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"Making N1b will make this my last robbery"

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The life and times of TK, the militant, pipeline vandal and robbery kingpin felled by police bullets in what turned out to be his last robbery.

By Ifeanyi Okolie

Place of birth, areas of operation

He was relatively off the radar of security operatives in Lagos State until last September, when he organized the abduction of the wife of the Deputy Managing Director of the Sun Newspaper, Steve Nwosu in their apartment in Amuwo Odofin area of Lagos State.

Toweki Joseph, a.k.a. TK, a 32-year-old native of Arogbo in Ese Odo Local Government Area of Ondo State, until last Thursday, was the leader of one of the most notorious and dreaded criminal gangs terrorizing states within the South-West and South-South regions of the country. Members of his gang who are mainly Ijaw natives and based in the creeks of Ishawo in Ikorodu and Ijegemo areas of Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Area of Lagos State, were said to be responsible for most of the bank robberies that took place in Ondo and Lagos states in 2015, that saw several residents including security personnel lose their lives during the operations. They were also linked to the abduction and killing of several security operatives in Ikorodu area of Lagos State.



Late TK

Waterloo

Last Thursday, TK and 10 members of his gang met their Waterloo when they attempted to rob some banks and bureau de change operators at Seme, a border town between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. Their target was to make up to the sum of N1 billion.

It was gathered that TK, who lead a 17-man gang was ambushed by the security operatives when he arrived Seme through the waters in four speed boats and was armed with heavy assault rifles, such as two General Purpose Machine Guns, GPMG, seven AK-47 and 49 rifles, two LAR rifles and one automatic pump action gun.

Sources disclose that operatives of the Inspector General of Police Special Intelligence Response Team, SIRT, an elite squad of the Nigeria Police Force, newly established by the current IGP Solomon Arase and trained to combat terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery and other heinous crimes within country, gathered an intelligence indicating that TK and his boys were planning to carry out a large scale robbery on banks and bureau de change at the Seme Border. Unlike in the past when such intelligence was generated by the SIRT and passed on to the Lagos State Police Command to act on, the SIRT operatives were deployed to Lagos State by Arase and they also alerted the Nigeria Customs Service, the Border Patrol Unit of Nigeria Police Force and men of the Intelligence Team B of the Inspector General of Police Special Task Force on Anti-Pipeline Vandalism.

Crime Guard gathered that 72 hours before the operation, the Lagos State Police Command deployed men of its Special Anti-Robbery Squad, SARS, their counterparts at the Area K Command and the Seme Police Division to protect the banks and bureau de change at the operator, while the policemen attached to Border Patrol and their counterpart at Anti-Pipeline Vandalism were deployed into villages around the border.

Gang member assures on the N1 billion target

Crime Guard gathered that 48 hours before the operation, the SIRT operatives, while acting on its intelligence, arrested a driver to a popular bottling company in Lagos, who was contracted as a member of the gang to

help them ferry rifles, ammunition and explosives for the operation. The driver who was identified as Jonson Chukwuma, was picked up at the premises of his company at Ijora area of Lagos and when he was interrogated, told the police that he was contacted by one Ozoremna Obi, a.k.a. OZ, who he said resides in Seme to carry the arms, ammunition and explosives to the border so as to beat police check points. He told the operatives that OZ promised to reward him handsomely if the job was successful but he declined, thinking it was risky and it could get him into trouble. Chukwuma then took the SIRT operatives to Seme where they caught OZ in a hemp joint where he was smoking.

The hemp dealer at the joint was also arrested by SIRT operatives. During interrogations, OZ confessed and told the SIRT operatives that he and one of his friends identified as Ifeanyi were the informants to TK and gave the idea of the job to TK. He explained that after conducting his surveillance around the banks and bureaux de change at the shops, he was confident that they would make as much as one billion naira if the job was successful. He added that to convince TK about the job, he told TK not to give him his own share of the loot if the money was not up to N1 billion. He added that TK told him that it would then be his last robbery if they succeeded.

OZ also explained that TK wanted to come by road and escape through the waters and he wanted a truck to bring to Seme the arms, ammunition and explosives that would be used and he told him that it would be too risky, but TK insisted.

He said he contacted Chukwuma to do the job for him, but later he brought in Ifeanyi to explain to TK that coming by road could be too risky due to heavy presence of security operatives on the road and he urged TK to come through the waters. He said TK accepted and promised to call him when he

left his camp for Seme.

Hours before death

Crime Guard gathered that Seven hours before TK met his Waterloo, he called OZ while he (OZ) was in police custody, and said he heard he was arrested and OZ was asked to tell him that he was picked up by policemen from Area K Command who raided the joint where he was smoking hemp and he was detained for a night and he paid N1000 as bail. TK then told him not to worry, that he was on his way and after the operation, he would be well rewarded.

Five hours later, OZ got another call from TK asking him to join them by the waterside in Seme with a motorbike, so that he would lead them to the banks as they were not familiar with the areas, but the SIRT operatives asked him to tell TK to come to land and TK refused. But while he was thinking of what do, TK was said to have moved closer into Seme and birthed close to Custom Barracks.

Unknown to him, he was moving into an ambush. The custom officials on guard at the barracks on sighting TK and his men on the water, opened fire on them and they went into different directions. 13 of them, including TK, who were on three speed boats ran into Poturume, a village between Nigeria and Benin Republic, and they had a clash with policemen from the border patrol unit, backed by the Intelligence Team B of the Anti-Pipeline Vandals. Crime Guard gathered that 11 of the suspects including TK sustained fatal bullet wounds before they were handed over to the Lagos State Police Command, Ikeja.

