

# The Saturday COVER

## We saw dead bodies as we covered four states, trekking through bush paths in Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Delta

- \* Our heartless kidnapers killed a man whose family paid N10m rather than N150m ransom
- \* Kidnap victims recount their eight-day ordeal in Southeast forests
- \* Ezeagu forests in Enugu State now notorious as kidnapers' den



•The victims (Bamanger is second left)

**A**youth mobilizer and front-line politician of the People's Democratic Party, PDP in Enugu North Senatorial Zone of Enugu State, Hon. John Ifeanyi Eze (aka Bamanga Tukur) has narrated his heartrending ordeal in the hands of kidnapers while coming back from a burial ceremony in Abia state. He was kidnapped with three others as they were going back to base in Nsukka, Enugu state. They spent eight days in captivity, trekking through bush paths from one state to the other while their abductors kept on subjecting them to serious torture and beating with a view to ensuring that their families raised the whopping millions of naira they demanded. Worse still, he said they saw many dead bodies in different stages of decomposition along the length and breadth of the bush paths across the states of Abia, Imo, Anambra, Enugu and some parts of Delta as they trekked alongside the armed kidnapers. He narrated his ugly encounter during the incident which coincided with the kidnap of the former Secretary to Enugu state government, SSG, Dr. Dan Shere. Excerpts:

By Johnson Mathew

"The day was October 20th, 2022; it will remain indelible in mind forever. I kissed my wife and children goodbye in Nsukka, Enugu state to attend a burial ceremony in far away Abia State. I was in company of others that attended the burial ceremony unknown to us that we were close to death. We were four occupants in a vehicle from Abia State heading to Nsukka when our abductors who were dressed in military uniforms, numbering about nine, opened fire on our vehicle and ordered us to halt after raining bullets on the vehicle. The driver screamed to abrupt halt and before we knew what was happening, they marched us to the bush where we were engaged in a circuitous journey that covered four states in the south east.

### Beating, torture

"We were kidnapped along Abia State University about 7.30 am by men on military uniform. They blind-folded us from 7.30am to about 8.30pm and kept us on a hill from where they monitor if anyone was coming after them. Amongst four of us, one is an Immigration officer, another former soldier and the third person, a forest guard. They collected all our phones and money; they asked us to identify ourselves. Initially, they thought I was a policeman because I was clean-shaven and heavily built. I was beating to stupor and it was so painful. I had no choice than to accept that I was a policeman in order to save my life. While the beating and torture was going on, I kept on praying inwardly, begging God not to allow me die from the excruciating pains all over my

body. In fact, I resolved there and then that I would not die no matter the degree of torture and beating.

### Negotiation for ransom

"They opened all the contacts in our phones and instructed us to tell them the person to call that will pay the ransom they were demanding. We started negotiating for ransom from N150 million per person and they were threatening that if we failed to pay, their cattle would be better than us. They used knives to make marks on the body of any of us who said he couldn't afford to pay the ransom. At this stage, they started taking us through the forests and while we were trekking, they were happily showing us abandoned dead bodies in different stages of decomposition.

### Dead bodies across routes

"Some of the unidentifiable bodies were buried in shallow graves while

some were just dumped beside heaps of stumps in the forest. They told us, with relish, how they killed one of the men before we were kidnapped because he agreed to pay N150m but later raised only N10m. They also told us that one of their victims was a policeman while another was a traditional chief. One of them told us that the red fbo cap he was wearing belonged to that man. We noticed that they usually follow routes created by high tension wires, erosion or cow routes. They always sleep on top of hills. We only cross expressways when they must have made sure that nobody was on sight or no vehicle was passing.

"While the beating, torture and trekking continued, they usually tied our legs on hill tops and dragged us down valleys with our eyes blindfolded. We noticed that they didn't stay in a location for two hours. We were moved from Abia State boundary to Imo state boundary, Anambra state and Enugu State linking Ezeagu local government area to meet their colleagues at Ugwuogo Nike in Enugu State. We were able to know this from their conversations with each other because they normally discussed at nights and the only thing we were able to hear were corrupted names of where we were or where we would be going to. However, one of us who understands Hausa language was also interpreting their conversations to us. From all indications, all the boundaries, names of villages, communities and even hamlets in the South East are well known to them and they are very much conversant with every location inside the thick forest.

### Death threats

"We faced the greatest threats to our lives when they raised the issue of Biafra. They threatened to kill all of us and they were very angry with us saying that people of South East said that they were migrants from Niger. Chad republic and even called them terrorists who kill, maim and rape women. They were boasting that before they allow us to get Biafra, they would massacre all of us. In fact, their anger over this issue was unrestrained and it was only by the special grace of God that one of them pleaded that they should not kill us while we continued with negotiation.

### Raising money for ransom

"When they turned my phone on, they checked my account balance and what they saw did not impress them. The beating continued unabated. They allowed me to call my wife and I directed her to sell my truck, landed property and whatever she could lay hands on in our family to raise the N10m they pegged as our ransom. Luckily, she was able to raise the money after selling those things and with contributions from my friends and family including from the family of the immigration officer; they called them and announced that they were ready. The other two could not raise anything.

### Journey back to Abia

"After answering the phone, we thought they would simply tell them where to drop the money and we would be released because we were aware that we were staying inside a forest in Ezeagu, Enugu state, very close to our home. But, the reverse turned out to be the case. They marched us all back towards where we came from. We trekked for unending hours inside the forest only to discover that we were back in Abia state. I think they passed through Delta state boundary because we overheard them saying that we were very close to Asaba.

### Delivery of ransom

"It was when we got to the forest in Abia state that they now called our relations to start coming with the ransom. We did not hear what they were discussing with our people but after several hours, they ordered us to get up and follow them. They brought us to a point where our people met with them and after counting the money diligently to ensure that marks were not made on them, they gave us N2000 each as transport fare. They also gave us bottles of malt drink from the carton they asked our people to bring along with N10,000 Suva and a carton of Peak Milk.

### Our suspicion

"From all indications and the unkempt look of those kidnapers, they must be on oath, working for somebody because while we were there, our food was rice which they cooked with salt and red oil. They used stick to stir the rice while we all ate with bare hands. They have bruises on their heads signifying torture or initiation. They were nine, clutching Russian made Kalashnikovs rifles and they were wearing Senegalese on top of military camouflage. I thank God that we survived in spite of the wound they inflicted on my fingers."

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