54 Years After: British Secret Files on Nigeria's First Coup- Part 1

Wednesday, January 15, 2020 4:30 am



Nzeogwu: Led soldiers to kill Ahmadu Bello in Kaduna



By Damola Awoyokun

Today, 15 January, 2020 is the 54th anniversary of the first coup in Nigeria, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. Below is a story we published on this platform and hard copy in 2016. It details the British intelligence reports on the putsch, entitled:

British secret files on Nigeria's first bloody coup, path to Biafra

Damola Awoyokun, an engineer and historian has perused hitherto hidden dispatches from British diplomats and intelligence officers on Nigeria's first coup—a very bloody one—executed by Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and Emmanuel Arinze Ifeajuna on 15 January 1966. The coup in which political leaders and military officers of northern Nigeria extraction were majorly killed triggered a counter-coup and eventually declaration of Biafra and a civil war.
TheNEWS today shares the rare insight into the bloody event of 15 January 1966 and we believe it may serve as a good lesson as the drums of war are being sounded in some parts of our country

Kaduna

It was a soundless morning, dark, pulsating, starless. The harmattan spiked the 2am air with prickly cold and fog. With his finger to the trigger, the 28-year-old Major Patrick Chukwuma Nzeogwu addressed the soldiers from Charlie Company of the 3rd Infantry Battalion and some Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC) personnel. They were armed with fury, submachine guns, knives, grenades, torchlights, rocket launchers. Nzeogwu reeled about how the politicians had dragged the country to the cliff of fall and kicked it down into a worst-case scenario. He reeled about nepotism, large scale looting of public wealth, persistent poverty of the people, the yearnings of millions hollowed out by afflictions, the epidemic of insecurities, the Tiv riots, the Western Region's daily bloodletting, the country's tireless race to the bottom instead of high up to the plane of regard.

He pointed to Sardauna's residence right behind him as the ultimate symbol of the filth Nigeria had become. His fellow soldiers were stunned. They did not know they had been turned into reluctant rebels. They thought this was supposed to be another night's training exercise the brigade high command had approved for them which they started two weeks previously. Nzeogwu then asked the soldiers to concentrate on how to be necessary and to feel proud that they were the ones called upon to rescue the nation, to show the way, to be the new founding fathers of a better Nigeria. In other words, like Homer's Illiad, he was asking them not to see the epic bloodbath that was about to start as an outbreak of evil, but their generous contribution to the redemption and welfare of the nation.

They Charged Forward

Four hours earlier around 10 o'clock, the last lights in the Sardauna's household had gone out. They were expected to wake by 4am to eat suhur, the predawn meal to begin the fast. Ramadan started on 23rd December 1965. A week earlier, the Prime Minister Mallam Tafawa Balewa Abubakar met the Queen and the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson. He had invited all the Commonwealth Prime Ministers for a special meeting in Lagos from 11- 12 January to resolve Rhodesian crises. It was the first of its kind outside London. On 19 December, he went to the small village of Arondizuogu in Orlu for the commissioning of his trade minister, Dr Ozumba Mbadiwe's Palace of the People. Built by Italian contractors, it was a three-storey affair resplendent with blue terrazzo walls, swimming pool and a fountain, grand conference halls and event rooms, red carpet and gilt chairs. All these in a village where most houses were still born of mud and thatched roofs.

Since the first tarred roads were constructed in 1890s in Lagos, and the first dual carriage way in Nigeria – Queen Elizabeth Road – appeared in 1956 in Ibadan, no road in Arondizuogu or in Orlu had ever been graced with bitumen before. Yet Mbadiwe situated the grand palace there as a source of pride for his people. At the commissioning ceremony, the Eastern Premier, Dr Okpara never saw the project as a white elephant planted by megalomania and watered by corruption, rather he hailed the project as "a great achievement for one of the priests of pragmatic socialism to have been so clever to accommodate this building within the context of pragmatic African socialism." The press placed the value of the house at least half a million pounds. Mbadiwe said it was "at most £40,000." After the commissioning, Abubakar then proceeded to his farm in Bauchi for his annual leave. On Tuesday 4th of January, he joined the retinue of well-wishers in Kaduna airport to bid farewell to his in-law and godfather, the Sardauna, who was going to Saudi Arabia to perform Umra, a lesser hajj, in the company of 184 other state-sponsored pilgrims. The cost of the one-week pilgrimage to the government was around £17,000.



Nigerian soldiers Drawn from Charlie company of the 3 rd Infantry Battalion believed they were going for another night military exercise!

That morning, The New Nigerian newspaper wrote an unprecedentedly scathing editorial laying the blame for the region's financial woes and lack of development on Sardauna inefficiencies and ineptitude and asked him to "put his house in order." When Nzeogwu read the editorial, he went straight to the paper's newsroom and demanded to see the writer. He was in his uniform and his eyes were red. No one knew him nor had seen his face before. The staff did not know what to make of his demand. The expatriate managing editor Charles Sharp then stepped forward. Nzeogwu shook his hands and said the content and tone of the editorial reflected their thinking in the army and they had resolved to put that house in order. The newsroom did not understand what he meant until the morning of the January 15. The paper was the first to publish for the world the picture of Sardauna's house still smouldering in the flames of Nzeogwu.

Meanwhile, the premier of the Western Region, Samuel Ladoke Akintola received a tip from his NNDP ministers in the federal cabinet that after the Commonwealth special meeting, the Prime Minister planned to impose a state of emergency on the Western Region, drop him as an ally and appoint a federal caretaker just as he did in 1962. Market women staging protests against skyrocketing costs of foodstuffs, burnout cars, shot and charred corpses, politicians and civil servants' houses set on fire, intellectuals' houses emptied onto the street were weekly occurrences in the West. Ever since the rift between Awolowo the Action Group leader and Akintola his deputy, the Western Region that was an Africans-can-do-it model of governance and jaw-dropping development was turned into a landscape of sorrow, blood and tears. With fund from the public treasury and under the command of Fani-Kayode the deputy premier, Akintola's well-armed hooligans held the upper hand while AG's bully-boys sponsored by Dr Michael Okpara and the NCNC leadership

were on the defensive. After the elections of 11 October 1965, Akintola used the state broadcasting services to announce false counts while the Okpara-sent Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service team secretly camped in Awolowo's house declared the correct results ward by ward. On the night of 15th October, when Akintola was to announce himself the winner, Wole Soyinka, with a generous assistance from his pistol, forced the Western Broadcasting Service to air his own subservice tape asking Akintola to resign and go. Akintola and his supporters went berserk. The police declared Soyinka wanted and he fled to Okpara in the East for temporary refuge until his arrest on 27th October 1965.



TheNews hard copy that is circulating in Nigeria

On Thursday, 13th January when Sardauna arrived from Mecca, Akintola flew to Kaduna to meet him to dissuade Abubakar from imposing a state of emergency on the West or replace him with an Administrator. Akintola had

recently buried his daughter and staunchest ally Mrs Modele Odunjo who on 26th October died allegedly of overdose of sleeping pills. She was married to Soji Odunjo, who was a staunch enemy of her father and he was also the son of the Alawiye's Chief J.F. Odunjo whom Akintola also sacked as the Chairman of Western Region Development Corporation for being pro-Awolowo. Akintola had also sent his son, Tokunbo (who died in 1973) faraway to Eton College in England. He had imported the first ever bulletproof car into Nigeria: an £8000 Mercedes Benz. As the 13th Aare Ona Kakanfo of Yorubaland, he felt unchained and fired up for a total fight. With more men and firepower, he told the Sardauna, he would crush all disturbances from AG's supporters and their Eastern sponsors. The Sardauna promised to discuss his request with the Prime Minister. Major Timothy Onwuatuegwu, a 27-year-old instructor at the NMTC who was detailed to track Sardauna's daily movements reported this surprise meeting with Akintola to the Revolution's high command. From his No 13, Kanta Road residence, Nzeogwu promptly dashed to the Kaduna airport where Sardauna had already gone to see off Akintola. Nzeogwu went to the VIP lounge saluted the Sardauna and wished Akintola safe journey back home convinced that in 48 hours at most, both VIPs would be counted among the dead.



Ahmadu Bello: killed by Nzeogwu during Ramadan

That evening, Nzeogwu went back to the airport to pick up his best friend Major Olusegun Obasanjo the Officer Commanding the Field Engineers who had just finished his course in India and flew in via London. Obasanjo's deputy Captain Ben Gbuile was supposed to pick him up at the airport but he was busy mobilising for the Revolution. And so he telephoned Nzeogwu who

promptly came to the airport. Though they slept together in the same room, Nzeogwu never told him of the death awaiting certain personalities.

The following day, 14th January, Bernard Floud a British MP and director of Granada TV (now ITV) which partly owned the Northern Region Television Station was staying at the plush Hamdala Hotel in Kaduna. He had met with the Sardauna briefly to discuss funding and expansion of the television reach. They were supposed to meet the following day Saturday 15th January to continue the business talk. But there would be no tomorrow.



Emmanuel Ifeajuna: the sports hero turned revolutionary. This University of Ibadan Zoology graduate was the brain behind the revolution. He recruited Nzeogwu (who said he could gun down corrupt politicians) into the revolution

For Nzeogwu and his soldiers had cut through the Premier's Lodge fence by the side and at the entrance rounded up three policemen (Police Constables Yohanna Garkawa, Akpan Anduka, Hagai Lai) and a soldier (Lance Corporal Musa Nimzo) rubbing their hands together between their knees to resist the harsh harmattan. Nzeogwu asked them to face the wall and coldly pulled the trigger on them. He was trying to man up his fellow soldiers who were still acting like reluctant rebels and give them a taste of where the night was heading. He then posted two new sentries by the entrance while he and other soldiers conducted a room-to-room search in the main house for the Sardauna. Routine police patrol that sighted the mutineers converging menacingly in front of the Premier's Lodge radioed the British Police officer on duty in the Kaduna Police Operations room. He in turn phoned Mallam Ahmed T. Ben-Musa Sardauna's Senior Assistant Secretary (Security). He immediately sprang up and went to the Lodge. He was shot on arrival by the sentries who were motivated by Nzeogwu's earlier example. They had accepted the transformation from reluctant rebels to motivated mutineers.

The general alarm had woken Sardauna. He was not in the main house but upstairs in the rear annex with his senior wife Habsatu, the daughter of Mallam Abbas, the Waziri of Sokoto, his second wife Goggon Kano, the third, Jabbo Birnin Kebbi and Sallama, a house retainer. They listened and rattled

prayer beads in fear for an hour as Nzeogwu and his motivated mutineers booted down doors, pumped bullets into guards mounting resistance and shouted to others, “Ina Sardauna? Take us to the Sardauna.” It was dark, Sardauna and his wives went downstairs and into the courtyard connecting the annex and the main house. They were trying to escape. On finding them, Nzeogwu shot the Sardauna and his senior wife who was trying to protect him. He then blew a whistle which was the agreed signal for all soldiers to converge at the rallying point at the front gate for the final onslaught on their symbol of national decay. The rocket-launching party then began shelling the house. Boom! Boom! The ground shuddered like the cannon fire which the great Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky laced into his 1812 overture. Nzeogwu was a lover of jazz and classical music.

Their beauty heightened his sensitivity to the decay which Nigeria was. He even mentored Captain Theophilus Danjuma to become a classical connoisseur. With the huge flame before him overpowering the harmattan and the night with abundance of light and heat, Nzeogwu was satisfied his own unit’s assignment was a success. He felt like a single note from an oboe, hanging high up there unwavering, avid for glory, above pulses from bassoons and basset horns till a drag from a clarinet took over and sweetened the note into a phrase of such delight, such unfulfillable longing making the coup’s failure unlikely with every passing bar. Nzeogwu then left for the brigade headquarters to await news from other units confident as ever like that high oboe note from Mozart’s Serenade for the Winds in B Flat that the news would be good news.

The mutineers had divided themselves into three groups. Nzeogwu headed the group that looked after the Sardauna, Captain Gbuile was to seize the 1st Brigade Headquarters, the TV and radio stations and Major Timothy Onwuatuegwu headed the group to delete the existence of Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun and his Deputy, Col Raphael Shodeinde. Ademulegun was startled when Onwuatuegwu entered his bedroom just after 2am. He was reported to have asked, how did you get in here? As the commander of the 1st Brigade of the Nigerian Army, he was the most protected personality in the whole of the Northern Region. While police personnel guarded the Premier and the Governor, Sir Kashim Ibrahim, his own guards were drawn from the 3rd infantry battalion. They guarded not only inside and outside his compound but around his main house too. But the guards had been compromised and they led Onwuatuegwu straight into the Brigadier’s bedroom. Had Ademulegun survived the assassination, he would have ordered all the guards, the guard commander and their officer commanding to face firing squad because as guards, they were supposed to die first before anything happened to him.



Victor Banjo

But he was not scheduled to survive. Onwuatuegwu asked the Brigadier, "Get dressed and come with us sir. Those are my instructions; to bring you to the headquarters." It sounded like nonsense to him. As the head of that headquarters since 17 February 1964, he was the only person that could give such an order. His wife Latifah, 8 months pregnant, planted herself fearlessly between her husband and the pointed guns knowing full well that if she remained glued to the comfort of their bed those weapons would not be diverted away from her husband. The Sardauna's senior wife did exactly that at that moment somewhere else. (Any other Nigerian woman would have done the same. Contrary to what the New Feminists led themselves to believe, Nigerian women were never born to be weak. In the top bedside drawer was a service pistol. As a Brigadier, Ademulegun knew a pistol was no match for 6 soldiers armed with SMGs. But he would rather fight and die gallantly than degrade the honour of his office by surrendering to subordinates.

As he made a dash for a quick draw, Onwuatuegwu opened fire on the Brigadier, his wife and the unborn. Cruelty resulted when anything stood in the way of the indefinite expansion of the will to power. Without Ademulegun dead, Nzeogwu could not preside over the biggest Brigade of the Nigerian Army. Ademulegun's children Solape and Kole were in the next room. They heard all the clash and they were the first to see their lifeless parents

surrounded by a pond of blood. Onwuatuegwu and his mutineers then strolled out across the street unchallenged by the guards to the home of Colonel Shodeinde, Deputy Commandant of Nigerian Defence Academy whom Ademulegun usually handed over the Brigade too when he was not around. They killed him too in cold blood with an angry grenade. They then left for the Brigade Headquarters satisfied their mission was a success. That was what Nzeogwu meant when he asked his fellow mutineers not to see the epic bloodbath that was about to start as an outbreak of evil but their unique and generous contribution to the development and welfare of the nation. Anything that benefitted their Revolution cannot be injurious to morals. That was their driving belief. And it freed them to be terrible.



Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun: Muredered also

Lagos

Down in Lagos, at 11 Thompson Avenue Ikoyi, home of Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari, the commander of the 2nd Brigade, there was an elaborate gathering of all the senior officers and some junior officers for a cocktail party. It started at seven in the evening. The compound was a green sprawl patterned with stout palm trees and garden benches. Ramadan was ongoing but Maimalari did not concern himself with such rituals. Instead, military stewards in white gloves moved gracefully around with trays on which were delicately perched wine bottles with bow ribbons tied to their necks. All senior officers including their ADCs were in mufti except the Joe Nez-led regimental orchestra who amongst other songs played popular hits from the British comic play, Pinafore. Zak Maimalari was under his jacaranda tree with the GOC, Major General 'John' Aguiyi-Ironsi, Lt Col Yakubu 'Jack' Gowon and Patrick

Keatley, a British journalist for the London Guardian. (Note: all Nigerian officers had English nicknames so that their erstwhile colonial officers could easily remember them) As the guests swayed to the orchestra, Jack Gowon said, “There was song of revelry by night.” It was the famous opening line of Lord Byron’s poem The Eve of Waterloo in which Byron narrates how the night before their defeat at Waterloo, French soldiers kept on drinking and dancing and womanising at a party thereby ignoring the advancement of death and destruction from the animated enemy forces. In his later account of that night, Keatley said he replied Jack Gowon:
“But surely we need not conclude that Nigeria is facing her Waterloo?”

Jack replied deferring to his superior, the guest of honour for the night: “The politicians may not know it but John sees danger but you can take it from me John will never allow this country to be torn apart. The Federal Army is his pride and joy and its final barrier that will save us from tribal warfare.” It was a tactical cleverness on the part of Major Ifeajuna, Maimalari’s Chief of Staff who organised the party to make “General John” the special guest of honour. That made it impossible for the pre-selected senior officers in Lagos to find an excuse not to attend and miss their appointment with death.