"TK was like a field marshal"

The Lagos State Commissioner of Police Fatai Owoseni, while confirming

the deaths of the suspects, told journalists at the Command Headquarters Ikeja, that they found the following with the bandits: Three speed boats, one with inscription "Castina Marine", 22 pieces of dynamites, four Ak-47 rifles, two GPMG, 3,678 assorted live ammunition, 28 magazines, eight live jackets, three 50 litres jerry-can of fuel, two 100 litres jerry-can of fuel, assorted pieces of charms and military magazine jackets. Owoseni described TK as a Field Marshall who commanded different armed gangs that engaged in all forms of criminalities such as kidnapping, high-profile bank robberies, pipeline vandalism, piracy and cultism. He said, "TK had his signature on almost all violent crimes in Lagos, Ondo, Delta, Ogun, Edo, and Benin Republic. Intelligence had revealed that TK, at a time, led a gang to hijack a vessel on the waterways of Ghana. Intelligence had also revealed that he had his base in a creek situated somewhere in Ijagemo in Amuwo Odofin LGA of Lagos State."

Residents mourn death of TK

When news of TK's death filtered into Ishawo Ikorodu, Arepo and Ibafo areas of Ogun State, Ijaw communities within these areas were thrown into mourning. A source who spoke to Crime Guard on the condition of anonymity, disclosed that TK's father has been crying uncontrollably since he heard the news of his son's death. When asked why TK's father was crying for a son who was a known criminal, the source explained that TK built a house for his father and that made him very close to his father.

Becoming a terror

The source added that TK took to crime after he was excluded from the amnesty programme for Niger Delta ex-militants. The source said it was same with Ossy, another pipeline vandal. Said the source: "I am from the same town with TK and his real is Tokiwe Joseph. I knew him while we were growing up. I learnt he was angry that he wasn't included in amnesty

package given to the Niger Delta ex-militants and he came to Lagos with his boys and formed the Arepo Camp, where they were vandalizing NNPC pipelines. He had his boys at that time but in 2013, he was arrested for being in possession of a gun, was charged to court and remanded in prison.

"When he formed the Arepo Camp, he and his boys weren't using guns and I don't know how he got the gun the police found on him. While he was in prison, Ossy came with his own boys and took over the camp. Ossy and his boys came with guns and they accommodated all TK's boys into their command and became so strong that no one could confront them. They became very brutal and were killing anybody that stood on their way. They were responsible for the killings of many security operatives. When TK was granted bail, he came out a very angry man. When he went to Ikorodu, he discovered that Ossy had taken over the camp, and one Igbala was controlling the Yoruba boys and his deputy, Double Prince was all in charge of Ishawo and Arepo. "TK then decided to form his own camp since his boys were not ready to stay under Ossy. He took them to Ijegemo and they chased out the man controlling that creek and started working. I actually don't know what made him go into armed robbery and kidnapping. I was shocked whenever they mentioned his name in any of these bank robberies or kidnapping across Lagos State."

Attracting the spotlight.

Crime Guard investigations revealed that before Nwosu's wife was kidnapped in their apartment, TK was almost completely off the radar. The IGP Special Task Force, Anti-Pipeline Vandalism, was the only security outfit that knew about his existence. However, the kidnapping of Nwosu's wife, Toyin, and the subsequent killing of nine operatives of the Department of State Service, DSS, who were in Ikorodu to rescue the woman brought him into the larger picture. He took the top spot of the most wanted criminal

after that incident and the IGP was said to have deployed the SIRT operatives to track him down. TK, who was said to be highly shrewd and tactical, was said to have always taken refuge within the creeks in Ijegemo or Arepo.

Crime Guard gathered that SIRT operatives, in October 2015, arrested one of TK's girlfriends in Abuja and it was discovered during interrogation that TK was planning a massive bank robbery in Lagos State. The information was passed on to the Lagos State Police Command with no specific area. Sources at the Lagos State Police Command told Crime Guard that the command swung into action and was placed on red alert with more emphasis placed on the Island and Ikorodu areas that had been previously attacked.

There was also security beef up around Ikeja and other parts of the mainland, but a few days after, TK, led the gang and they struck at three banks in Festac Town and carted away large sums of money, while a middle-aged woman and her baby were killed during the operation.

The source at the Lagos State Police Command Headquarters also told Crime Guard that intelligence was also generated on the Agbara bank robbery, but the intelligence indicated that TK and his gang would strike at Badagry and Seme areas. According to the source, "The intelligence from the operative monitoring TK indicated in November 2015, that he was planning to attack banks within Badagry and Seme areas of Lagos State and security around banks in those areas was beefed up to maximum level by the late Area Commander, Epko Esoung who coordinated the operation.

"But while he was doing that, TK and his team took a detour and attacked a bank in Agbara area of Ogun State and carted away over N110 million from

the bank. But the Area Commander gave them a fight. Though he arrived the bank minutes after the robbery started, he engaged the robbers and forced them to abort the operation as they had intended to raid all the banks in that placed. They escaped through the waters and he hired a speed boat that took some of his men and went after the boys.

When he arrived the creek where the boys abandoned their boat, he recovered several military uniforms and a cell phone belonging to one of the robbers, Blessing Olotu, who was eventually arrested a few days later.

"Meanwhile, when the SIRT got the intelligence on the plan to rob banks at Seme, the IGP deployed the SIRT and ensured there was a synergy between all police formations and other sister agencies. The result is what you have seen. They didn't just take down 11 members of his gangs, TK was killed and a large cache of his arms, ammunition and explosives were recovered", the source concluded.

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