

B-i-z-a-r-r-e: How we kidnapped, killed Chinese expatriate, Innocent Orji confesses

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THE alarming rate of violent crime, especially kidnapping, in the country in recent times, particularly in the South East has compounded the already frightening insecurity situation in the area.

In 2007 at a mild stage of kidnapping, a black and two Chinese expatriates brought into the country to enforce the local manufacturing of vehicles, courtesy Innoson group, were kidnapped by suspected members of MASSOB.

But unfortunately one of the Chinese died in the process. The suspected kidnappers quickly buried his corpse some where in Edah, Afikpo South believing that it was over, not knowing that nature has a way of catching up with the evil men, until recently when their kingpin, Innocent Orji was apprehended in Onitsha by the Police.

His arrest in February this year led to a great revelation such as how Feng died, who was behind their operations and many more. Both the management of Innoson roused for justice just as they have protested that there were plans to sweep the facts of the matter under the carpet.

However, the kingpin Orji in this session before the police confessed a blow by blow account of how their operations were executed. Excerpts:

You were a leader of the gang that terrorized the Nnewi and environs which led to the death of a Chinese national can you narrate what transpired?

I am Innocent Orji by name, popularly known as "General". I started with the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). Uwazuruike made me the general commandant when we buried Gabriel Ogu at Mbaise, in Imo state. I was in-charge of the parade.



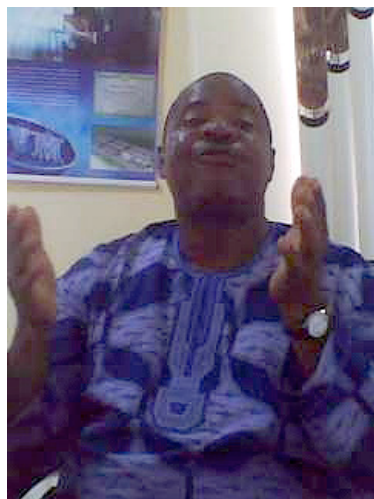
Innocent Orji: Haunted by his deeds.

He was sending me from one province to another. When he was arrested he called on us to make some violent noise so that the federal government of Nigeria will release him, that was when we scattered from our different camps in accordance to his instructions. So, from custody he gave us directives on how to start our operations. So we started by moving around looking for how to realize some money to back up our operations. Anambra was our early port of call.

From Nnewi we relocated to our Edah camp, in Afikpo South Council area of Ebonyi State. So at the camp, one of my boys known as Ejior asked me how much Ogbuawa gave to us and I told him that Ikechukwu brought N400,000 from the traders. He said it was untrue and told me the true situation, that Ogbuawa gave us N1million to support our activities. So I was angry and confronted Ikechukwu to produce the balance.

When he could not, I threatened to abduct Ogbuawa to explain the true situation. So at that point I detailed Ejior to get hold of Ogbuawa since he knew almost everything about Nnewi. So when they brought him, he confirmed he gave us N1million. So Ogbuawa asked me what he could do to regain his freedom.

I demanded for N50million ransom from him to enable us build our camp. He complained of not having enough money but promised to offer N20million. We accepted it but he went further to tell me that he (Ogbuawa) will not be the only person that will be kidnapped in Nnewi, that there are lots of other rich businessmen who can help us financially but I told him that I was not interested, that I abducted him (Ogbuawa) just to confirm the actual amount he gave to us.



•Onigwe: Is he a culprit ?

So, he (Ogbuawa) told us that he will help us the more if we do what he asked us to do. So he gave me seven names. But I can only remember few, Chief Executives of Innoson group, Irotec Company, Capital Oil etc and promised to give us 5 motorcycle for our operations, with a power generating plant and pledged more if we get these people. We became motivated, but before we set out we contacted our leader Uwazuruike on what next to do so he asked us to release Ogbuawa and ask him to engage some media for an aggressive media report, calling on federal government to release him (Uwazuruike) from the custody.

So we released him but told him to tell the world through the media that we kidnapped him to protest the arrest of our leader so he promised to do that and was allowed to go. When he regained his freedom he did so much work in the media.

After that, I then directed Ejiofor to proceed to Nnewi to fetch Innoson. So Ejiofor and his group left the camp and landed in Nnewi in the night and according to him (Ejiofor) they slept in one primary school, I can't remember the name. The next morning at about 9.00am they drove into Innoson group of Company but unfortunately Innoson was not in the office so they took the two Chinese expatriates and one black man known as Sylvester Onigwe (a.k.a Isiocha). So they brought them back to our camp.

