never committed.

"The government, through the JTF should, as matter of policy, stop the incessant attacks on our leaders. If these things are not addressed urgently we advise that all foreigners should quit the region, as we will not guarantee their safety," he said.

Army blames attacks on lifting of curfew

The army PRO and spokesman for the JTF in the state, Lt.-Col. Sagir Musa, also confirmed the attack, saying an army captain who was recently transferred from 73 Battalion was caught in the cross fire. He is receiving treatment at the Military Hospital in the state capital.

His words: "At about 12:45 a.m. on January 1, 2008, militants numbering about 22, armed with GPMG, AK-47 rifles, RPGs, Barret rifles and dynamites stormed Port Harcourt city, attacked Presidential Hotel, killed a civilian guard, wounded one person who is receiving treatment at the Military Hospital.

"They also shattered glasses at the main entrance of Presidential Hotel, attacked two Police stations. At the Trans Amadi Police Station, they killed one Police Inspector, one Policeman was wounded and a 25-year-old mentally-deranged person was killed.

At Borikiri Police Station, three Police men were shot dead. But the Police also killed six of the militants. Two civilians were killed.

"At Artillery junction, they injured one Policeman. Some items were recovered from the militants. They include dynamites, arms," he said.

He said the curfew which was lifted only 24 hours before the attacks by the state governor might have contributed largely to the situation because, according to him, it weakened the security situation in the state. "Recent lifting of the curfew might have weakened security situation, and may have influenced the present menace," he said, adding that no group had claimed responsibility. But when told that Ateke Tom had, in a phone interview, said he was behind it, Sagir said they were not surprised.

Sagir said the JTF had intensified patrol in the area. Asked if curfew should be re-introduced, he said it was the responsibility of the state government to do that. "It is the responsibility of the state government. Our role is advisory," he said.

I will destroy Rivers State — Ateke Tom

Meanwhile, Ateke Tom in a telephone interview confirmed that his group was behind the attack.

The interview: **Vanguard: This is Vanguard on the line.**

Ateke: I observe that you are putting your phone on speaker. Well, what do you want?

Vanguard: I want to be sure I am talking with Ateke before I continue.

Ateke: You are talking with the general himself. My voice may be different. For you to believe it is the general, I will remind you that the last time we spoke you advised against violence in the state.

You see, I handed down a seven-day ultimatum to the Federal Government. And I had thought that there would be efforts on the part of government to douse tension. The seven days expired but I did not do anything because of pressure from many people against violence in the state. But I realise now that the JTF wants to kill me. You are aware they came with helicopter some days ago and shot at different places in a bid to kill me. They even killed people in boats on the Bonny route going home for Christmas. They used gun boats to kill innocent people that same time. So it is clear that they want to kill me. We came out yesterday night.

Vanguard: How many places did you attack?

All the places you heard were attacked. And I will continue this attack. Amaechi has given money to the JTF to kill me but they cannot get me. The JTF Commander can't get me. He is a trained soldier but I am a born soldier. So I will fight him till he runs or I will kill him. Since Amaechi does not want peace, there will be no peace in the state.

Vanguard: Hope you know innocent people are being consumed in this your attacks?

Yes. They should ask Amaechi why he wants the innocent to continue to die in the state. Why can't he maintain the peace as governor? I know it is the innocent that will continue to die but they too should rise up and tell the governor to cool down.

Vanguard: After this attack now, hope there will be ceasefire?

No, no. I will continue till they want peace. Me, I am ready for peace. You will remember I spent over one hundred million naira to promote peace in Okrika. I had expected government to support

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30 Kenyans burnt to death in Church

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al standards".

Children died - around 25 in number and four elderly people. And our men and our people who tried to confront them were injured, church pastor Jackson Nyanga said.

In an interim report, chief EU monitor Alexander Graf Lambsdorff said the tallying process "lacked credibility."

Mr Lambsdorff said an independent inquiry was needed to resolve the dispute over the election and called on the Electoral Commission of Kenya to co-operate fully.

The observers say an audit of all the voting returns is vital, and called for results from every polling station to be published in newspapers and on the internet. Four Kenyan election commissioners have also expressed unease at the result, but the government denied any irregularities.

About 400 people were said to be taking refuge in the church, which belonged to the Kenya Assemblies of God, when the attack took place at about 1000 local time.

A pastor from the church, Jackson Nyanga said the people who had been taking shelter were beaten before the building was set on fire. Most of the victims were members of the same Kikuyu ethnic group as the newly re-elected President Mwai Kibaki.