Tiv drummers and dancers from 2nd battalion in Ikeja who had performed at the send-off party for outgoing commander of the battalion Lt Col Hillary Njoku on 12th January filled up the serene Ikoyi air with a native flavour after the regimental orchestra paused for drinks. Maimalari used the occasion to show-off his new wife from Kano. His previous wife, Doinmansey Mariamu was killed on Major Fajuyi’s balcony. They were officially married on 4th January 1961 and they had two children: Abubakar, born December 1961; Amina, 1962. Fajuyi was returning from a hunting expedition when he noticed Mrs Maimalari and Mrs Fajuyi sitting at the balcony. He greeted them cordially, went into the sitting room and propped his Beretta 12 gauge shotgun against the wall. He had forgotten he still kept the shotgun loaded and primed when he left for the bedroom. Then came his little son who began to play with it. The powerful explosion razed down the sitting room window and ended the previous Mrs Maimalari outside.



Gowon: Sang a line of Lord Bryon's poem, The Eve of Waterloo, to a London Guardian journalist at the night party, the song, a probable foreboding of what might happen. However, he decided to lead a quick reaction force to Balewa's residence, but too late

On December 1965, Maimalari took another wife in Kano. The reception was held with great pomp and pageantry at 5th battalion officer's mess with the guard of honour raising swords to form a colonnade for the newly wed to pass under. The wife was 15 years old, the brigadier, 34 years old. And so he used the cocktail as an opportunity to introduce the young girl to the South. The Queen's cousin, Prince William of Gloucester and two other British diplomats were there at the party. There also was Colonel Tom Hunt, the former GSO1 at the Army HQ who had turned into the British High Commission's military adviser. Colonel Berger of the US Defence Intelligence Agency was also there under an embassy defence attaché cover. While he was primarily an overt collector of open source information, he also engaged in covert collection operations. The CIA station chief's house was nearby too. Yet no one suspected that in a few hours' time, some junior officers who were drinking and joking with their senior officers would soon end the lives of one colonel, three lieutenant colonels and turn Maimalari's new bride into a teenage widow. It was the eve of Waterloo and the drinks and dance continued.

Around ten o'clock, the junior officers left the party only after all the senior officers had left as it was customary. To avoid suspicion, they left one by one to dress up in full combat dress. Ifeajuna was the last to leave being the busiest person that night. He coordinated the bar, the dancers, drummers, the food and drinks servers, the orchestra, the cleaners. Once he ensured everyone was done and left, he went to salute his boss who thanked him for a job well done.

At 1 o'clock, Ifeajuna having changed into combat dress, stood up to address the 13 officers including four Majors that had been converging in his sitting room in Apapa since 11 o'clock. Major Mobolaji Johnson, a staff officer at the Army HQ and neighbour to Ifeajuna saw nothing unusual in their convergence at such an hour. Unlike Nzeogwu who at the same time was giving his pre-battle rousing speech to his fellow soldiers up North to pump up their morale, Ifeajuna did not have his finger to the trigger. Operation Damisa was organised in the North to draw and nightly train unsuspecting NCOs (Non Commissioned Officers) from various military installations under the 1st Brigade for their Revolution while their officers lied to them that it was part of a course designed to teach new nocturnal attack procedures. When in December Ifeajuna asked Maimalari for permission to do the same for the Federal Guards, the Brigadier refused. Not only because Ikoyi was the national capital with international presences, but because there was constant uneasiness that the violence in the Western Region would soon overrun Lagos as well. Conducting nightly manoeuvres even with dummy bullets and flares instead of grenades would only heighten public panic and hence was unacceptable.



Chief Obafemi Awolowo: Leader of Opposition

However, Ifeajuna had a Plan B. Unlike in the North where the military units did not have call outs for IS (internal security operations), troops and transport from various units in 2nd Brigade down South and were frequently requested by the Police high command for IS operations to reinforce police

activities in stamping down riots at a new flash point in the Western Region. This was the South's Operation Damisa cover that Ifeajuna used to draw the pre-selected but unsuspecting NCOs for the Revolution and he had forged the necessary documents to justify the troops mobilisation. Why was it necessary to lie to the NCOs? Because no matter their feelings about the government, none would willingly take up arms against it.

After Ifeajuna finished addressing the officers and reminding them their assignments and their duty to the nation, he went to the brigade HQ to the waiting head of the NCOs – Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) – James Ogbu who went to turn out the NCOs of Camp, Signal Squadron barracks and Lagos Garrison Organisation for the so-called emergency IS operation. They were issued arms and ammunition and divided into units to be commanded by the 4 majors. Only Major Okafor left without an allocation of troops because he needed special troops for his own assignment. Away at Ikoyi, Lt. Ezedigbo and 2/Lt. Igweze had roused and primed these special troops and they were at the Federal Guards guardroom awaiting further instructions. At exactly 2am, convinced they were the five points of a bright new star for a new Nigeria and not the five fingers of a leprous hand, the five Majors led their various units to enact the Revolution. They never called it a coup nor a mutiny; they convinced themselves it was a Revolution comparable to Fidel Castro's.

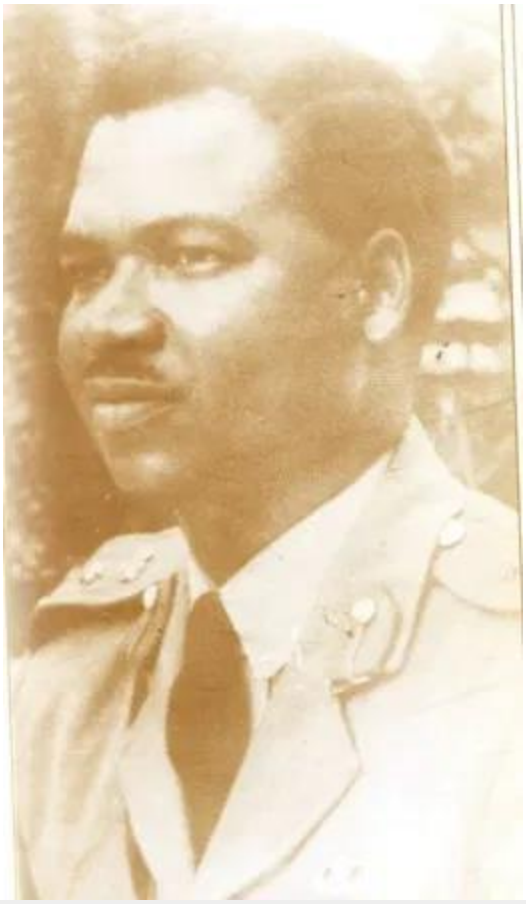
One of the Majors, Chris Anuforo was a General Staff Officer II (training) at the Army Headquarters. Assisted by second lieutenant (2/Lt.) C. Ngwuluka, he led 6 NCOs in private cars to his boss Lt Colonel Kur Mohammed on 1st Park Lane, Apapa. Mohammed had been acting chief of staff at the Army HQ since November 1965 when Adeyinka Adebayo went for a course at Imperial Defence College in London. It was Mohammed that Maimalari always requested to act when he was not in the country. When Major Anuforo's unit arrived at his front gate on foot having left the cars some distance from the house, they tricked the guards, put them at gunpoint and conducted a room-to-room search for the Colonel. Mohammed recognised Chris being his immediate superior at the HQ but Chris had become a rebel and no longer recognised Mohammed as his superior but an enemy. Anuforo ordered the NCOs to tie his hands with rifle sling.

They all left for the home of Lt. Col. Unegbe on Point Road which was only two streets away. Unegbe like Brigadier Maimalari and Lt Col Njoku, the head of 2nd Battalion were alumni of Command and Staff College in Quetta, Pakistan. Returning from Quetta, on 1st March 1964, he took over as commander of 5th Battalion in Kano. He dispatched a company headed by Captain Tim Onwuatuegwu to quell another of the Tiv riots in Gboko. Later as the Quartermaster General at the army HQ, Unegbe was responsible for the provision of every article, clothing, equipment, weapon, ammunition, food,

vehicles for the Army in general. He held the keys to the armoury and the control of armoury was vital to the success of the second phase of the Revolution. When Anuforo asked Unegbe for the keys, he refused and was shot immediately in the presence of his wife Enuma Unegbe. Even if he had handed over the keys, he would still be terminated with extreme prejudice because he was guilty. His offence was that in a Revolution packaged together by junior officers, he was a senior officer. If the Revolution succeeded, what could prevent the senior officers from using other soldiers to overcome them? Without the senior officers dead, their Revolution stood no chance. Anuforo then ordered his NCOs subordinates to carry the corpse to the waiting cars downstairs.

Anuforo then asked Col Mohammed in the car to say his own final prayers too. The Colonel did not plead for mercy nor remonstrate in any manner; he was silent and gentle as a breeze even as Anuforo's bullets reached him from the back, took his heartbeat and fell him down. Less than an hour after they started, Anuforo's unit had completed their mission objective. They drove to the Officers Mess of the Federal Guards in Ikoyi which was the agreed rendezvous for the units that have completed their tasks.

Unlike in the North where the Revolutionaries used the Brigade HQ as their rendezvous, why did the South opt for the Federal Guards? First, it was the only military unit at the seat of government. All government officials were easily accessible from there and they could easily be brought there as a corpse or as a living object to be paraded in front of the TV later in the day. Two, the Federal Guards was the only military unit whose head was part of the mutiny. Hence, the resources and manpower of the unit could easily be put in the service of the Revolution without seeking authorisation from anyone or forging cover-up signals like was done with other military units. It was the Federal Guards' net and radio systems that was cryptically used to coordinate operations with Nzeogwu's group up North.
Major Humphrey Chukwuka's unit assisted by 2/Lt Onyefuru and five other NCOs had already finished their own assignment too and they were waiting for others at the Federal Guards Mess. Chukwuka was DAG 1 (Deputy Adjutant General) at the Army HQ. His assignment was to arrest his boss, Lt Col James Pam. Being the Adjutant General, Pam was responsible for enlistment of new soldiers, payment of all soldiers, and promotion of some soldiers. He looked after the discipline and welfare of all soldiers and supervised their medical care. He was ultimately responsible for their discharge or burial in the case of death.



Brigadier Zakari Maimalari: Commander of 2nd Brigade hosted Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, Lt Col Yakubu Gowon, to a cocktail in Ikoyi, Lagos while the coup was afoot.

When Anuforo's unit arrived at the Mess at around 10 minutes past three, they delivered their own two dead bodies and saw that Pam the objective of Chukwuka's unit was still alive, unbounded and under guard in one of Chukwuka's unit Land Rover. Anuforo called Chukwuka to the side and reprimanded him for not delivering a finished job. To Anuforo, nothing, not even the force of conscience or the fear of blood must stop an idea whose time had come. According to the account which 2/Lt Godwin Onyefuru who assisted Chukwuka later gave, he said Chukwuka told Anuforo that Pam offered no resistance during his arrest and followed him voluntarily thereafter, why should he then kill him? But to Anuforo, Kur Mohammed offered no resistance and followed him voluntarily too yet he still terminated him with extreme prejudice because the Revolution demanded it. As Nzeogwu instructed: all senior officers must no longer be viewed with ordinary eyes but must be "seen through the sights of your rifles." Anuforo then ordered Chukwuka to go back with the Pam and obey the Revolution. Chukwuka refused. Anuforo then angrily entered their Land Rover with Pam and ordered them to drive. Just drive. He was sick of abstinence.

During the recruitment for the so-called Revolution, there were moderates who shared the ideals of a Revolution but they did not favour bloodshed. Ifeajuna was interested in the firebrands who could stand in solidarity with his

resentment of the political system, embrace the need for a radical solution and boldly sacrifice as many people as was needed including all their superiors in the army. One of the reported ways of recruiting was by asking, how do you feel about the situation in the country? Nzeogwu was reported to have answered: "If I have my way I will gun down all the politicians." That was in 1965 after Ifeajuna succeeded the British Officer Major Gilliver as the DA and QMG at 1st Brigade in Kaduna. Ifeajuna was pleased with Nzeogwu's intoxicated temper and he marked him down as a future asset. Ifeajuna knew the heart was the seat of fire and the same fire that could give birth to ashes could also refine gold. And so Ifeajuna preferred firebrands who had cruelty in place of a heart. He had no use for moderates. He only co-opted them in the plot because they commanded positions that were strategically useful to the Revolution and promised them there would be no bloodshed only to arrest and retire the senior officers. Chukwuka was one of those moderates and he was co-opted because one of the ways of getting the senior officers was to tell them they were needed in the office for an emergency. The phones of course would have been disabled so they would not be able to confirm with other senior officers. Up to the time he abducted Pam from his bedroom, moderate Chukwuka was still promising Pam's wife, Elizabeth, that he would be okay, that he would ensure he was okay. But the plot's drivers had other designs.

Anuforo led them to the furthest edge of the Ikoyi Golf Course in the dark. He asked Pam to come down and say his last prayers. Pam was reported to have softly pleaded with him: 'Oh Chris, don't do this, please.' Please? Chris? To listen to pleas and cries was to pay homage to error and testify against the Revolution. Anuforo squeezed the trigger and watched as the dry grass welcomed Pam. He then ordered the NCOs to come down and load the dead body unto the Landover. The men were frightened and they refused to leave the vehicle. Pam, the Adjutant General of the Army who was responsible for the welfare of every soldier would just be so summarily executed? They were there when Pam asked his children to stop crying and told his wife to look after them that he would soon come back. Was this the IS operation they were woken up for? Anuforo, a devoted believer in the ability of gun to set the agenda then pointed his still smoking SMG at the reluctant NCOs. They immediately obeyed without complaint. They all drove back to the Mess where the body was off-loaded and placed alongside the bodies of Col. Mohammed and Lt. Col. Arthur Unegbe. Excepting the GOC, that was a clean sweep of the top command of the Nigerian Army HQ accomplished.

Why was it necessary to drive away from the Mess in order to shoot Pam in the first place? Because the loud noise of fired guns would wake the Federal Guards barracks before the time. The Federal Guards was a company strong combat unit with 5 officers and 179 NCOS. Though they were often used as ceremonial guards of honour at the airport and at Azikiwe's State House, they

still received infantry training like weapons training, field craft, minor tactics and signal communications like any other combat unit. Most of the rebels in the South were drawn from administrative, signals, army workshop, logistics, supply and transport units. They were service troops not combat troops. The rest that were drawn from the Federal Guards which was a combat unit were given the most difficult assignment of the night.

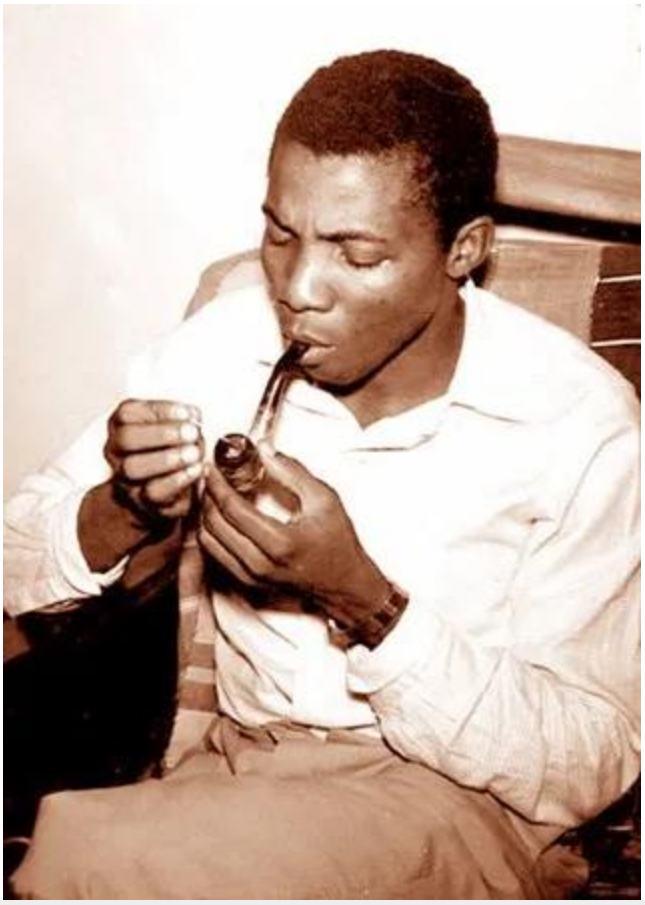
Major Donatus Okafor, the officer commanding the Federal Guards was tasked with the assassination of the Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari. Above every other person in southern operation, it was important Maimalari was cold dead if their Revolution was to succeed. As the commander of the Southern brigade, Maimalari had under him all the fighting forces of the battalions, the field artillery corps, the armoured and mechanised squads. He could effectively mobilise the entire brigade even if the country was suddenly attacked by a neighbouring army. He knew how. Without his name, the Revolution would not have taken off at all. It was forged orders given in his name that Ifeajuna had handed Captain Nwobosi head of the Ibadan operation and Lt Nwabuchi the liaison officer of the Enugu operation in case any senior officer challenged their troop mobilisation. It was forged instructions issued in his name that Ifeajuna had handed Nwobosi to bring the 105 mm Howitzer from the battery gun park in Abeokuta to Lagos. It was in his name that Ifeajuna had sent signals over the army signal network to give the all clear H-message and commence operations two hours earlier. The 3 day Brigade Training Conference which Ifeajuna used to bring all the battalion commanders together in Lagos for easy assassination was organised in his name. To ensure that these commanders did not travel back to their stations when the conference finished by 2pm on 14 January, Ifeajuna persuaded Maimalari to hold a small cocktail in his house to be attended by the brigade hierarchy. It was financed with brigade funds withdrawn in the name of Maimalari as Njoku the next brigade commander later revealed. Maimalari mattered too much. That was why he had to die.