On arrival, Ejiofor called Ogbuawa informing him that they missed Innoson but got his white men. Ogbuawa queried him and asked him to go back for Innoson later. Shortly after that, Ogbuawa called my phone asking me how and why we missed Innoson, so I explained to him that I was not the one that led the operation, he now directed that we return for Innoson.

At that point, I raised my voice at him and told him to stop commanding me, that with these ones, Innoson will bring money.

Later, after some negotiations Innoson brought N10 million but Isiocha promised us that if we release him, he will go and facilitate another N10 million. So we allowed him to go. We were still waiting for his return with the money when soldiers invaded our camps. It was a very tough combat with them. But we succeeded in escaping with one of the Chinese Eric.



•Ogbuawa: Is he a culprit?

After that encounter I handed over the white man to my second in command known as “Incredible” and left with three of my men to look for what to eat.

On getting to Ohafia, in Abia State, the army cut us off. While we were away a report came from my men that one of the white man Feng was dead due to severe cold from a three day constant rainfall. He developed severe cold and died because we had no drugs to take care of him. We did not kill him.

Then, how did he die ?

He died out of cold. So after, one of my men known as incredible took the body and buried him in Edah thick forest. Shortly after that the Police arrested me. After some time the police arrested me and questioned me on how we can exhume the body of the Chinese so I took them around the area since I did not know exactly the point he was buried.

On getting there, incredible had taken to his heels. So I promised the police that we could trace the particular point if I am allowed to discuss with incredible on phone.

So with that and the assistance of some people in the village we found where the Chinese was buried. They searched for the grave for about four days. I had about 28 boys, who were members of my gang. I do pay them N20,000 monthly and shouldered their responsibilities from the ransom we collected from people.

At the initial time our major sponsor was MASSOB. I am saying all these because I know I have sinned against humanity, against God and against the society. I know that I don’t deserve to live. But I only pray that government should temper justice with mercy.

How kidnappers beat police check points — Victim

One of the victims in the Innoson Group kidnap saga, Mr Sylvester Onigwe who survived the attack has expressed worries over the level insecurity in the country.

In this interview session he narrated his ordeal in the hands of his abductors and subsequently, cried for justice to prevail now that the culprits have been arrested. Excerpts:

You were among the three people kidnapped by some hoodlums in 2007 at Innoson vehicle factory what was your experience?

My name is Sylvester Onigwe. On the 17th day of March, 2007, at about 9:30am, at the Innoson group new motor plant located at Nnewi, Anambra.

At about this time the some kidnappers struck in land Rover jeep. They drove across our factory but quickly reversed into the premises. I was sitting right in front of the factory when they came in and

surrendered everybody around there with guns. They threatened to kill us if we moved so we helplessly stood still. So they came closer and asked me after our Chief Executive Innocent Chukwuma (Innoson). I told them that he was not in the office at the moment.



•Feng Shenyi: Died in the hands of his captors

So they demanded for the expatriates, Feng Shenyi and Eric Niu Guiqiang while we were talking in front of the office, I didn't know that some of them had gone through the other door to pick the Chinese. When they brought them down stairs to where I was, they quickly seized my phones and forced three of us into their jeep.

We drove for about four hours before we got to the final point where we came down and were matched into very thick forest. They started interrogating us after which they tortured me to an extent that I fainted more than twice.

Some hours later I recovered, they asked me if I could call Innoson and I replied in affirmative. So they brought my phone. Once I established contact with Innoson they took the phone from me and started demanding for ransom of N200million.

After their discussion with Innoson, they told me that he was unserious with them because he only offered N10million. So the situation became worst.

There was no hope of releasing us from their hideout. I spent 25 days with them. One of the days after answering phone call they went into serious jubilation, so I thought my people had responded but when there was no move to let us go I started asking questions and they told me that it was not my people that called rather Pius Ogbuawa, an Nnewi based businessman.

At that point, I became inquisitive and attentive. So they said he promised to give them some kind of support such as motorcycles, generator and in couple of hours they brought those motorcycles into the bush. The group was organized such that they have a special squad that receives either their ransom or even gift from the public without implications.