Another eyewitness, who gave his name as Joseph, said the fire

was still smouldering, and that most people had fled the scene. "I am seeing strewn clothes and belongings around and charred remains," he said.

Eldoret, in the Rift Valley, has witnessed some of the worst violence since Sunday's controversial poll and has a history of inter-ethnic tension.

Correspondents say that over the past few days hundreds of Kikuyus in the Eldoret area have been taking shelter in churches and around the town's police station.

The Kenyan Red Cross said at least 70,000 people have been displaced in the Rift Valley area as a result of the unrest, describing it as "a national disaster".

At least 160 people were killed across Kenya after the election result was announced on Sunday, according to the Red Cross, though the numbers are expected to rise after continued violence on Monday.

Mr Kibaki's challenger, Raila Odinga, backed by the Luo community, said that if fresh killings were taken into account, the total would likely be about 250 or "slightly more."

UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown has again urged Kenya's political leaders to talk, and said: "The violence must be brought to an end."

Doubts on polls

EU observers said the country's

election was flawed. "They were marred by a lack of transparency in the processing and tallying of presidential results, which raises concerns about the accuracy of the final results," the EU team said in a statement.

According to the EU, in at least two constituencies - Molo and Kieni - the results that were announced did not reflect the number of votes cast.

EU observers say they heard the voting figures being announced in Molo itself, but when the same results were announced again in Nairobi, the number of votes for Mr Kibaki was significantly higher - by 25,000.

Four of the 22 Kenyan election commissioners have also expressed doubts about the veracity of the figures giving President Kibaki victory by 200,000 votes.

But Finance Minister Amos Kimunya denied his party, the ruling PNU, or the government had been involved in rigging the poll.

He told the BBC: "I have no evidence that they were rigged. Anyone who has any information that they were rigged in one constituency or the other, or overall, let them subject it through the legal process."

Mr Kibaki was declared the winner on Sunday after a controversial three-day counting process.

His challenger, Mr Odinga, said he was robbed of victory by alleged fraud.

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this peace process but they want my life. I will fight Amaechi since he does not want the state to have peace. I have many people to kill.

Vanguard: Are you not worried that many innocent people are dying?

It is not my fault. If I did not want peace, I would not have been seeking peace in Okrika with several millions of naira. See how they have come to destroy Okrika.

Residents call for curfew

Many residents of the state have called on the state government to re-introduce the curfew but that this time it should begin from 10pm. They wondered why the government hastened to lift the curfew when all signs showed clearly that the security situation was still not good.

Petrol tanker explodes, 30 houses razed

In the other tragedy, a petrol tanker fell on its side, spilling its content which then set about 30 houses on fire. Scores of families were subsequently displaced and property destroyed.

Vanguard gathered that the tanker driver was being chased by some policemen attached to a task force.

Members of the task force, who the driver was escaping from, could not be found and the driver was said to have vanished as he noticed the impending doom, after his truck fell and sparks of fire emanated from the driver's cabin.

Trouble started when the vehicle attempted to negotiate a sharp bend at top speed, only

for the content to sway the vehicle, causing it to fall on its side.

Witnesses said there was an explosion at the Mile Four zone, triggering pandemonium with people running in different directions for dear life.

The rage of the inferno outpaced the combined efforts of the Agip Oil and Rivers State fire fighters who rallied and battled the surging flame from causing a catastrophe in the heavily inhabited community.

Although no life was lost, some of the residents who braved it and attempted to retrieve some of their belongings were burnt, some seriously and have since been hospitalised.

One of the victims, Mr. Victor Nzuma, 82, a pensioner, said he had lost his house and everything he had lived and worked for. "Even my pension certificates and everything about my life has gone with the fire," he said.

Another man who spoke in tears said: "I was sitting in my veranda and my family was in the parlour, watching TV. All of a sudden, I heard a heavy noise and before I could look out to see what was happening, this whole place had been set ablaze. Fuel was pouring from the trailer and before I knew it, smoke had taken over everywhere.

"I started struggling with my family to get out, my wife and my children were struggling to go over the gate, but no way. Eventually, God saved us, we succeeded in opening the back-yard door and we ran out through there. Meanwhile, as we were running out, fire was pursuing us," he said.

There was also a young man, Chigozie, who started behaving strangely and lost consciousness. He was said to have lost N300,000 in cash and items purchased recently for his wedding which comes up in about two weeks."