Babatunde Jose: Editor of Daily Times that was after the neck of Mbadiwe for diverting government land at Ijora Causeway to personal use

Unlike Brigadier Ademulegun's guards that were compromised up North around the same time, Maimalari's guards challenged the intruders. Okafor ordered the sentry to call out the guard commander and tell him to take off his men and return to the barracks, there was some emergency. Okafor was his officer commanding but he doubted the emergency. According to the standard operating procedure, the guards were on duty to a superior officer, any change of instruction had to come from him not Okafor. The guard commander refused and Okafor's men barged in.

Meanwhile the phone was ringing and Maimalari had woken up. It was Pam calling to report some shootings in his compound and that some soldiers had gained forceful entry into his bedroom to arrest him. Maimalari had hardly spoken to Pam that he heard the shootings at his front gate too. Pam also heard the gunshots before the line went dead. Pam immediately called the GOC stating that there was evidence of an ongoing munity. Just then Chukwuka re-entered Pam's bedroom to inform him that the time they had given him to dress up was over. The gunshot Maimalari heard was that of Captain Oji the 2ice (second in command) to Okafor. He had killed Maimalari's guard commander who adamantly denied the mutineers entrance. In the process a bullet ricocheted and hit L/Cpl Paul Nwekwe of 2 Brigade Signal Troop in the neck. They were roused for an internal security operation. They had prepared themselves to travel as far as Ibadan to engage Fani-Kayode's thugs and Adegbenro's hooligans. But they found themselves in front of their Brigadier's residence wondering whether they had not been turned into demolition ants dedicated to bringing down the roof of their own house.



Christopher Okigbo: Ifeajuna informed him of the plan

Immediately Maimalari heard the splash of submachine gunfire, he dropped the phone, ran upstairs to pick up his wife whom he did not want to disturb by picking up the phone downstairs. He fled across the large garden where cocktail party ended five hours earlier. He kept his wife at the boys' quarters, scaled the tall fence and disappeared into the darkness. All senior officers that night were in their pyjamas when they escaped. They did not have time to dress up in combat fatigues. Except the GOC who left up fully geared up and even took his walking stick with crocodile carved into it.

When Okafor realised Maimalari had fled the house, he became very angry. He ordered his men to comb the compound and shoot the Brigadier on sight; he must not be given any chance to even surrender. He then jumped into the Land Rover driven by Lance Corporal Noji and searched around Brown Street, Thompson Avenue all the way to Glover Road and Bourdillon Road. Without Maimalari dead, they were doomed. As Ifeajuna later wrote in his manuscript, "We fully realised that to be caught planning, let alone acting, on our lines, was high treason. And the penalty for high treason is death." Therefore, they had to be successful or die trying.

Okafor like other officers joined the Revolution because he wanted to free Nigeria from the corruption and indiscipline of politicians. But four weeks

earlier, the Army Legal Officer, Chief Arthur Worrey found Okafor guilty of stealing his subordinates' funds. The Federal Guards held a monthly raffle draw and social nights (Wassa). The proceeds from ticket sales and lucky dips were recorded in Army Book 64 and saved in the PRI (President of Regimental Institute) account. For months, false figures were recorded as Okafor was stealing this money and giving a fraction as hush money to the treasurer Corporal Magaji Birnin Kebbi, a NCO in his fifties. Unknown to Okafor, Magaji was recording actual figures in his private file. Later Magaji interceded on behalf of a friend and colleague Private Mamman Sokoto at the Motor Transport Section of the Federal Guards who had been overlooked for promotion for four years. Okafor did not honour his pledge to promote the man when the list of the promoted was published. When Magaji went back to Okafor in his office in November 1965, Okafor ordered him to be locked up as he a Major and the OC of the elite Federal Guards did not feel he was answerable to a mere corporal in matters of promotion. Magaji then spilled the secrets. Eventually Okafor was found guilty of stealing his soldiers' funds. Lieutenant Tarfa who was one of Okafor's junior officers at the Federal Guards served as Magaji's interpreter before the panel of inquiry. For Magaji was an old illiterate soldier. Tarfa later wrote in his account that, Okafor was afraid of being severely punished that he appealed to Brigadier Maimalari to help. But then they never knew then that the main reason he was scared of punishment was that he would have been suspended and relieved of his command of the Federal Guards. That would have deprived him of both participating and making the resources of the Federal Guards available to their Revolution.

Maimalari, a Northerner intervened and cut tapes that let Okafor, an Easterner, off the hook. But Okafor had lost the total respect of most soldiers in the barracks for his action towards the elderly illiterate Northern corporal and for stealing their money. Had Maimalari allowed army procedures to properly take its due course, had he not allowed "kindness" to get in the way, that night of nights, he would not had been in a position where he had to be scaling his own high fence, hiding in shrubs, fleeing from the man whom he thought he had saved from punishment. Well, 90 minutes later, it was his own world famous brigade chief of staff, Ifeajuna, who had organised a befitting cocktail at his residence that eventually pulled the trigger, took his heartbeat and finally put him to rest.



Samuel Ladoke Akintola: Personally engaged soldiers in gun duel

The 31-year-old Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna was the brain behind the Revolution. He studied zoology for 4 years at Ibadan University and graduated with a B.Sc before being commissioned into the army in 1961. At the age of 20, he brought glory to the nation when at the 1954 Commonwealth Games in Vancouver, he won Nigeria's first ever gold medal at any international games and set a new record in high jump. He refused to wear the athletes' spiked boots or any shoe at all for the run-up competitions. At Vancouver, in front of the international cameras, he was persuaded to wear the boots. As a compromise, he wore a boot only on one leg and jumped the highest setting a new world record in high jump and in bizarre outfitting. Ifeajuna knew he was not born to be ordinary and so was addicted to breaking rules and setting new records. As a charismatic orator and Director of Information at University College Ibadan Students Union, he led the protest against the Queen's visit to the University in 1956.

Ibadan City was born by dissident soldiers headed by Lagelu among seven hills as a refuge for immigrants fleeing wars in 1829. By 1960, Ibadan had become the most cosmopolitan city in Nigeria. Being an embodiment of the lure of consistent non-conformism, Ibadan like New York of that time, held an extraordinary collection of flame-headed intellectuals avid for novelty and whose creativity and distinguished activisms enriched the city and the country.

There was nowhere in Africa that matched Ibadan's assemblage of fire then. There was SG Ikoku who challenged and defeated his own famous father Alvan Ikoku at the Eastern Region Assembly elections of 1956 and then radicalised his new adopted father Chief Obafemi Awolowo into socialism. There was Anthony Enahoro, Chris Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Chinua Achebe, Tayo Akpata, Benedict Obumselu, Chike Obi, Wole Soyinka, Sam Agbam, Akin Mabogunje, Bola Ige, Emeka Anyaoku, Elechi Amadi. Ifeajuna was a friend to most of them. He wrote in his manuscript:

"It was at Ibadan also I learnt my third lesson. One morning, workmen arrived in the campus with what looked like burglar grills. In a matter of days, they had sealed off each hall or residence from the outside and turned all into cages. Altogether, they gave the place the look of a zoo, so that students saw themselves as animals on show…Then the students took a decision – the cages would have to come down faster than they had been put up. But how to do it? Everybody knew what was wanted but they had not or did not know the means and the manner of effecting the change desired and demanded by all. Each waited for the other to act or simply waited in the hope that something would happen by way of providential intervention.

"At the appointed hour, I and two others met in a hidden rendezvous. We worked out the detailed plans and assembled hammers for the job. The events which took place a week or so later went according to plan. We called a Union meeting. There were speeches, moving speeches. Then one of my friends shouted: 'Down with the cages.' He led the way to the hammer dump. Before long the cages were down. At the end of it all a student friend reflecting on the incident made interesting comment that a collection of professors would still be a crowd: a group must have a leader or remain in chaos. The University College was closed for a term but we made our point. And the lesson that emerged for me from this incident was the need for careful planning before [undergoing] any operation; the chance of success can be said to be proportion to the work put into the planning."

Ifeajuna informed Okigbo the discussed Revolution was in the works. According to Wole Soyinka, Okigbo informed Achebe and informed him also without going into details. Soyinka was then on trial for allegedly using a gun to persuade the state broadcaster that instead of Akintola's tape announcing himself as the election winner, his own tape asking Akintola to pack and go was of better value to the people. He was later freed by Justice Kayode Eso on 12 December 1965.

Ifeajuna was pleased to hear about Okigbo's friend subversive broadcast. He regarded it as theatre; they were plotting the real stunt. On the day of this stunt, more than anywhere else in the country, there was great euphoria of

vindication in Ibadan as the people leapt around on the streets like compressed chests freed at last from the tyranny of pushdown bras. Ibadan claimed Ifeajuna as one of its very own and Okigbo distilled the joys of that day into his poem Hurray for the Path of Thunder. When Nzeogwu's voice fountained out like a genie of the lamp amongst some Ibadan intellectuals clustered around their radio at Risikatu's restaurant, Okigbo was reported to have called for patience, patience, patience. He confidently proclaimed that there was still another voice that would soon follow suit. He was referring to his friend and chief engineer of the Revolution, Major Emmanuel Arinze Ifeajuna born on 3rd March 1934, married to Rose on 16th June 1959 at Lagos Registry in Ikoyi and commissioned into the army on 6th December 1960.



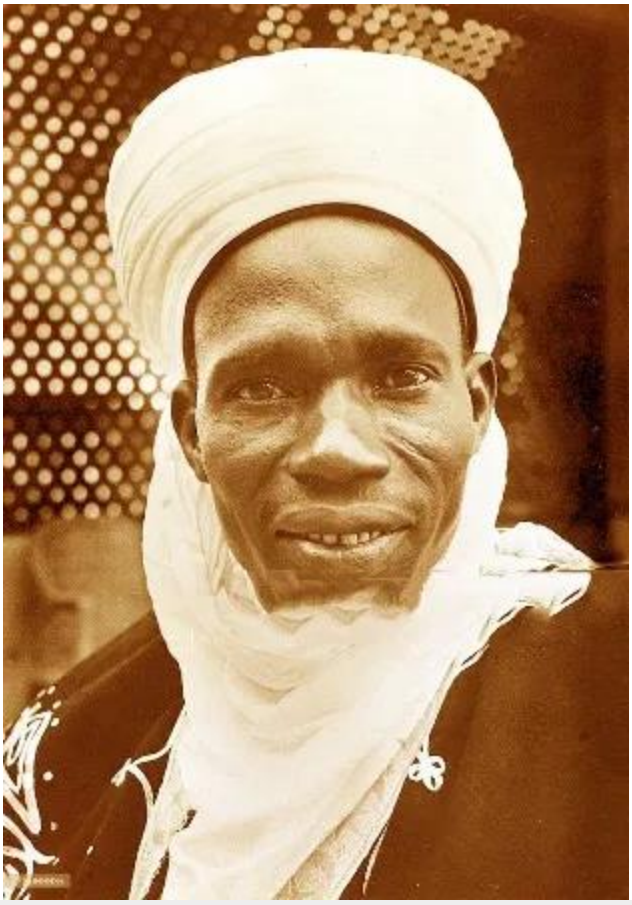
Ben Gbulie: Obasanjo's deputy who ought to pick him at the airport

On the night of the coup, after Ifeajuna concluded his address to his fellow mutineers in his sitting room, he led the largest unit comprising 22 soldiers. Reaching Onikan roundabout, he divided them into three groups. One officer, 2/Lt. G. Ezedigbo and 8 NCOs would go to arrest the finance minister, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh who was then the most corrupt politician in the history of Nigeria. Just like the Downing Street model in London, the Prime Minister and Finance Minister lived side-by-side. But they had become respectively like church and state that did not mix. Another unit comprising 5 NCOs commanded by second warrant officer Onyeacha was left behind to watch over their vehicles and ensure that no other vehicle entered or exited the Onikan

roundabout during the course of the operation. Ifeajuna himself commanded the remaining soldiers whose task was to arrest the Prime Minister, Sir Tafawa Balewa Abubakar, the novelist and teacher turned Prime Minister.

Abubakar was widely known to hardly surround himself with guards at home or even when commuting. He always cautioned his household against striving for the inessential and ostentatious materialism which expressed itself in need for elaborate security measures. Only Abubakar could have a disabled cripple called Inspector Kaftan Topolomiyo from Nangasu in Chad as his head of security. It was only in 1964 that he consented to a supplement ADC, Sgt Maxwell Orukpabo fondly called "the Igbo" in the household. In February 1963 during a police council meeting with the four regional premiers, the newly restored Western Premier, Akintola proposed a budget for armoured cars for themselves given the security situation in the country. Abubakar softly reprimanded him: "Mr Premier, if I ever thought I would need an armoured car to go anywhere in Nigeria, I would resign." In the pornography of corruption called the Nigerian government, Abubakar was a monk. And so Ifeajuna knew his task would be very easy. The soldiers he took to abduct him were service soldiers drawn from Signal Squadron, Lagos Garrison Organisation and Camp. None were combat soldiers.

Around thirty minutes later, without a single shot fired, the cool and soft-spoken Prime Minister emerged from the front gate of his residence untied, gently rattling his prayer beads and was dressed in a white flowing jalabiya and a pair of sandals. A lifetime of emotional discipline had rendered his signature face docile and unconquerable by fear. The dead silence of the night lent a hallowed majesty to his steps as he advanced towards his Golgotha. Behind him was Ifeajuna and eight other non-combat soldiers with guns drawn. By the time the entourage reached the parked vehicles, Okotie-Eboh his NCNC Finance Minister had been arrested with his hands tied. Abubakar was assisted into the backseat of Ifeajuna's luxurious red Mercedes Benz while Okotie Eboh was tossed like a sack of potatoes into the back of the 3 tonner. The convoy drove to report to Federal Guard's Officer's Mess.



