



• Burnt house of ex Anambra Commissioner

By Vincent Ujumadu, Awka

THE protracted land dispute between Anaku and Omor communities in Ayamelum local government area of Anambra State, which has lasted about 100 years, early this week claimed the lives of three

persons, including two policemen posted to the area. In the latest clash between the two communities, a former chief judge of Anambra State who hailed from Omor was physically assaulted, while the country home of a former Commissioner in the Willie Oboano administration, Dr. Christian Madubuko and 30 other mansions in Anaku were set ablaze. The National Youth Service Corps members' lodge and teachers' quarters close to the police station in the town were heavily torched and looted and the Youth Corps members have fled.

When Saturday Vanguard visited the troubled communities, the entire area was deserted as the people had abandoned their homes and fled into the bush and to neighbouring communities where they take refuge. The only secondary school in Anaku, Ogbe High School, has been closed down and all markets and primary schools have also been deserted.

Following the incident, Governor Obiano has imposed an indefinite curfew between 7 pm and 6 am in the area, while the state police command has beefed up security in the area. At the Anaku Police Station, the policemen looked dejected after losing their colleagues to the clash. Fortunately, the hoodlums who burnt the houses did not attack the police station, despite the fact that it is located close to some of the houses destroyed.

At the palace of the traditional ruler of Anaku, Igwe Peter Oforikansi, his two-storey building, two bungalows and six vehicles were burnt and whereabouts of all members of the royal household could not be ascertained. Also, burnt vehicles littered the major Otuocha-Anaku-Omor road.

Saturday Vanguard gathered that the policemen lost their lives while trying to stop youths suspected to be from Omor from invading Anaku. The state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Chris Owolabi said he has already commenced investigation to find out what led to the attack.

An indigene of Anaku, Mr. Michael Atumanya recalled that a similar attack took place in 2020, adding that stakeholders had to intervene to restore peace in the area. He said: "The people of Amikwe Omor invaded a piece of land belonging to Obukwu kindred, Anaku in April 2020, but the matter was timely managed by Ayamelum LGA which settled it with the active participation of the traditional rulers of the two communities."

"An agreement was signed on 28 April 2020 that everybody should maintain

How 100 year-old land dispute sent two policemen, one other to early graves in Anambra

• Monarch's palace, ex Commissioner's house, 30 others burnt

peace and status-quo. Unfortunately, Omor people started building houses on the disputed area of land belonging to Anaku such that by the time the constituted boundary adjustment committee visited the area, they were already claiming ownership of the place. While they were scrambling for land, a fight ensued among them and they started destroying structures.

"This latest action is not unusual, as over the years, they have always employed both violent and nefarious means for forceful annexation of lands belonging to neighbouring towns. Anaku people have always been at the receiving end of this age-long land dispute between the two communities."

According to Atumanya, in 2008, the people of Omor attacked late Mr. Ayaduno Obodeze and other indigenes of Anaku at Igbachala farmland which eventually led to his untimely death. The same year, they massacred late Mr. Ozoemena Edunor. In 2016 their mercenaries decimated late Mr. Okaka Atumanya on the same piece of land; took his body away and mutilated it.

"The matter was reported to the

government and suspects charged to court but, it died in Otuocha High Court without justice. In 2015, they demolished Obukwu Town hall and the country homes of Mr. Raphael Onochie, Stephen Ndife, Chijioke Okechukwu, Oranefo Nwakwudo. In 2019 they equally burnt down Ayamelum customary court at Ikpa Obukwu Anaku.

"These clashes led to wanton destruction of multiple lives and properties worth huge amounts of money. Of greater importance is the atmosphere of bitterness, resentment, enmity, daunting and protracted legal suits such conflicts create among the neighbouring towns in the local government, thereby defeating the aim of working together as brothers and sisters and coexisting harmoniously in peace for the achievement of progress and development in our local government as a political unit."

Investigation showed that in the 1920s, the people of Igbariam in Anambra East local government area were crossing the Ezu River to Anaku to claim farmlands, which Anaku said, was unexpected given the fact that Ezu

River was a natural boundary. The encroachment was then duly resisted by the people of Obukwu and this led to a litigation process at the native court during the colonial era.

During the litigation, the people of Amikwe (Omor) and Umuerike (Umerum), offered their support to the people of Obukwu. After the case was won by Obukwu, and to ensure no further encroachments to the farmlands, the people of Amikwe (Omor), Obukwu (Anaku) and Umuerike (Umerum) struck an agreement to allow free farming on their borders.

In 1974, when the Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited came to the area for oil exploration, the people of Obukwu, Anaku invited the other two communities of Amikwe (Omor) and Umuerike (Umerum) to become co-owners of the oil wells. At that time, land was in abundance and there was relative peace among the people. A

twelve-man committee, comprising four members from each community, was raised to oversee the activities of Shell on the land.

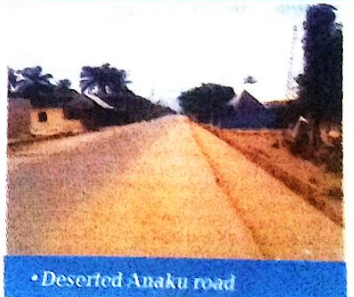
Also, in 1980 the Federal Government provided an irrigation infrastructure for the benefit of the local farmers in the area. The land for the rice fields were acquired from Umumbo, Omor, Umuerum, and Anaku communities. The Lower Anambra/Imo Irrigation

Project (LAIP) was achieved using a location map (1982), created by the Federal Government and authorities of the irrigation project allocated specific number of plots to each of the four communities according to the size of land expropriated from them. The land of Amikwe (Omor), Obukwu, Ikenga (Anaku) and Umuerike (Umerum) communities jointly constitute the South West Zone of the project.

Atumanya called on the Anambra State government to use the available topographical information to intervene in the land dispute to ensure that peace was restored in the area and justice done on the matter. According to him, the intervention would also ensure that boundaries between Omor and Anaku, Omor and Umumbo, Omor and Igbaoku, as well as other communities in the area, were properly delineated for peace to reign.



• Burnt palace of Igwe Peter Oforikansi



• Deserted Anaku road