So I told them to allow us go that I will talk to my chairman i.e. Innoson to also provide support for them. I told them this believing they could allow us go but rather they intensified the beating on me, beating me with flats sides of their knives. At a time when I was crying, one of them came to me and asked me if I knew Ogbuawa. I said yes. He advised me to tell my people any other time we speak to reach out to Ogbuawa to intervene in the matter.

In one of the occasions I called my wife and asked her to go and beg Ogbuawa to effect my release. Unfortunately the boys didn't give me another opportunity to talk with her again until I was released but she told me that when she got Ogbuawa on phone he said it was not in his powers to release but that Innoson was already doing something in that direction.

According to my wife, Ogbuawa asked her if she knew how much ransom already paid, she said N5million so Ogbuawa flayed up and asked if it was for one person or for three of them. Towards the period they released me some of them became friendly as we were chatting they told me that Ogbuawa was very patriotic, that he has sympathy for Biafrains and that is why they always come to his rescue any time he is in trouble.

When I was released, the Chinese were kept back, may be for me to go get the ransom. When I came out of their bunk and told my chairman, Innoson, what happened, he petitioned to the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo who quickly ordered that some police, military joint team should take over the

matter.

So the police team struck following a tip off and rescued Eric but the kidnappers escaped with Feng whom we learnt later died in the bush. So since then we have been seeking for justice. We demand for justice. It will be very painful if truth is swept under the carpet.

These are expatriates who came in to assist us stabilize the new vehicle factory. Their other brothers are with us here threatening to return to china if nothing serious is done for justice to prevail. They now feel insecure.

Without them, the made in Nigeria motor project will be a mirage. When the overall boss of the gang, Mr. Innocent Orji known as the general was arrested by security agents, he confessed being behind the atrocities. The Chinese got so upset when they sighted the person who allegedly was responsible for the death of their brother moving freely. We are only asking the federal government not to allow the matter be swept under the carpet because no body is above the law.

While in their hideout, how did you cope with feeding and other daily needs for 25 days?

Well we were not talking of food, when you encounter such a situation; fear of death will make you loose appetite for food. Their food was nothing to write home about because they were about 200 in number inside the bush. All I could remember was that they had India hemp, Gin and other hard drugs in abundance. After smoking taking they became more hardened and violent.

Often times they asked me to open my mouth and they put gun in my mouth, threatening to blow my skull. It was like a foreign movie.

What was their camp like?

It was a very thick forest very far away from the villages. In their camp they had a tent which covered us partly from the rains. Through out my stay there. I didn't see even a single woman around them, they had native doctors in the camp who prepared their charms made sacrifices, cut parts of their bodies to put charms for protection and treat them with herb when they are sick. They also do adoration every day, holding morning devotion. They initiate new members with marks and gives them Bibles and knife.

What were other activities they engaged in within the camp?

They sang, shoot indiscriminately because if you shoot from there people in the nearby villages may not hear the sound. It is very far away from where they live. Some times of the evening, from about 9:30pm, one of their top officers will select a few and leave the camp to somewhere for operations and will return before day break. Darkness did not mean any thing to them though they had a small power generating set which only supplied light to the general's bunk.

In the camp, you don't go out or move out of your corner or discuss with any body. If you want to ease yourself two people, well armed will be detailed to escort you. I also observed that majority of them were youths and enlightened enough. Some times they quarrel amongst them with voices rising but once their general shoots his gun every where becomes quiet.

What do you think could be a possible solution to the problem of kidnap in Anambra and the entire country?

The possible solution is to beef security in every corners of the state, provide adequate fire arms to law enforcement agents because these boys operate with sophisticated weapons that is capable of sacking a village within few minutes.

It is also important for the security agents to be careful during its recruitment not to employ the bad eggs that will corrupt others. They should monitor already existing officers because from what transpired, those boys had contacts with professionals regularly. Again, parents also have a big role to play here. They should monitor the companies their children keep, though their peers could influence them at school. But there is great need to keep their eyes on their activities from time to time.

Another possible solution is for the governments to take seriously issues of unemployment especially for graduates. The language and operations of these boys were so organized and professional. There's need to engage the youths in meaningful venture that could keep them busy and out of nefarious activities.

You drove with them for hours on the tarred roads, how they beat the police check points?

Ahhh! That one is very easy for them. They operate with tinted glass vehicles which had customs number plates and sirens. Once they get closer to a police check they will switch on the sirens and police will immediately give them express pass without asking questions.

Infact I did not sense any place police stopped us for search. There is need to search thoroughly any suspected vehicles on the high way. That is why they were posted.



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