Balewa: Killed too

Why was Sir Tafawa Balewa (meaning Black Rock) so powerless an agent of change in the face of his colleagues' corruption extremisms? Why wasn't there enough of him to go around? In February 1964 for instance, the NCNC parliamentary leader and Minister of Trade Dr Ozumba Madiwe was caught using his office to divert a government land at Ijora Causeway to his private company Afro Properties and Investment Company since 1961. He then assigned the land lease to Nigerpool in return for a hefty annual profit. The discovery generated another media-exposed corruption scandal. Abubakar met privately with Babatunde Jose, the editor of the powerful Daily Times spearheading the intense campaign to remove the corruption extremist if he declined to resign. Mbadiwe never bothered. There were those who were attracted by the durability of rock. They wished to be massive and unmoveable. They wished not to change. Abubakar told the editor: "You want me to remove this man? What he did fell below what is proper. Under British standards, he would go, but the NCNC who put him in my original coalition are solidly for him. Its central working committee had just passed a unanimous vote of confidence in him. If they withdraw, since Awolowo can't join, the [coalition] government will collapse.' Hence, Abubakar made peace with being a little rock thrown to the bottom of a polluted river; the polluted waters washed over him all the time but never penetrated him. On 19 December 1965, he even attended the commissioning of the Mbadiwe's Palace of People

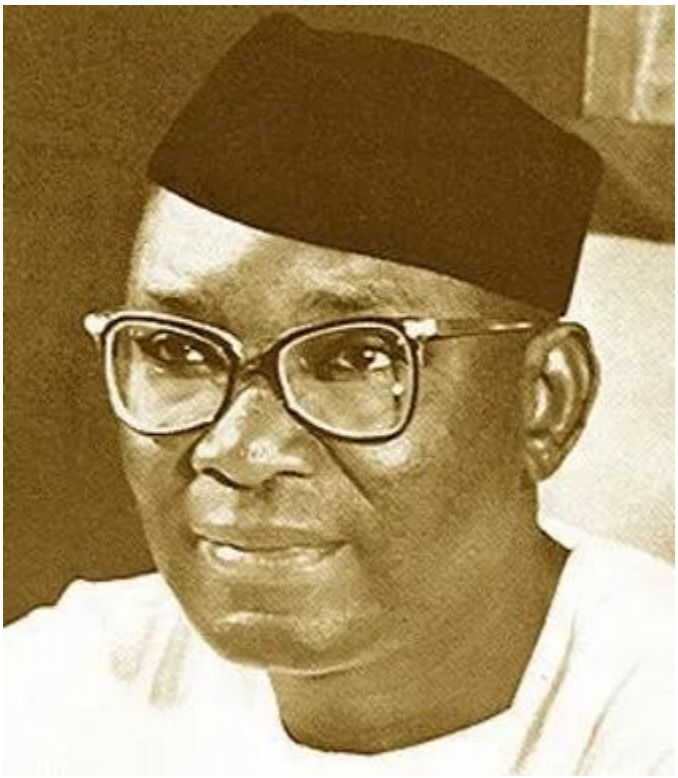
constructed with the proceeds of corrupt practices in the village of Arondizuogu. But on the night of the Revolution, it was Abubakar that Ifeajuna arrested and marched on to his eventual death while Mbadiwe kept on sleeping at home undisturbed by bedbugs. He lived happily ever after.



Obasanjo: He and Nzeogwu slept in the same room, yet he did not know about impending coup

When Ifeajuna and Ezedigbo's unit reached the Federal Guards Mess, Anuforo was nowhere to be found. He had gone with Chukwuka to end Pam on the Ikoyi Golf Course. And so Ifeajuna decided to take up his assignment of terminating all the 2nd Brigade battalion commanders residing at Ikoyi Hotel. But he did not know the rooms where they were lodged; Anuforo and the Brigade adjutant were in charge of the reservation. The assassinations supposed to have happened on the night of 13th of January. All the principals slated for death were already within reach except Brigadier Ademulegun who went to attend an OAU Defence Commission meeting in Ghana from 6th – 10th January. When he was told of an imminence of a mutiny in Nigeria, he argued against its possibility. He said none of the top commanders was interested in taking over government. And if some renegade unit in the South –they had to be from the South because that was where the seat of government was – he would mobilise troops from his brigade in the North to crush them. The maths of an armed takeover in Nigeria unlike Egypt (1952) or Togo (1963) could not add up.

When he arrived Lagos on the 12th January, Major Anuforo the staff officer in charge of accommodation offered the Brigadier reservation at the plush Ikoyi Hotel before his flight to Kaduna the next morning. The Brigadier refused. He then asked Major Madiebo, lodged at the Apapa Officer's Mess chalet and who had just finished eating a recruitment lunch with Ifeajuna, to vacate the place for the Brigadier. Ademulegun was not interested. Had he accepted to stay at Ikoyi Hotel, his assassination would have been blessed for that very night: His door would have been knocked several times in the middle of the night by the night receptionist just as he did to Largema's Room 115 door. He would have been told there was an urgent phone call for him. And because the phone was situated at the end of the corridor, he would have been told to come out and pick the call. He would have come out and like Largema, bullets would have been pumped into his heart and lungs as he picked up the phone. Ademulegun refused Anuforo's hotel offer. Instead, he went to stay with a friend somewhere in Lagos and was off the radar. On the morning of Friday 14 January, he showed up at his office at the 1st Brigade. Captain Ben Gbulie confirmed his presence to his fellow mutineers. Like a clock's hands at twelve o clock, both the Northern and Southern rebels joined hands to set the H-hour.



Azikiwe: President

Ifeajuna then went to fetch 2 NCOs to load Largema's corpse into the boot of Mercedes Benz in the car park. The Prime Minister heard the gunshots, saw the corpse and lost his cool. There was another senior officer, David Ejoor the commander of 1st Battalion in Enugu who had come for the Ifeajuna-organised Brigade Training Conference and was in Room 17. He was at the

cocktail hours earlier. They knocked and burst into many rooms but they could not find him. As it will be seen later, a modesty incident caused Ejoor to change rooms earlier hence missing his allocation of death.

When Ifeajuna left, the night manager of the hotel picked up the phone to report the incident to the police but the phones were dead. He drove down to the Force HQ. Two incidents had been reported: the kidnap of the Prime Minister and the assassination of a senior officer of the army. There was a coup going on. The scrambling of police chiefs and senior politicians began in earnest. It was around half three.

As Ifeajuna's unit tore through the dark to the Mess (a mere three minutes' drive), the headlamps sprayed out light as if from a water hose until they picked out an impossibility. They did not notice it until they passed by and they had to stop when they were hailed down. It was Brigadier Maimalari in pyjamas hailing them to stop, stop. When he escaped from his home, he hid in shrubs and watched as Okafor's Land Rover sped up and down searching for him. He had been hiding and running trying to make his way to the Federal Guards barracks. When he heard or saw the light of an oncoming vehicle he dived into the road side shrubs again. An average walk from his house to the barracks was 22 minutes. Running was around 10 minutes. One hour after scaling his fence, he was already on the last lap of his journey to the Federal Guards.



Major General Aguiyi Ironsi: The most senior military officer then

When he saw some headlights turning in from Kingsway Road, he ducked into the shrubs again thinking it might be Okafor and his men. Instead, he recognised the red Mercedes Benz and his famous brigade major. It was not immediately clear to Maimalari that Ifeajuna was no longer in mufti but in combat uniform. Instead, Maimalari saw Ifeajuna as his hope and dashed for him. Ifeajuna slammed the brakes, stepped out with his SMG and sprayed his boss. In 1965, according to the outgoing British GOC, Major General Welby-Everard, Maimalari was brilliant but too young that was why he was excluded from the list of his possible replacement. When Maimalari's killers lifted his body into the Land Rover, its spring sank. Maimalari was born in a little town called Maimalari in Borno Province on 2nd of January 1932. He attended Officer Cadet School, Eaton Hall in England from January – May 1951; attended Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst from August 1951 – February 1953; attended Staff College, Quetta, Pakistan from January –December 1961. He spoke five languages (English, Fulfulde, Hausa, Arabic, and Kanuri). He enlisted in the army on 10th of July 1950 and on 5th February 1953, he became the 6th Nigerian commissioned into the army after Ugboma, Bassey, Ironsi, Ademulegun and Ogundipe in that order. Maimalari was survived by his parents, a teenage wife and three children.

When Ifeajuna arrived at the Mess which also doubled as the senior officer's mortuary, Anuforo and Chukwuka had returned with Pam's corpse. Major Adewale Ademoyega too had finished his assignment of placing rebel troops at NET building, Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), and disabling the telephone infrastructure. The fifth Major unaccounted for was Donatus Okafor who was still searching for Maimalari. Ademoyega and Captain Adeleke then jumped into the Land Rover driven by Lance corporal Omeru and off they sped to Maimalari's residence to inform Okafor that the Brigadier had become a stiff corpse at the Mess. The night was eventually going on as planned. It was around four o'clock. The rebels were already feeling the triumph of flying to the highest skies where stories transformed into glories. This was the time Ahmed Kurfi Secretary of State in Ministry of Defence went to inform Shehu Shagari the Minister of Works that some soldiers had vanished with the Prime Minister.

Then a comedy of errors took off that grounded the rebels and enhanced the failure of the Revolution. The general alarm in the Federal Guards barracks next door had been sounded. They had been disturbed by vehicle and troops movements up and down the barracks. Two batches of NCOs had been turned out for alleged IS operations and some gunshots were heard in the proximity of the barracks. All soldiers were ordered by the head of NCOs, RSM Samuel Tayo to gear up and proceed to their various platoons. But according to military standard operating procedure, being NCOs, they needed an officer to give them commands. So the RSM led a platoon to their Officer

Commanding's(OC) residence at No 5 George Street, Ikoyi. But Okafor was not in. He was five streets away at Thompson Avenue searching for the Maimalari. Then they headed to knock on Lt Ezedigbo – the second in command's door at the block of flats at No 4 Lugard Avenue. He was not in too. He was part of the Revolution. So was the next in line Lt Igweze. Of all the five Federal Guard's officers, only a very junior officer Lt Paul Tarfa was at home. Lt Joseph Osuma was not in too. He was not part of the assassins though; he had only gone out to sleep with a friend following Friday night's festivities. If Tarfa later turned out to be somebody in his military career, it was because on that night of nights, he was present at home when the RSM arrived flustered looking for leadership. There had never been mutiny in the barracks before and so no one knew the standard procedural response.

According to his later account, Tarfa said he geared up in battle dress and was driven to the Federal Guards by the RSM's convoy to take command. He was briefed on the situation and was told that most of the Igbo soldiers in the barracks could not be accounted for including the OC. Tarfa put the Federal Guards on a defensive alert like a cobra coiled to spring. He ordered sentries and machine guns emplaced on sandbag to be posted round the barracks walls. They made up and circulated a call out with its password "Black/Boy" so that dissent soldiers who were still coming in and out of the barracks could be identified and rounded up. Corporal Sarwuan, a Tiv rifleman became the victim of this coiled cobra. Seeing a soldier coming in from the dark, RSM Tayo challenged,
'Halt. Who goes there?'
'Friend.' Sarwuan was said to have replied.
'Advance to be recognised.' Tayo ordered and called out "Black."

But Sarwuan did not respond and continued to advance. Tayo called out again, "Black." No response. The RSM's finger twitched in the trigger guard and his heart beat faster and faster. Tayo for the third and last time called out "Black." But Sarwuan kept advancing without replying. He had forgotten the password and Tayo concluded he was an enemy. He squeezed the trigger plunging Sarwuan's wife and children into sadness of incomprehensive depths. Major Adegoke, who took over from Ifeajuna as the DA and QMG at 1st Brigade in Kaduna was similarly killed in 4th battalion in Ibadan having been mistaken for a mutineer/enemy. He was holidaying in his native home when he heard about the coup; he hastened to the barracks for more information only to be handed his death. Black/Boy. His Boy did not follow Black and Adegoke met his death.

That night, Tarfa who had assumed the command of the Federal Guards went to the OC's office adjacent to his. In a file in the cabinet, he saw planning documents, operations orders and a recent signal note from Nzeogwu which read: "Ensure the Tiger is in the net. Even if recruiting more captains." The

tiger he later understood was Maimalari; the net was his death. The extra captain they managed to recruit was Adeleke who only knew of the plot hours earlier at the Apapa residence of Ifeajuna after being brought by Major Ademoyega before some departed for the cocktail. Adeleke at first refused and was told that if the Revolution to free Nigeria started and he was not with it, he would regret it maybe not that day, maybe not the following day, but soon, and for the rest of his life. He fell in enthusiastically. At around quarter past four, Adeleke was with Ademoyega at the Officers Mess when Okafor came to report that he had just lost his command; that the Federal Guards were no longer responding to his orders, that in fact they almost shot him when he went back to the barracks to mobilise more troops. The only infantry force on which much had hinged and much of the second stage would hinge was no longer with the Revolution. What had happened?

When Okafor's lieutenants roused the NCOs for the assignment, they were told they were needed for an IS operation. They were expecting to be taken outside Lagos to crush one of the hotspot of the Western Region's crisis or to Mushin to quell a riot as they had done three weeks before. Instead they were taken to Brigadier Maimalari's residence and they saw his guard commander and another soldier shot dead. The guard commander was known to them. They lived in the same quarters at the barracks. They had started to doubt whether they were truly on IS operation. Again, they were ordered not give the Brigadier a chance to surrender; they were ordered to shoot him dead on sight by Okafor, a disgraced thief and a liar pardoned by the same Maimalari they were asked to kill. They concluded that this was not an IS operation; this was an assassination squad they were forced to join. The final straw came when Ademoyega arrived to tell them that Maimalari had been found and shot by Ifeajuna. His corpse laid at the Mess. It was a terrible blow to the NCOs. Okafor was relieved to hear the news and ordered his second in command Captain Oji with four NCOs to proceed to check the situation at Airport Junction in Ikeja. The remaining men were ordered to proceed to Mess for further instruction. Instead, they rebelled, passed the Mess to the barracks and threatened to shoot Okafor if he tried to give them orders anymore. It was righteous mutiny within an unholy mutiny.



Okoti-Eboh: Finance Minister

According to the testimony Ifeajuna later gave after his arrest a month later, he saw the GOC's official car and his guards driving past the entrance of the barracks. This made them conclude that it was the GOC that had roused the soldiers and placed the barracks on a defensive alert. As envisaged, the Revolution was not meant to be a one-night stand. They had anticipated that at one point, soldiers still loyal to the Nigerian Army would wake up and fight them. That was why in the first place they decided to kill off all the senior officers that will command the loyal troops. In addition, that was also why immediately Nzeogwu finished off Sarduana up North, he went to take over Brigadier Ademulegun's office at the Brigade. Knowing that the Brigadier or his deputy would not come back, the revolutionaries had expected that the shock of seeing all the senior officers dead was enough to sag the morale of the loyal soldiers to fight back. Furthermore, Ifeajuna had planned for a further arms advantage: The firepower of the Southern brigade was in Abeokuta with the 2nd Recce Squadron and the field artillery battery. Their officer commanding, Major Obienu was a central plank of the Revolution. He was supposed to mobilise his armoured, mechanised and artillery support: all the ferrets, the scot cars, 105mm Howitzers and assemble at the airport junction in Ikeja. A unit from the Revolution high command set up at the Federal Guards Mess was supposed to go to Ikeja bring this armoured squadron into Lagos and position them menacingly in front of the barracks and other military installations to neutralise any threat to the Revolution.

But with the presence of the GOC and his perceived rousing of troops against them, Federal Guards Mess was no longer the place to set up the Revolution High command. They had to hasten up connect with Obienu's unit and quickly

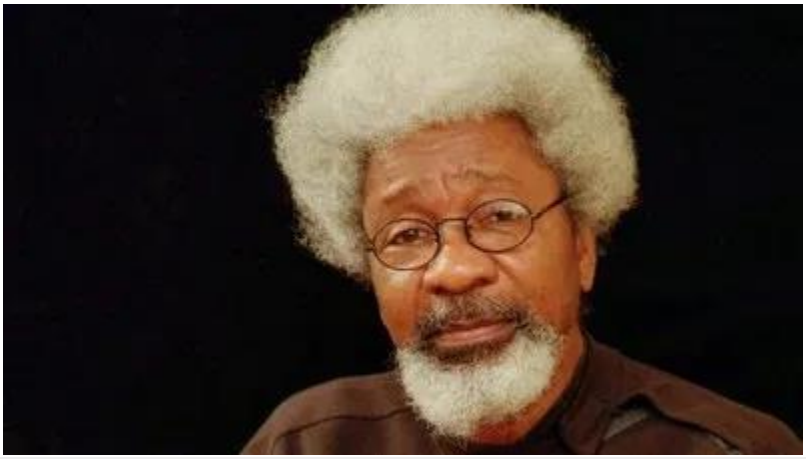
establish their firepower supremacy. All the 9 corpses were quickly loaded into the 3 tonner including the Minister of Finance who was still alive and scared to death. They left in a convoy of 6 vehicles: two army Land Rovers, Okafor's private Peugeot 403, Ifeajuna's Red Mercedes Benz, Anuforo's private car and the 3 Tonner.

Unfortunately for their Revolution, Obienu overdrank at Maimalari's cocktail party. Instead of attending the briefing at Ifeajuna's house or proceeding straight to Abeokuta as expected, Major John Obienu branched at Shomolu to taste his mistress and became glued to a cleavage of extraordinary amplitude. He lacked the strength to get up as his name was melodiously chanted with Gregorian devotion. The Revolution to save Nigeria and do better than the politicians began to fall apart piece by piece.

