

## How Gunmen stormed Owerri High Court; killed 2, freed serial killer

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IN what appeared like a *Rambo* movie, gunmen stormed the premises of Owerri High Court in Imo State yesterday, shooting at prison officials and rescuing their mentor, Chibueze Henry, a man simply identified as Vampire who is a notorious serial killer and armed robbery suspect.

Two people were feared dead while many were injured. Not fewer than 30 suspected criminals brought to the court for trial escaped. The operation left many bewildered. Owerri is tensed.

Saturday Vanguard gathered that the rampaging hoodlums gained entrance into the premises, in a Sports Utility Vehicle, SUV, shot at the armed prison officials, as soon as the suspects were ready to be moved into their respective courtrooms, where their cases were scheduled for hearing.



court

A lawyer, who was at the scene of operation, said that the gangsters were fully prepared for the onslaught.

“The gangsters were fully prepared for the rescue mission. Their gunshots hit an armed prison personnel and one of the suspects”, the lawyer stated.

Continuing, the lawyer said that there was total confusion in the premises, as the assailants fired sporadically from virtually all corners.

“People scampered into safety. Some of the accused persons equally ran away for their life. I ran into the toilet room in the Bar Centre”, the lawyer said.

A litigant, who was shivering as he spoke with Saturday Vanguard, described the scene as “akin to what we see in movies”.

“The attack virtually brought activities in the magistrate and high courts to an abrupt end. The armed men were obviously interested in rescuing one of their own”, the litigant said.

Continuing, the man said: “The pathetic thing was that the armoured vehicle, which was stationed at the gate into the court remained silent and unmoved throughout the operation”.

A staff of the Judiciary, who also spoke on strict anonymity, lamented that the hoodlums gained entrance into the premises and operated successfully without inhibition.

“There is no way I can properly explain the commando-like incident to the outside world. The sound of their guns and their operational finesse, goes to prove that they were not amateurs in the game”, the staff recalled with grief.

Meanwhile, some of the suspects, who felt that they had good cases, simply ended their search for safety in nearby Government House and were later handed over to prison officials.

### **Imo Prison Command reacts**

When contacted, the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Taiwo Lakanu, confirmed the incident but quickly added that it was the headache of the State Prison Command.

He expressed worry at the way the prisons allowed the dreaded criminals, including Vampire to escape the arms of the law.

The Public Relations Officer, PRO, of the Imo State Command of the Nigerian Prison Service, NPS, Mr. James Maduba, equally confirmed the well coordinated attack, affirming that the Command received a call in the morning that some armed men were seen in the High Court premises.

“We thought they were operatives of the Directorate of State Security, DSS, as we were conveying over 50 inmates to the court. The gunmen attacked some of our men and some of the inmates”, Maduba said.

The PRO also confirmed that the critically wounded officials and inmates have been moved to hospital for treatment. “My Comptroller and other security chiefs in the state are on top of the situation”, Maduba assured.

### **Tension in the community**

The escape of Vampire, who had terrorized residents of South East and South Southern parts of the country for a long time, has thrown entire Nigeria security community into disarray.

Saturday Vanguard gathered that the gunmen shot indiscriminately moments officials of the Nigeria Prison Service, brought Vampire, who was arrested by operatives of the Department of State Security Service, DSS, in July 2015, for attempting to kidnap some Judges attached to the Imo State Electoral Tribunal, and other suspects to the Owerri High Court .

A police source at the force headquarters Abuja, who spoke with Saturday Vanguard on the condition of anonymity, disclosed that police command across the country has been placed on red alert following Vampire’s escape. The source explained that Vampire was notorious for killing his victims after collecting ransom.

### **Vampire’s criminal records**

On February 16, 2013, Vampire stormed the home of his girlfriend, Sandra Ijedinma, at Igando area of Lagos State, with an AK47 assault rifle and opened fire on everyone present in the apartment, killing his girlfriend, her elder sister, Praise Ozor and her two children. Not satisfied, Henry proceeded to a nearby street where one of Sandra’s elder sisters resided and killed the woman and three of her children, before fleeing.

But while the search for him went cold in Lagos, Henry, was said to have regrouped with his gang in Imo State and they coordinated several kidnappings in the South

East and South South, where he kidnapped over 200 persons, killing most of his victims, including the wife of a royal father in Imo State and an official of the Imo State Environmental Transformation Commission which yielded him N50million ransom.

However, luck ran out on him, when he attempted to kidnap the tribunal Judges, handling Election Petition in Imo State, at their lodge, in Disney Hotels, along Onitsha -Owerri Road. Operatives of the Department of State Security, DSS, acting on a tip-off swooped on him, but he managed to escape with bullet wounds which he had gone to treat in the house of his elder brother's wife, in Ohafia, Abia State, where men of the secret police eventually apprehended him.

While in prison in February 2016, Vampire was said to have converted a servicing official of the Nigeria Prisons Service, in Owerri Prison, where he is been detained on awaiting trial and formed a new kidnap gang that could help him raise money for his bail. The prison official identified as Chukwuma Agim, assembled a six-man gang headed by one Chiboy also known as Eze Ekudele and they carried out several operations in Imo State.

In one of their operations, they abducted a middle-aged woman and got a ransom of N5million. After that operation, operatives of the Inspector General of Police Special Intelligence Response Team (IRT), headed by ACP, Abba Kyari, rounded up five members of the gang, including the prison official in various parts of Imo State.

The smashing of the new gang was expected to put an end to Vampire's activities but his escape yesterday has dashed the hope of the security communities within the country, atleast for now. Security sources disclosed that the indiscriminate use of cell phones within prisons across the country was a major factor aiding activities of kidnappers within the country.