Ibadan
The 4th battalion in Ibadan was the oldest and the second biggest batallion in Nigeria. It had 26 officers and 829 NCOs. During the centenary celebrations at Mapo Hall in Ibadan in June 1963, the Olubadan of Ibadan, Sir Isaac Akinyele conferred on the battalion Freedom of Ibadan City and handed it the Key of Ibadan City. More than anywhere in Nigeria, Ibadan was historically a war-crazy city. At midnight just before his pre-battle rousing plan, to the other four Majors, Ifeajuna telephoned Captain Nwobosi, the officer commanding the Field Artillery Battery in Abeokuta. He issued the all-clear message and ordered Nwobosi and his unit to proceed to Ibadan 90km away and achieve the Revolution's objectives there. Had the Revolution succeeded, Captain Nwobosi would have been the most rewarded.

Solving the bloodbath of the Western Region was one of the reasons they had plotted the Revolution in the first place. But up till two days before the planned date, they had no officer to actualise the operations in Ibadan, the Western Region's capital. Nwobosi was recruited on January 12 when he came to Apapa for the Ifeajuna-organised Brigade Training Conference. Ifeajuna tried to recruit Madiebo over lunch on the same day, but Madiebo started preaching about failure being an option and tribal loyalties being stronger than national ambition among the revolutionaries. Ifeajuna had to cut him out and relied on Nwobosi who did not even know places in Ibadan very well. The 4th battalion in Eleyele which they had initially planned to use was just 10 minutes' drive away from the Premier's Lodge. Their commander Lt Col Abogo Largema like other battalion commanders was already earmarked for the end at Ikoyi Hotel. That would give his second in command Major Mac Nzefili a safe space to take over the command. Like all the seconds in command of all battalions in the Nigerian Army, Nzefili was Igbo. Up to the last minute, Ifeajuna harboured no doubt that he would come on board for the Revolution. He spent all of December travelling to his residence in Ibadan to discuss operational and

tactical requirements but he only met his wife at home; he was always away on assignment. Also Nzefili as the British records disclosed was awaiting court-martial for getting drunk, wondering into the female quarters of the police barracks, resisting arrest and biting the ear of the arresting police officer. Nzefili declined Ifeajuna co-option.



Soyinka: Arrested for allegedly forcing Western Broadcasting Service to air his own subversive tape, asking Akintola to resign

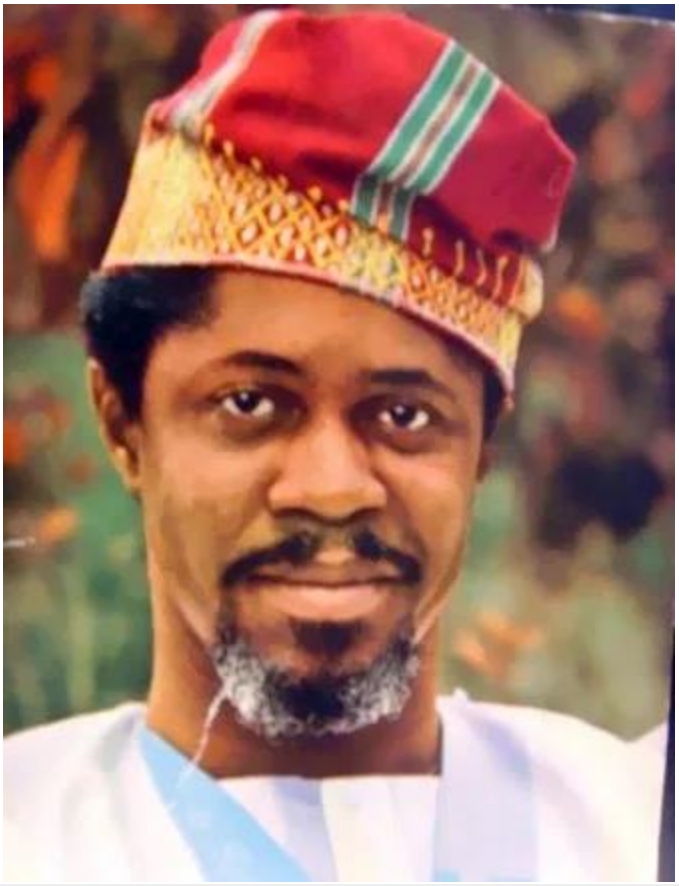
On the night of the assassinations, Nzefili was at the officers' mess in Ibadan when Justice Kayode Eso, Akin Johnson, the administrator of Abeokuta Local Government Council and his wife Mosun met with him. The Johnsons came to seek asylum at Eso's residence in Ibadan having escaped Action Group's hoodlums who accused him of gravitating towards Akintola. Eso told them he did not consider his own home safe since 12th of December 1965 after inadvertently humiliating Akintola by freeing Wole Soyinka, the un-mysterious gunman. Eso and Akintola were neighbours. Since the Johnsons knew Largema, Justice Esho took them to the barracks for refuge. According to Esho, Nzefili told them Largema was in Lagos but once he finished drinking with his mates at 11pm, he took the Johnsons to their safe rooms without knowing them personally. Largema his boss was widely respected both outside and inside the Army and Nzefili too when not drunk was a kind man.

To Ifeajuna, Nzefili was a disappointment. It was a huge relief when Nwobosi accepted to head the Ibadan task. Ifeajuna then gave Nwobosi a forged order issued in the name of Brigadier Z Maimalari authorising him to take a detachment to Ibadan for an IS operations there. This signal (instruction) was necessary in case a senior officer challenged him or the quartermaster needed proof before issuing ammo.

When they reached Ibadan shortly after 2am, they headed straight to Agodi Telephone exchange and ordered all workers to go home. Unlike Lagos, where the telephone exchange was partly automatic, Ibadan's exchange was fully automatic. Asking the workers to go home did not silence the phones. Nwobosi

and his men then proceeded to ECN (Electricity Corporation of Nigeria) Eleyele, ordered the workers to halt all power generation and go home. Ibadan was plunged into darkness. Ibadan people were already used to transcending the dark. This was the time the British head of ECN was woken up and was told soldiers had shut down the generators. Nwobosi even offered some of the workers lift to town. He was a gentleman. As they set out for the operations in Abeokuta, he saw a lonely pregnant woman in labour who couldn't make it to the hospital. He halted his convoy and took the woman to the hospital in the army Land Rover. But it was not only because he wanted to be kind that why he gave the workers lift; they did not know the house address of their first target, Chief Fani-Kayode, the deputy premier. The lifted ECN workers showed him the address.

Of all the regions in the country and at the federal government, the Western Region was the only government with a deputy premier. When Nwobosi's convoy arrived at the front of Fani-Kayode's residence at Iyaganku GRA, they were shocked at the number of armed thugs that were present between the hundred metre road main gate and the main residential building. The thugs quickly ran way after being awoken by a slowly moving convoy of 16 gunners, 2 lance bombardiers, 2 sergeants, 1 battery quartermaster sergeant, 1 second lieutenant, 1 trooper and 1 captain in two 3 tonners and a Land Rover. If the violence, the rapes, house burning, lynchings, intimidation of opposition lecturers, election rigging and all other woes that had engulfed the Western Region had a face, it was that of the 44-year-old Remilekun Fani-Kayode, a Cambridge-educated lawyer who presided over the government thugs infrastructure. From 1959, he was a pro-Zik NCNC politician before Akintola poached him in 1962 and made him the Minister of Local Government and Deputy Premier of the most advanced Region in the country. According to Nwobosi, they were surprised that Fani-Kayode's thugs quickly ran away because it contradicted the legendary stories of Fani Power they had heard. They were rather prepared for a confrontational showdown.



Remi Fani-Kayode: Akintola’s deputy

“Fani-Kayode! Come down you are under lawful arrest by the army” Nwobosi shouted. He said lawful because the forged signal issued in the name of Maimalari stated Fani Kayode’s arrest as one of their objectives. The compound like the city was in darkness. Visibility was provided by the headlamps of the convoy parked on the driveway.

“I am coming. I am coming; don’t shoot.” Fani-Kayode was reported to have responded from upstairs. He did not move. Nwobosi called out again. But Fani-Kayode did not move. Nwobosi then fired his gun into the ground as a warning. When their target did not bulge, they broke a glass panel in the door to gain entrance and started ransacking the house and intermittently shooting. The children were terrified and weeping. They found Fani-Kayode in his bedroom with his hands already upstretched like twin towers above his uncombed high hair.

“I surrender…I surrender…I surrender…” he chanted repeatedly already drenched in fear. Again Nwobosi and his gunners were surprised to see the feared embodiment of the legendary Fani Power shuddering.
Nwobosi, 23 addressed the 44-year-old deputy premier: “You have wasted a lot of time – we could have shot you.”

They tied him with rifle slings in front of his wife and 3 children and tossed him in the 3 tonner. His wife picked up the phone and called the Premier to report the arrest. Akintola tried to calm her down and assured her that he would get him released as soon as possible. It never occurred to him the soldiers could be coming for him too until he heard the convoy and saw the headlamps. He grabbed his gun and gathered ammunition. That night of nights, of all those fell by bullets all over the country, Akintola was the only one who died the death of a true warrior. He was not interested in the Akintola-you-are-under-arrest noises he was hearing from outside. No way! Oya, say hello to my little friend: he cocked his SMG and began to blaze furiously like Tony Montana as Nwobosi and his men tried to open his bedroom door.



New Nigerian newspaper: First to publish photos of Sardauna's burnt house

Akintola was the 13th Aare Ona Kakanfo (Field Marshal General) of Yorubaland. After the previous Kakanfo, Aare Latosa who reigned from 1871 – 1885, no one had the courage to accept the title for 79 years because of the mysterious curse associated it. Since Alaafin Ajagbo inaugurated the first Aare Kokoro Gangan (Scorpion) of Iwoye in 1650, no Aare was expected to live long and enjoy a soft death. The title was like the warrior Achilles in Homer's Iliad whose fate as explained to him by his mother, Thetis, was either to die young and gain glory, or to live a long boring life in obscurity. When Ojo Aburumaku (meaning: the wicked always live long) was installed as the 11th Aare Ona Kakanfo in 1860, Yorubaland was so peaceful that he had to foment a civil war in Ogbomosho which he then proceeded to supress with uncommon brutality just to justify his title. He was struck by lightning in 1871 and Aare Latosa, Akintola's immediate predecessor took over. One of the reasons the Kafanfo Curse became self-fulfilling was that the overdose of courage which an Aare was supposed to possess actively insulated him from siding with peaceful resolutions, seeing reason and knowing when to stop. Several times from the 3 Tonner, Fani-Kayode called out to Akintola to cease firing; that the soldiers only came to take him to Lagos. Instead, Akintola continued to blaze his gun

at Nwobosi's men even though he never successfully hit anyone. They had fled the house and ducked behind the garden shrubs. Justice Kayode Eso who was a neighbour described the relentless shooting as sounding like the crackle of rapid bush bushing. Akintola then ran out of ammo but Nwobosi and his men did not know this, they thought he was reloading and waiting for them.



Ojukwu: First to conceive a coup in 1965, but Gowon and Ejoor who he wanted to use for national spread, refused. He contacted Ademoyega too

After a while, Aare Akintola held out a white handkerchief of surrender and proceeded to his balcony with his hands up. Nwobosi and his men proceeded to end him.

When Akintola's wife saw his lifeless body surrounded by empty casings drenched in blood, she screamed. In less than three months, she had lost her husband and first child, Modele Odunjo to the Western crisis. That night, if one put one's ear to the echo chamber of Nigeria to hear the deafening roar of woes on one side and joy on the other, one would surely break into pieces. Nwobosi and his men then made a mistake: they left for the Federal Guards Mess in Lagos without packing Akintola's corpse with them. (He was buried the 23 January 1966 at his home in Ogbomoso)

Editor's Note: This is the first of a three-part series. The hard copy is circulating nationawide. Damola Awoyokun, was, on 12 February 2016, inducted as a Chartered Engineer and Member of the British Institution of Civil Engineers(ICE). The first Nigerian honoured that way was Hebert Macaulay who was inducted on 5th December 1893. We celebrate his achievement with this cover story.

Readers can direct their questions to the writer (he is ready to respond) through: osoronga@yahoo.com

Nigeria's first coup, Biafra: British Secret files (Part Two)

Sunday, June 19, 2016 5:22 am

Damola Awoyokun offers the second and third part of his revealing fresh narrative on Nigeria's first coup on 15 January 1966, using hitherto secret British diplomatic and intelligence files. This sequel tells how Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu held sway as military governor of Northern Nigeria for several days, how Yakubu Gowon in Lagos and David Ejoor in Enugu crushed the mutiny inspired by Emmanuel Ifeajuna and majorly ethnic Igbo military officers, the days of national confusion and political crisis before the emergence of General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi as Nigeria's military head of state. The writer provides some other troubling additional insight: the pollution of national values very early in Nigeria's march to nationhood, by political leaders, who preferred to whitewash confirmed, convicted crooks and fraudsters, using the specious paint of politics



Nzeogwu: Led soldiers to kill Ahmadu Bello in Kaduna

The Counter Attack
Lagos – Gowon

The soldier who nipped the coup in the bud and ensured it failed miserably was Gowon. Lt Col Yakubu 'Jack' Gowon left the shores of the country on May 1965. He was then Adjutant General at the Army HQ. Because of his distinguished performance in Congo Peacekeeping mission, he was asked to attend the elite Joint Services Course at Latima House, Buckinghamshire, UK. The course was designed for lieutenant colonels on how to plan and execute tri-service operations. While the course was drawing to an end, the Army HQ told him that he was coming home to become the commander of the 2nd battalion, in Ikeja Lagos. His ship docked at Apapa Wharf, Lagos, on the morning of Thursday, 13th January 1966 and Lieutenant T. Hamman, a brigade staff officer was sent by Ifeajuna, to pick him up. (Gowon and Ifeajuna were both 31 years old.)

Gowon's heartthrob, Edith Ike was there to welcome him too dressed for the occasion. Jack did not inform her of his arrival date but her network within the Army HQ kept her alerted and ensured she was neither surprised nor outmanoeuvred by fast-eyed competitors whose rears were so shapely and soft as if Lagos lagoon was stored in their back pockets. Lt Colonel Hillary

Njoku the erstwhile commander of the 2nd battalion had been reassigned to the NMTC in Kaduna. He was slated to vacate his residence on January 16. Ifeajuna then offered Gowon a reservation at the posh Ikoyi Hotel pending the time Njoku left. Gowon then went to see Lt Colonel Pam at No 8 Ikoyi Crescent Ikoyi whereas Adjutant General, Gowon used to live before he went on course in England. He wanted to stay with him for some few days and catch up what he had missed about the army and the country. Pam's twins Ishaku and Ishaya and the girls Jummai and Kaneng rejoiced "Uncle Jack!! Welcome Uncle Jack!!" when they saw Gowon filling up their doorway. Pam and Gowon were both on the Editorial Board of the influential army journal, The Nigerian Magazine. They were also both from Middle-Belt region though Gowon was Anagas and Pam was Birom. Pam was the first officer in the Army from the Middle Belt. Pam advised Gowon that since he would soon take over from 2nd battalion, he should rather be close to Ikeja not be in Ikoyi. Had Gowon accepted Ifeajuna's Ikoyi Hotel reservation, he would have ended up like Abogo Largema. Had he stayed with Pam, he would have been slayed like Pam.



Yakubu: He made sure the coup failed miserably.

On Friday, the morning of 14th January, Gowon went to the brigade headquarters in Apapa to see Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari the head of the brigade under whose formation he was would serve. Largema, the CO of 4th Battalion in Ibadan was there too attending the Brigade Training Conference. Major M.O. Nzefili, Largema's second in command called in from Ibadan that the Western Region's police commissioner, Chief Odofin Bello came to the barracks to request a detachment for some IS operations. It was Maimalari who later called Nzefili back. He told him to tell the commissioner to place his

request via Army HQ. Maimalari's intention with the cost implications. He had argued that his brigade's men, arms and ammunition, his supply and transport were being used to provide internal security for the West's political crisis hence his brigade deserved more appropriations.

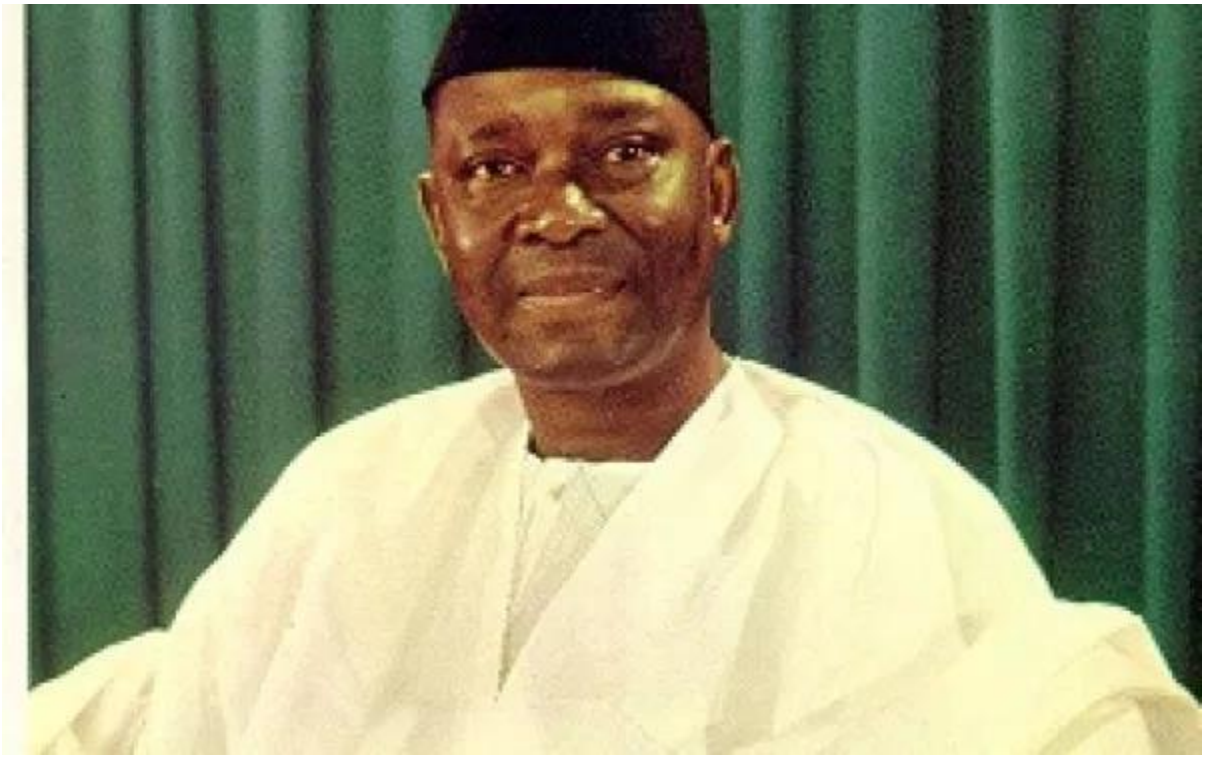
Maimalari had also circulated a signal signed by Ironsi that certain unnamed officers backed up by politicians were planning to cause trouble. He asked his commanders to tighten security when they get back to their units and to warn all their subordinates against disloyal acts. The influencing politicians he was referring to was notably Mbazulike Amaechi an MP and NCNC's publicity secretary, RN Okafor an MP who was on that day appointed the minister of state for trade, and Paul Nwokedi. They had befriended Donatus Okafor the CO of Federal Guards and was always seen most evenings going to Okafor's residence in the evenings to lecture him about Revolution, Armed Struggle, Current Affairs and the need for a conscious Army. Ademulegun too had cause to report Nzeogwu to first his boss Col Shodeinde and then to the Army HQ in Lagos which supervised the NMTC. Captain Udowoid complained to Ademulegun through a letter that Nzeogwu's lectures had become extended sermons of political bitterness that had little to do with military training. Ademulegun in his report wrote that Nzeogwu was "a young man in a hurry that needed to be watched." Ironsi and Maimalari never envisaged that the human intelligence they received had a false estimate of the scale of what was being planned. It was not just some mere disturbance but a full-fledged treasonable mutiny that would take the army leadership down with it.

Maimalari then officially welcomed Gowon to the Brigade and told him of the cocktail party at his residence that night. Ironsi was there too and being the special guest of honour, he told Gowon he had to be there. Gowon politely declined saying his sweetheart who came to welcome him had to be taken back safely to University College Ibadan. She was in the middle of her exams. But Ironsi did not accept the excuse. He told Gowon:
'Edith Ike? We know her. Bring her to the party. That's an order.'

Ironsi was a member of her network. They laughed and Gowon consented. After the cocktail party, Jack and Edith later left for Ikeja Cantonment as Pam had advised and they had to make do with a makeshift room to spark magic from a cold starless night and explode bam, bam like fireworks.

Commotion rose. It was around five in the morning. Army vehicles zoomed back and forth and soldiers in different degrees of undress were running in haphazard directions. Gowon sprang from bed to the window and could make out Captain Martin Adamu from the chaos. As the adjutant and the chief of staff of the outgoing commander, Adamu was in charge of all the organisation, administration and discipline for a battalion. He told Gowon that the GOC came

to inform them there was some disturbance in Lagos in the order of a coup; the bugle had been sounded and every soldier was ordered to report to their company. Gowon too left the cantonment for the battalion HQ. There he found the GOC and Njoku huddled over a map, jotting down some information and sipping tea. There were captains, company commanders and the battalion hierarchy already present. The GOC then told him there were some unknown soldiers 'creating trouble in Lagos.' He and Njoku had just dispatched a platoon on a fact-finding mission. Gowon was shocked that he was not specifically sent for as the incoming commander of the battalion. What he did not know was that Ironsi did not send for Njoku too. He went straight to the RSM's office and asked a sentry to go and fetch him. It was Njoku who moved the meeting to the conference room the battalion headquarters from the RSM's office. Gowon then started having doubts. He asked if they had contacted the brigadier and other senior officers down in Lagos. The answer was negative.



Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe: Leaked Ojukwu's coup idea to Peter Enahoro published in the Sunday Times of 2nd of June 1968 when he (Azikiwe) had fallen out with Ojukwu during the Biafra war

Had the night being normal, as the General Officer Commanding, the first person Ironsi supposed to contact for action was Brigadier Maimalari who would then mobilise the Federal Guards, the combat force immediately accessible to him in Lagos. That was why Maimalari was running to the Federal Guards. Should more infantry reinforcement be needed, the next unit to draw from would be 2nd battalion in Ikeja then 4th battalion in Ibadan. And if mechanised and artillery support were needed to augment combat power, 2nd Field Battery and 2nd Recce Squadron in Abeokuta would be mobilised. The

battle order and operations procedure was that clear and basic. But the night was not normal and the GOC was a certified mediocre. According to the British intelligence assessment report, Ironsi was "a notorious profligate and twenty years of British Army records show him up militarily as a consistent flop." Only Ironsi would reach a battalion in a time of action and order for the RSM when there were 460 officers between him and the RSM. The history of Nigeria would have been very different had Maimalari refused to solicit lift from Ifeajuna and reached the Federal Guards by himself. He was already less than 100m away.



Major General Aguiyi Ironsi: According to the British intelligence assessment report, Ironsi was "a notorious profligate and twenty years of British Army records show him up militarily as a consistent flop." Only Ironsi would reach a battalion in a time of action and order for the RSM when there were 460 officers between him and the RSM

After the briefing, Ironsi ordered an immediate platoon headed by Lt Walbe to be formed for a reconnaissance while the companies prepare for action. He then asked the platoon when they would be ready. He was told given the nature of the requirements, two and a half hours' time at the minimum. To conclude, Ironsi asked for questions. Gowon was shocked. In his later account of the night he wrote that he asked: "When was this trouble first reported, sir"

" About 3am"
"What time is it now?"
" 5:30."
"These people have already had over two-and-a-half hours' advantage. Must we give them the same again to enable them to consolidate?"

Gowon then faced the platoon commanders, 'I give everyone 20 minutes to get ready.' That was the first order he gave as the incoming commander of the battalion. Unlike Njoku the outgoing commander and the GOC who contented themselves with issuing orders from the safety of the battalion headquarters while the mutineers went on killing, Gowon a lieutenant colonel, decided to lead the quick reaction force. Success laid in being bold. And that made all the difference. Spruced up in full combat kit, Gowon grabbed a helmet, his service pistol, sten gun and readied himself for action. He gazed at his lover, Edith, fresh, sweet-looking, innocently-dozing and wondered whether he would see her again. To him, the call of duty and the requirements of its success superseded the indulgences of an irresistible bed. After all, the Revolution collapsed partly because Major John Obienu preferred the cock-teasing allure of a bed in Shomolu and its two cushion of pins to the call of revolutionary duty. The sense of the true is always a kind of conquest but first it is an opportunity.



Buhari: In charge of the Land Rovers and three tonners that roared out of the Motor Transport Section of the battalion, ready to take on the mutineers

Lt Muhammadu Buhari was in charge of the Land Rovers and three tonners that roared out of the Motor Transport Section of the battalion ready to take on the mutineers. The A Rifle company began to mount like commandos with their ammos doubled up to war quantities. Off, they charged out from the gates of the battalion. The first place Gowon led the force to was the Prime

Minister's residence. It was six o'clock. Gowon met the Minister of State for Defence, Tanko Galadima who told him some armed soldiers had kidnapped the Prime Minister. Gowon then conducted a thorough search of the Residence. He found no mutineer and no clues. He then led the soldiers to the parliament buildings where the office of the Prime Minister was, again no clues. Then he went to the Federal Guards that held responsibility for the safety of service officers and government officials. Gowon praised Tarfa and the RSM Tayo for safeguarding discipline and was told all Igbo officers including the OC were missing.

At around six o clock, Captain Nwobosi and his men too arrived the Federal Guard's Mess from Ibadan. They wondered whether they were reporting early or too late since other units were nowhere to be found. During the planning for the coup, a decision was made against the use of walkie-talkies because their communications would easily be picked up by the Special Branch of the Police Operations Command and Army Signals. Once Gowon was told of the presence of unaccountable soldiers and vehicles next door to the barracks, he rounded up the Mess and overruled Tarfa who preferred lobbing grenades before attacking. Tarfa was a lieutenant. Gowon was a lieutenant colonel. The difference showed. Gowon's fear was that the Prime Minister was there with them and he may be killed during the process. Instead they called out to the mutineers to be aware they had been surrounded. Nwobosi surrendered and showed Gowon the signal from Maimalari authorising their action. Gowon handed Remi Fani Kayode to Tarfa the de facto commander of the Federal Guards for safekeeping. (Victor Banjo came later to take possession of Fani Kayode of his own accord.) With his crack force, Gowon went to the senior officers' residences in Ikoyi. At the GOC's residence, he met his wife Victoria and their six children who told him what happen in the middle of the night with the phone calls they had received. Gowon assured her his husband was safe in Ikeja issuing orders.



Banjo: Ojukwu eliminated him, Ifeajuna and Nzeogwu with extreme prejudice

With Ikoyi clean of the rebels and placed in hands of loyal troops, he proceeded to Apapa military installations and placed loyal officers he could absolutely trust in charge. They were all Northern officers.

The first person to conceive a coup as an antidote to politicians' recklessness destroying the country was Lt Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in 1965. At an off-the-record meeting at the State House facilitated by his friend Bamidele Azikiwe who was the president's first son, Ojukwu asked the President, Nnamdi Azikiwe to bless his plans to use a section of the army to put Azikiwe in actual power instead of the phony powers he enjoyed as Head of Government like the Queen of England. (Azikiwe leaked this secret meeting in an interview with Peter Enahoro published in the Sunday Times of 2nd of June 1968 when he had fallen out with Ojukwu during the Biafra war). Ojukwu thought thoroughly about the consequences of him an Igbo using the army to take over a central government controlled by a Northern party.

So that the coup could have equal representation and be valid as a national youth service, Ojukwu, an Easterner went to recruit some other senior officers, Victor Banjo (a Westerner), David Ejoor (a Mid-Westerner) and Yakubu Gowon (a Northerner). But Ejoor and Gowon refused to participate citing ethical imperatives and military code of conduct. Ojukwu and Banjo did not want to

do it alone because they knew that given the state of the country, the consequences of their coup being seen as a tribal calculation would outweigh any progressive agenda they set out to achieve. That unexecuted coup became the most secret non-secret in the army.

To Ifeajuna and Nzeogwu, their own coup would not have been necessary had Ojukwu not gone to 'invite everybody.' And so to avoid becoming lions anyone could chase away with mere sticks, they conveniently avoided the wisdom of Federal character in their own planning. That later opened the door to the massacres that kept tears in the tap for Igbos once the coup failed. Ojukwu was right. He later eliminated Ifeajuna and Nzeogwu with extreme prejudice. And Banjo too.

The Eastern Region

Lagos – Ejoor



David Ejoor: crushed the plot in Eastern Nigeria

On 9th of January, Lt Col Ejoor the commanding officer of the 1st battalion in Enugu received a signal in the name of Brigadier Maimalari that he was invited to a three day Brigade Training Conference on the 12th – 14th in Apapa, Lagos. The battalion was handed to him on 26th December by Lt Col Adekunle Fajuyi who was transferred to Abeokuta to head the Garrison there. He left for Lagos on 10th of January and was booked into room No 17 Ikoyi Hotel. (Lt Colonel Fajuyi confirmed later to Mr Bell, the British Deputy High commissioner in Ibadan on 22nd January that he too received the signal for the conference and was booked into Ikoyi hotel too. But he refused and chose to stay in the VIP chalets of the officers' in Apapa. He was slated for assassination too). When Ejoor came back from the day's proceeding on 13th January, the air conditioner was left on all day and so the room was extremely cold. He opened the windows and changed into his nightwear only to discover that a lady on the balcony of the block of flats nearby was staring directly into his sacred affairs.

The following morning, he asked at the reception for a change of room. After the conference, he went to Maimalari's residence for the cocktail at 7:30pm. He and the driver of his staff car were travelling back to Enugu the following morning and he wanted his driver to get enough sleep for the 490km trip. Ejoor went to seek Maimalari's permission to leave at 9pm. The Brigadier refused. Ejoor then went to appeal to Colonel Kur Mohammed whom the Brigadier usually handed the Brigade over to when he was absent from the country. Maimalari, like Catholic theology, consented after much saintly intercession. Ejoor left Abogo Largema at the party not knowing that was the last time they would see each other.

By 7am the following day, his driver who went to sleep at Camp in Apapa came banging on his door. He told him there had been terrible happenings the like of which he had not seen or heard before. He said there the Prime Minster and many other officers had been kidnapped. Ejoor stared not only with disbelief but with deep confusion. He was convinced that his driver was drunk early. Just then Largema's driver too came and showed them shells he found in front of his master's room. All the three went to the Largema's room upstairs to find trails of blood which had hardened into a carapace on the corridor.

Ejoor wanted answers. The person who handled the death of soldiers in the army was the Adjutant General. So he left for James Pam's residence. The 30-year-old Mrs Elizabeth Pam said around 3am they noticed soldiers were crawling as they approached their house, climbing the telecom pole and scaling their fence. They were trying to avoid the sentries which they later caught and arrested unawares. They shot at the two front tyres of the car and at the kitchen door. She said James and the children were so terrified that

they knew it was an omen of something very bad. Then Major Chukwuka who was a family friend appeared. When other junior officers complained that they were left to fallow while Chukwuwa was sent on too many courses, Pam said he believed in Chukwuka's potentials as a professional soldier. Chukwuka saluted Pam in the bedroom.

'Sir, you are needed at the office.' Chukwuka told him. Pam thought it was a case of mistaken identity.

'Lieutenant Colonel Pam. Get your coat we have to leave now.' Pam asked Chukwuka and the other three soldiers in his bedroom to step outside for him to change. Pam picked up the phone and dialled Maimalari and Ironsi. After 5 minutes, Chukuwa and his men barged right in and took him downstairs unchanged. Pam resigned for the worst. His wife and children were screaming. What emergency had happened that soldiers had to shoot their way into his house? Chukwuka then assured his crying wife and screaming children, he would be fine. Elizabeth was born to John Daniel, a Ghanaian Christian and Hajara Ayashe, a Fulani Muslim in Kano on July 9, 1935. They had been married for 9 years. His final words to his wife as he was being bundled into the Land Rover was to look after their four little children. He had a strong feeling he would not come back.

As she spoke, Ejoor did not inform her of the blood of Largema at the Ikoyi hotel. He promised her that her husband would be found and brought home safely. He then left for Maimalari's residence, found the place deserted and left for Ironsi's house. It was there Mrs Victoria Ironsi told him Gowon had been there and said her husband, the GOC was in Ikeja. Ejoor promptly headed there.

According to Ejoor's account of that day, when he entered the battalion HQ office, he saluted the GOC. As Ironsi turned around and saw it was Ejoor, he quickly drew his service pistol. Ejoor was stunned at Ironsi's response to his cordial salute.

"Ha, David, are you with me or against me?" the GOC said.

Ejoor replied, "You are my commanding officer, whatever it is, I am with you."

Ironsi said with the event of the past 4 hours things had been confusing. He did not trust any officer. He then began to narrate the event as he saw it. He spoke of how Pam warned him of an ongoing mutiny on phone, how he dressed up, tried to rouse the Federal Guards barracks, how on the way to Ikeja he met Captain Ogbo Oji and some of the mutineers on Carter Bridge –

one of the two bridges connecting Lagos Island to the mainland – and how he bluffed his way through and proceeded to Ikeja to rouse the battalion.

Oji was an officer and he was too high to be manning a roadblock in particular when there was a severe shortage of officers for the Revolution. What happened was Oji was the second in command to Major Okafor whose Federal Guards unit was detailed to eliminate Maimalari. At some minutes past 4 o'clock, after Ademoyega drove over to tell them at Maimalari residence that the Brigadier had been killed, Okafor ordered Oji and four NCOs to check situation in 2nd battalion and see if Obienu's unit had arrived from Abeokuta. En route, he waited on Carter Bridge to get the situation report from the unit Ademoyega posted there to prevent enemy forces from disturbing their Revolution and to ensure key targets did not escape. Oji did not even know there had been a mutiny within a mutiny, that their operational base at Federal Guards Officer's Mess had been compromised, and that the convoy of his fellow conspirators was 15 minutes behind him en-route to Ikeja too. Then Ironsi turned up at the roadblock on the bridge in his staff car accompanied by escorts.

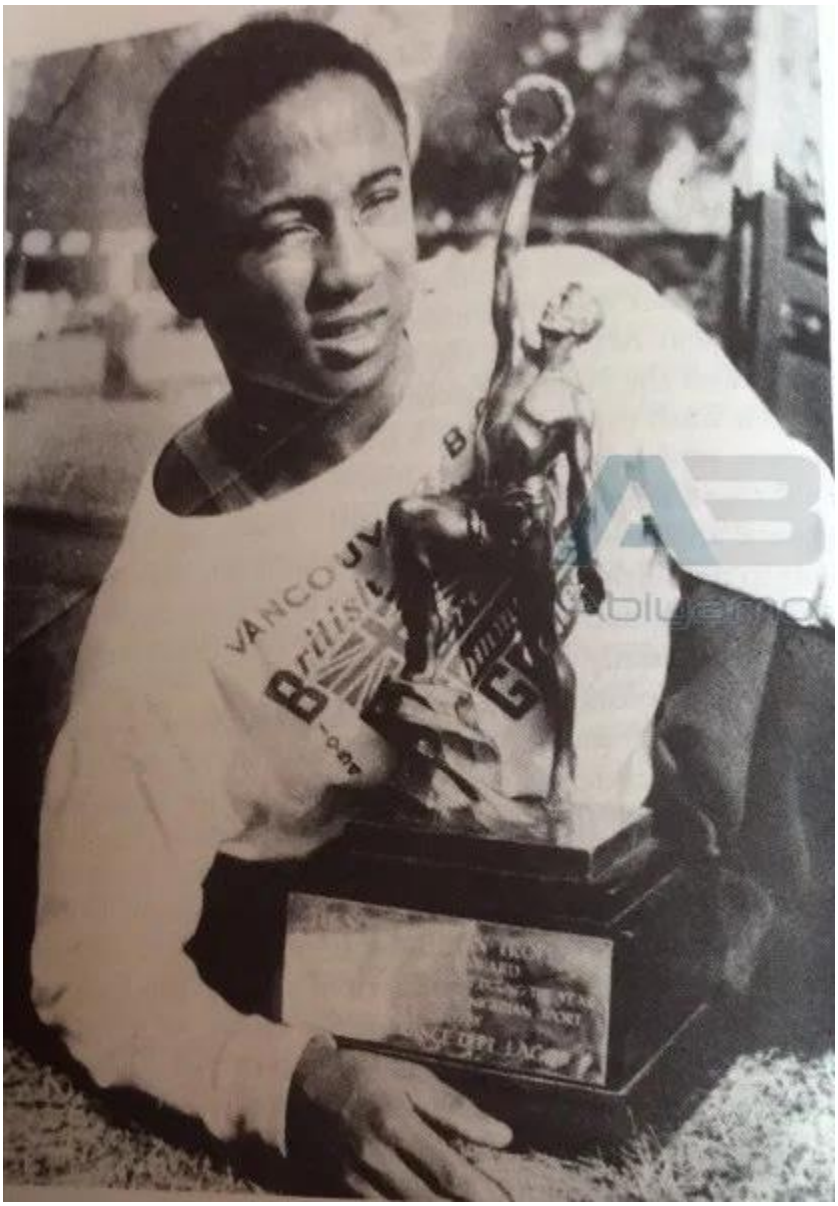
The 41-year-old Ironsi told Ejoor and Njoku that morning, he courageously challenged them and brushed past them to arrive at Ikeja. Oji was courageous enough to become the first of the mutineers to shoot someone in Ikoyi when he referred fatal bullets to Maimalari's obstinate Guard commander. Two hours later, he could not repeat the same fate for the GOC particularly when the success of their Revolution depended on how fast they turned Ironsi into a corpse. To Ejoor, the mutineers may have done something unprofessional and irresponsible but they were not cowards. For the GOC to say he charged at them at a roadblock and just brushed past them may fit diverse storylines except the truth.

Ejoor excused himself when the tea and biscuits that had been ordered for breakfast came. In his later account, Njoku wrote that when Ironsi turned up at Ikeja battalion at half five, his hand vibrated with fright as he struggled to write down the places that he wanted guarded with troops in Lagos and the junior officers he wanted arrested immediately. That was why he, Njoku, had to order tea to calm him down. These newly arrived tea and biscuits were for breakfast and small talk while Gowon was still with his crack force in Lagos willing to slug it out with the rebels. Ejoor did not want to be part of the grotesque. He told Ironsi:

"Sir, it appears I shall be of no use to you here. Perhaps if I can get to Enugu I may be able to bring some help." He then asked the GOC, 'have you heard from Enugu?"

‘Well, no, I cannot order you to go to Enugu now,’ was Ironsi’s reply.

But Ejoor was desperate to go. Military doctrine required that in time of crisis, a commander must connect with his unit and take charge. More so, the signal signed by Ironsi and circulated by Maimalari at the Brigade Training Conference the previous day stated that Commanders should tighten security when they get back to their units and to warn all their subordinates against disloyal acts. Had Ejoor joined Njoku and Ironsi in having breakfast and postponed going to Enugu, the coup would not have ended up as one night stand but would have dragged on and on taking with it many lives.



Emmanuel Ifeajuna: the zoology graduate of UI who inspired the bloody plot

Coup High Command in Transit

When the coup high command reached the airport junction, they could not wait there. Being a strategic junction, there was an unanticipated police check point there. They had to travel further outwards towards Abeokuta because they had corpses and the Finance Minister was on board so they did not want to risk police attention. Of the six vehicles that left Federal Guard's Mess, Okafor's private Peugeot 403, Ademoyega's army Landrover, Anuforo's private car and the 3 Tonner arrived. Ifeajuna's car and Chukwuka Landrover did not turn up. Major Humphrey Chukwuka's unit assisted by 2/Lt Godwin Onyefuru were detailed to go and do to Gowon what they had been doing to all other senior officers. Being the new commander, it was important he was dead so that the battalion made up of mostly Northern soldiers of Tiv origin will not be mobilised for the upcoming showdown during the second stage of the coup.

On reaching the cantonment gate, the sentries told Chukwuka they did not know where the new commander was. It was then that Ironsi and his escorts arrived and Chukwuka left for his block of flats at Ikeja. It was some minutes after five. When Major Nzegwu saw their building awash in the arriving Land Rover's lights, he berated Chukwuka from his opened window:

"Humphrey, your wife has since being crying, where have you been?"

Nzegwu was Chukwuka's next-door neighbour in the same block of flats. They were both staff officers at the Army HQ. While Chukwuka was the deputy Adjutant General under Pam, Nzegwu was a Staff Officer under Kur Mohammed. Nzegwu was the Army's liaison officer with the Air force and with the airport commandant in case flights were needed to be booked or army's visitors welcoming protocols needed to be prepared. He was the one Kur Mohammed had in mind to deploy hours earlier at Maimalari's cocktail, when Ironsi asked Mohammed to bring the London Guardian's correspondent Patrick Keatley to his office at 10am the next day for a discussion on the Smith rebellion in East Africa and to take him to the airport afterwards to catch his flight.

Nzegwu did not know that Chukwuka, his colleague and neighbour had just participated in an event that would lead to Nzegwu's own death six months later. In other words, Nzegwu had just 6 months left to live without knowing it. Had he known, he would not have asked, "Humphrey, your wife has been crying, where have you been?" He would also have asked: "Humphrey, why have you done this to me?"

Shortly afterwards, the barrack alarm went off. Being a combat battalion, all soldiers had to report to their various company offices. According to Onyefuru's account of that night, to obey the alarm, he had to leave the Chukwuka to join his company. Chukwuka later called his company office to ask for Lt Zacchaeus Idowu, the Quartermaster of the battalion. But on hearing Onyefuru's voice in the background, he asked him to come on the intercom. Chukwuka then asked if anyone knew anything yet. Onyefuru replied that they were awaiting the GOC's briefing. Chukwuka panicked, left his crying wife and fled to the East for refuge via Ijebu Ode road while Ademoyega, Anuforo and the rump of the coup plotters were still waiting for him on Abeokuta Road. The Revolution that looked so promising an hour earlier was no longer itself. Its drivers were staring into a deep well and seeing a trapped sky. It started to dawn on them that their stories may not become glories after all. But there was no going back.



Nigerian Soldiers : 1966 political intervention led to genocide, bloody civil war

At some minutes past 5 o'clock, Anuforo and Ademoyega decided to proceed to Abeokuta, mobilise Obienu and his firepower to keep the Revolution on track. There were nine corpses in the 3 tonner and it was not necessary to give them a lift to Abeokuta when they could easily dispose them right there in the bushes by the roadside. It was then that Anuforo noticed the drum-waisted Okotie-Eboh.

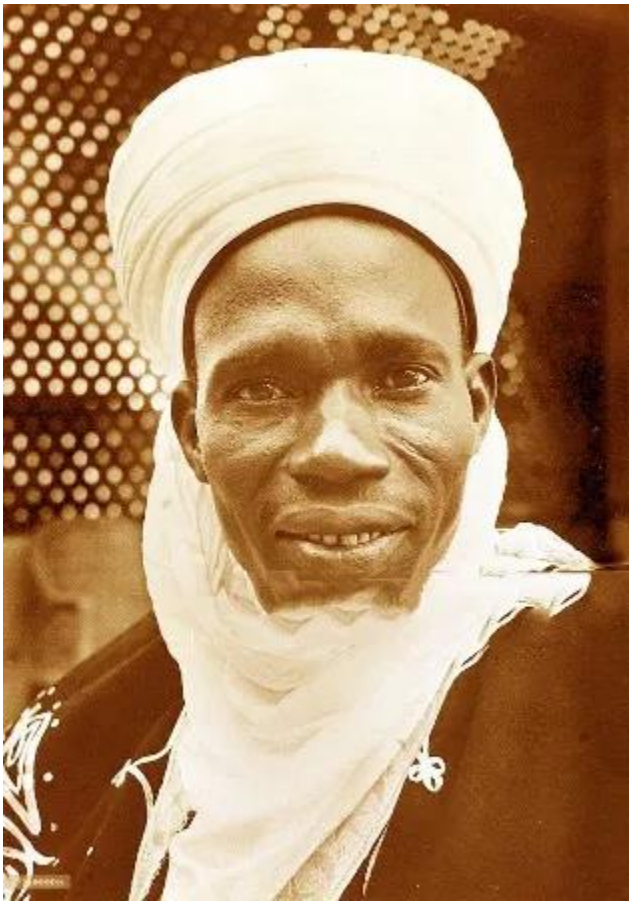
'Who is the man?' he asked.

When Anuforo was told he was the man who controlled the public wealth and the nation's finances, Anuforo was angry and he became very horny to end him. After all, pulling trigger and watching blood splutter gave Anuforo high voltage hickies and monkey bites. He was already the busiest killer of the night with three officers' lives under his belt. As the French philosopher, Blaise Pascal said: "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." Using his church mind, Anuforo helped the Finance Minister descend the steps of the 3 Tonner, and asked him to say his last prayers. He cocked his SMG and Okotie-Eboh's corpse was dumped along all the corpses in the bush by the roadside. Then the convoy drove down to 2nd Recce Squadron in Abeokuta to activate the command there. They arrived at around half seven in the morning around the same time Ironsi's tea and biscuits arrived at the battalion headquarters at Ikeja.

David Ejoor left Ironsi and Njoku and ordered Major Henry Igboba, Njoku's 2ice to radio Joseph O'Neill who was the senior operations officer and the airport commandant to arrange a security flight for him to Enugu. Unknown to Ejoor, Ifeajuna and Donatus Okafor having missed Anuforo and Ademoyega were racing to Enugu to raise infantry troops to continue their Revolution.

According to the testimony Ifeajuna gave to his interlocutors after arriving from Ghana on 14 February 1966 in the company of Okigbo, when he and his fellow revolutionaries left the Federal Guard Mess en-route Ikeja, he had to shear from the convoy to deposit Lt Ezedigbo at Yaba Military Hospital. A bullet ricocheted and hit him during the assassination of Largema and he was losing so much blood. He then rushed to quickly re-join Ademoyega and others at the agreed rendezvous. But the problem was that there were so many roadblocks on the way manned by soldiers and police; they thought Ironsi ordered the roadblocks as part of his effort to subvert their Revolution. Ifeajuna was even criticising Okafor for not going to kill Ironsi first instead of Maimalari. Ironsi was an administrative general; he commanded no troops hence ranked low in their initial threat estimate. Unknown to them, the roadblocks were the initiative of the police high command to prevent the Western crisis from spreading to Lagos. Also the convoy comprised army Land Rovers and a 3 Tonner, and so they sailed unobstructed through all the roadblocks. But after leaving the hospital, Ifeajuna discovered that since they were no longer in a military convoy, they were susceptible to being stopped and searched at any roadblock. Moreover, he had guns, ammo, an easily recognisable Prime

Minister in the car and Abogo Largema was in the boot pillowed by an extra tyre. According to his later testimony, they had to take side roads to reach Abeokuta Road. They arrived 10 miles away from their rendezvous. He said Abubakar had become a mess of panic and had grown hysterical since the shooting of Maimalari. He was blabbering to himself, his jaws and limbs vibrating uncontrollably. In other words, the Prime Minister had become totally ordinary. And Ifeajuna did not like that. He did not plot a coup to possess the ordinary; he was interested in capturing the Absolute just like in Vancouver in 1954 where he conquered gravity and vaulted higher than any man in the history of the world. He was not interested in the gold medal; he was interested in the record. (In an interview Ifeajuna's wife Rose gave, she said he did not even know where the gold medal was even before they married in 1959. It was the record that mattered to him.) Ifeajuna said he did not intend to harm or hurt Abubakar. And so they took him out of the car to see if fresh air would do him some good, rescue him from being common and ordinary so that Ifeajuna could enrich his record.



Balewa: Killed in Lagos

As a teenager, Abubakar was never interested in politics. He wanted to be a teacher and a novelist. In 1933, at the age of 20, his novella *Shaihu Umar* written colloquially came third in a literary competition organised by the colonial education department in Zaria. The novella is a bildungsroman that

parallels Shaihu Umar's journey amongst an enslaver's caravans across the Sahara Desert with a person's journey through life from birth, wedding, child-nurturing to death. The sandstorm and other natural disasters experienced in the desert is contrasted with the inevitable hardships and mishaps one must suffer in life. It was useless looking for someone to blame including his wicked brother who contributed to some of his most brutal hardships. If Abubakar could be compared to his hero, Shaihu Umar, then his wicked brother was Emmanuel Ifeajuna and the enslaver's caravan he travelled with in the desert was Okotie–Eboh, Mbadiwe and other government corruption fundamentalists who enslaved him to bad luck.

According to Ifeajuna, when they opened the door for him to get some fresh air, he surprised them: even though everywhere was pitch dark, Abubakar began to race into the bush. It was his white flowing jalabiya that gave him away. Quick, Ifeajuna grabbed his SMG from the car, cocked it and painfully set the darkness echoing before the dense forest could snatch his Abubakar away from him. He closed his eyes to unsee what he had done. But Abubakar was a rose that could grow out of mass concrete. It was love at last sight. The 54-year-old Prime Minister and a father of 18 children was not thinking straight; he, the 30-year-old Major and the father of 2 sons (Emmanuel and Bay), had to find a way to correct him. He could have been chased, captured and tied up. But Ifeajuna felt he was ripe for death anyway because he had become a liability to the Revolution and a pain to their free movement.

Ifeajuna reckoned that to outgun Ironsi and keep the dream of the Revolution alive, they needed more than the armoured, mechanised and artillery support that Obienu had to offer; they had to mobilise an additional company strong infantry at least. Going to 4th battalion in Ibadan was out of the question because they had no loyalist there. All their efforts to recruit Majors Nzefili and Ohanehi in December failed. Besides, the soldiers were extremely loyal to their commander Abogo Largema whose remains they had just tossed into the bush with Abubakar. The nearest military unit from which they could draw combat troops was 1st battalion in Apankwa Barracks in Enugu. Their commander, David Ejoor was supposed to be dragged out of the boot too and tossed into the bush like Largema, but he missed that fate by being unavailable in his allocated room in Ikoyi Hotel. They knew he was still in Lagos because he attended the Maimalari cocktail. Ifeajuna and Okafor decided to head back to Ikeja in order to proceed through Shagamu and race to Enugu to mobilise the battle ready troops. It was an impromptu journey that would have been inconceivable was Abubakar still with them.

In August 1962, the Federal Guards was formed and 150 of its initial 200 elite fighters were deployed from the Enugu battalion. It was the largest battalion in the country with 26 officers and 843 NCOs. Major Okonweze, Ejoor's second-in-command in Enugu was part of the coup plot. He would not hesitate to grant Ifeajuna's request for troops to Lagos. Using the privilege of their military uniforms, Ifeajuna and Okafor went through all the security roadblocks unobstructed. Combat fatigue and the post-traumatic stress disorder occasioned by his killing of two personalities with whom he had emotional connection – Maimalari and Abubakar – was already bossing him into making extremely individualistic decisions which prevented him from finding a way to inform Anuforo and Ademoyega of his new move.

Lagos – Ejoor

As the morning lights came and flushed away the stench of the night, Lagosians and Abeokutans woke up thinking the day was like any other day. It would take another 7 hours (at 2:30pm) for Radio Nigeria to announce the coup to the general public. Vehicles coming from Abeokuta to Lagos overtook a column of slow-moving armoured vehicles which Ademoyega and Anuforo had mobilised. In Ikeja cantonment, rumours blazed around like wild fire that the mutineers had been seen coming en masse to attack Lagos. The cantonment was in a state of heightened security. Bullet-resistant fighting positions were constructed with sandbags at strategic positions. When Ejoor reached the cantonment gate, the sentry did not allow him out. He told Ejoor he was under strict instruction to refuse any soldier from going out or coming in without authorisation. Ejoor had to go back to fetch Igboba. Ejoor was a lieutenant colonel. Igboba was a Major. Circumstance had turned the chain of command unto its head like the grave condition that made crayfish to bend.



Yakubu Gowon: mobilised forces against the plotters in Lagos

Something strange then happened. Major John Obienu, the cleavage extremist, turned up at the battalion's gates wanting to enter. When Obienu woke up in the morning, he tried to find out if the Revolution proceeded without him and if he might still fit in the scheme of things. So he went to the Airport junction; there were no sign of his squadron. He then dashed to Ikeja cantonment. He saw none of his ferret or Saladin and was making enquiries. All of a sudden he was recognised by one of the sentries as the officer commanding the unit rumoured to be coming from Abeokuta to attack. Igboba who came to the gates to authorise Ejoor's exit ordered guns trained on Obienu. He protested his innocence. He swore that he didn't know about any mutiny nor that his Recce squadron was making their way from Abeokuta. He said that he went to Maimalari's party, slept in a friend's place in Shomolu and was here trying to go back to Abeokuta. Liar, Igboba screamed at him. How was it possible that your unit was bringing their firepower to come and fight in a pre-planned mutiny and you their commanding officer did not know? NCOs do not mobilise for actions if they were not instructed by their OC. Who authorised them? Obienu swore he did not know anything. Ejoor then intervened. He suggested Obienu went ahead on Abeokuta road to neutralise his renegade unit. Obienu replied without troops to back him up, it would be unwise to go out there to stop them. That sounded reasonable to Ejoor and confirmed that he actually wasn't part of the mutiny. Had he been part of the rebels, he wouldn't have hesitated to go out there to meet his unit, Ejoor said. Henceforth, Obienu switched loyalty and joined the loyal forces trying to neutralise the Revolution. Not wanting further delay to the airport, Ejoor left them. In his account of what happened that morning, Ejoor wrote:

"As we approached the junction of the road that led into the Ikeja GRA and the Airport Road, I saw three artillery trucks approaching us. I immediately sense that this was what Major Igboba had talked about. I felt cornered as I had no way of knowing how these troops would react to me; whether they would take me as a foe or a friend. I did some quick thinking and decided to put the troop at some psychological disadvantage. Accordingly, I stood in the middle of the road and help up my hand indicating to them to stop. As the lead vehicle got close and stopped, I snapped at the troops, asking why they took so long to arrive, thereby slowing down our operations. The trick worked. They straightaway went on the defensive, explaining that they had some problems with tyres and fuel. I accepted their explanations and warned them that they were to be no more delays. "Go straight to Ikeja Cantonment and get your next orders," I said and proceeded to lead them to the barracks as the traffic cleared for the military trucks. When we got to the battalion headquarters, I gave orders that all the troops escorted there be immediately disarmed and arrested. While this was being done, I resumed my journey to the Airport. Thus, by sheer accident, I was involved with the first major arrest of those involved in the coup of 15th January 1966."

In a widely read article *Head With Creative Thinking*, in the influential Army journal *The Nigerian Magazine,* Ejoor lamented the absence of active creativity in the Army. He wrote: "*Creativity is necessarily the lifeblood of a successful business concern. This is because competition in civilian life is so severe that a heavy premium is placed on ideas of all kinds. In the military world in peace time, we have not the same spur of competition, and yet if we cannot instil a creative atmosphere within the Armed Services, we are in the danger of failing both in peace and war. I believe the classical example of an Army which failed because it was in a rut and lacking in ideas was the French at the beginning of World War II*." Creativity inspired Ejoor to distance himself from Ironsi and Njoku. It led him to single-handedly neutralise the rebel detachment from Abeokuta which Obeinu their commander could not even do. Creativity would also save him from another assassination plot by Ifeajuna awaiting him in the East.

Ejoor – Enugu

The sun was already up in the East staining the skies with fire. Ejoor landed in at 11:30am after the eighty minutes of flight. At the airport, he saw a platoon

of soldiers sleeping around in different degrees of disorderliness. He snapped them to attention and asked them what they were doing there. The platoon commander replied that they were ordered there since 3:00am by the acting battalion commander Major Gabriel Okonweze to whom Ejoor handed the battalion before he proceeded to Lagos for the Brigade Training Conference. When Ejoor asked for his service car and a platoon of guards to come and pick him from the airport, Okonweze himself followed them to confirm it was true Ejoor was truly back. Okonweze couldn't contain his surprise. When Ejoor asked why he had deployed troops all over town, Okonweze said he received a signal from Brigadier Maimalari ordering the troop deployments.

As of early December, Major Chude-Okei the battalion's second in command was the head of the Revolution in the East. But he went for a course in India and the coup command was handed to Okonweze. Ifeajuna used Lieutenant Jerome Ogbuchi who was in Lagos for a course to transmit a written instruction for troops mobilisation to Okonweze once he was certain that Ejoor was already in Lagos. Captain Joseph Iledigbo was to take his company across the Niger River and arrest the Premier of the Midwest, Chief Dennis Osadebey and his ministers. Captain Agbogu was to take his company to arrest the Eastern Premier, Dr Michael Okpara and his ministers. Captain Gibson Jalo was to seize the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (ENBC) studio buildings. Major Okonweze and Chude-Sokei were to command the Joint Operations Centre. Unlike the operations in other parts of the country, none of the politicians were to be moved to any rallying point or shot, they were simply placed under house arrest pending further instructions from Lagos.

To the political establishment in Enugu, the capital of Eastern Region, the first omen of the coup was at the airport. In the afternoon of 14th January, the President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios arrived for a visit in the Prime Minister's plane to great pomp and pageantry. He had come to Lagos to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference and intended to use the opportunity to visit all the regions in Nigeria. Enugu became his first and last point of call. All the ministers, state officials and heads of the American, British diplomatic outposts were present at the welcoming ceremony at the airport. Conspicuously missing was the military guard of honour. When President Julius Nyerere came visiting in 1965, the guard of honour was one of the spectacles he enjoyed most. He said he did not know Africans too could stiffen breathlessly for so long as he inspected the guards and savoured their regimental drumming with Dr Michael Okpara. Okpara was very proud that no one else but him provided that unique spectacle to the eminent Africanist. But this time around while awaiting the plane of the Archbishop Makarios, there was no guard of honour in place even though Okonweze was there

representing Ejoor. Okpara was so angry that he summoned Okonweze and berated him publicly. "You say Lagos put a ban on guard of honour. What are they afraid of? That Enugu will be mistaken for the capital of Nigeria?" This was according to Charles James Treadwell, the Deputy British High Commissioner who witnessed the incident at the airport. Okonweze did not tell Okpara that he was keeping the troops ready for the confirmation of the H-hour.

Okpara then compensated for the humiliation at the airport with a sumptuous party in the evening the same time in Lagos, a cocktail party was starting at Brigadier Maimalari's residence. Treadwell was there too. He wrote his report on 16th January a day after the mutiny:

"The gathering was the largest I ever witness at the Premier's Lodge and included the Governor, Sir Francis Ibiam, most of the Ministers and Ministers of State, the senior civil servants and a host of political leaders summoned from all parts of the region. As a social occasion it was a grand affair. Just before dawn the next morning, – Saturday 15th January – after the first shot had been fired in Lagos, Kaduna, Ibadan, troops of the 1st battalion moved into Independence Layout, Enugu, and took up positions outside the imposing residencies of the Premier and his Ministers. A barricade was set up across the access road into the area. Other troops sealed off all the road connecting Enugu with the rest of the Region; others still closed down the transmitter of the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service(ENBS) and a guard was mounted at the entrance to the studio building in one of the main streets of the town. In carrying out this operation, the Army achieved complete surprise.

"At seven o'clock, following a telephone call from Chief Justice of Eastern Nigeria, Sir Louis Mbanefo – who apart from the Ministers is the only Nigerian living in Independence Layout – I was in his house discussing strange turn of events with him. Independence Layout was already teeming with troops, (the Chief Justice did not know it but there was even one soldier standing behind a bush in his own garden), and the barricade, past which I had readily been permitted to drive, was protected by a strong army contingent carrying automatic weapons. The Chief Justice was understandably puzzled. He had been told on telephone that the Army had seized power in Lagos and elsewhere in the country. He himself had been awakened at six o'clock by a rumbling of heavy lorries on the road outside and had seen troops spilling out

into the Ministers' houses. After we had spent some time in fruitless speculation, Sir Louis Mbanefo telephoned the premier and asked if he knew what was happening. No, answered the premier, it was all a mystery to him. He could see troops moving about his garden but he could not guess their purpose.

"The Chief Justice next telephoned the Governor and informed him that the army was moving against the government; despite the evidence Sir Francis Ibiam -the governor refused to credit the story. The army would never do such a thing, he said, and that was that. My route to the office took me past the studios of ENBS apart from the troops outside this building there was not a single soldier to be seen in town.

The departure of the archbishop had been arranged for ten o clock, and while waiting for him at the airport, I heard from a civil servant the first fragmentary reports (obtained by monitoring police wireless message sent from Ibadan and Kaduna to Lagos) from outside Enugu. There had been fighting in northern and western capitals. Chief Akintola was dead. Not much at the time, but enough to kill any hopes that the army would be able to clamber down the five pinnacles of power without spilling blood on the way. The Archbishop accompanied by the premier reached the airport more or less on time. News of military intervention had been successfully suppressed from the president(Archbishop), but things must have looked odd to him. Only six of us were there to see him off and of these – the premier and two ministers – were flanked by troops carrying sten guns. The Press were not represented. After inspecting the guard of honour mounted by the police and taking leave of his tongue-tied premier, the archbishop, smiling thinly, boarded his special aircraft and left Enugu."



David Ejoor: crushed the plot in Eastern Nigeria

Seeing so many soldiers around the city, Treadwell and the American consul in Enugu Mr. R.J. Barnard decided to go the barracks to find out what was happening and if British and American citizens in the East needed to start getting worried. This was around 11 o'clock, 30 minutes before Ejoor arrived. Treadwell wrote:

"We were admitted without difficulty into the office of the acting commanding officer of the battalion, Major G. Okonweze, an Igbo from the mid-west, and spent a quarter of an hour with him and his adjutant, 2/Lt A.B. Umaru, a Hausa. In answer to our questions, Major Okonweze confessed that he was completely in the dark about the wider implications of the army move. He had received a single message during the night from Lagos instructing him to intensify internal security measures in the town and to restrict the movements of the ministers. The Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service transmitter had been closed down and a guard had been placed at the entrance to the studio building. Everything was normal, however, he added somewhat uncertainly, other parts of the region were unaffected and British and American nationals living in Enugu could be told to go about their business in the usual way. The

police had been ordered to stand by in case they were needed. He was meanwhile awaiting instructions from Lagos on the next step and would keep in touch with us. Outwardly, except some troops outside the broadcasting building it seemed just to be another day in Enugu and indeed many people at work in their offices were unaware for several hours that anything out of the ordinary had occurred. At noon a British business man had told me that his agent in Kaduna had telephoned to say that the Sardauna of Sokoto had been killed. All this was perplexing and worrying enough. In the early afternoon, however, events took a new twist, when the Chief Justice [Mbanefo] telephoned me with the news that all troops had been withdrawn from Independence Layout and sent back to the barracks."

Ejoor had arrived and had taken charge. To annul the designs of the mutineers and to alleviate the anxieties of Enugu peoples, he ordered all soldiers back into the barracks.

Treadwell continued:

"I telephoned Major Okonweze who confirmed this was true. He said the instruction he had received had been forged. They had been issued in the name of Brigadier Maimalari but he now knew that a group of mutineers had sent them. He had been fooled. Now that the picture was clear to him he was removing the army guards from the Independence Layout, lifting restrictions on the movement of politicians and arrange for the ENBS to resume transmission. Conditions in Enugu had entirely returned to normal he said. It was clear, however, despite calm in Enugu, that things were very far from normal elsewhere. Rumours were multiplying. Political leaders of NPC and NNDP persuasion had been assassinated in Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna. Northern army officers had been put to death in these places. It was an Igbo plot, people whispered, and innocent Igbos would pay for it with their lives. The absence of any reference to the events in news broadcasts from Lagos heightened anxieties. During the afternoon, the ENBS relayed a BBC announcement, still tentative, about the coup; this was the first radio report heard by medium-wave listeners in Enugu. Ministers had meanwhile panicked badly. Under restraints no longer, they poured out of their houses and headed for the countryside. Dr Okpara [abandoned his official limousine and] slid out of the town in a Volkswagen and went to Umuahia. He spent the next fortnight there moving from house to house each day in a bid to go to the ground completely. Chief J.U. Nwodo, the minister of local government, drove to his house at Ukehe, on Nsukka road, where he changed clothes with his gardener and made for the bush. Two or three Americans, chivalrous but unwise, drove ministers to their villages, using indirect routes, and boasted of their

enterprise when they returned. When dusk came all ministers' houses in Independence Layout were empty (apart from a child of one minister who was forgotten in the rush) and a similar exodus had taken place from the houses of ministers of state and senior civil servants in other parts of Enugu. The first news broadcast in the afternoon from Lagos did nothing to allay fears. When darkness fell, the street of Enugu were almost deserted."

Treadwell continued:

"During the evening, the Chief Justice telephoned me again and asked me to call. He and Lady Mbanefo were in a state of considerable anxiety. They believed that the Hausa officers in the first battalion outnumbered the Igbos and their sympathisers and feared that the former would break out from their barracks and massacre leading Igbo civilians to avenge the death of the Sardauna. Their fears had been heightened shortly before this when a friend telephoned them from Onitsha (Sir Louis Mbanefo's home town) with the news that three lorries packed with troops had crossed the Niger Bridge from the Asaba end and were now heading towards Enugu."

Indeed a company commanded by Captain Joseph Ihedigbo was heading towards Enugu. But they were the ones which Okonweze had dispatched to Benin to achieve the mutineers Midwest objectives. Since Ejoor had ordered their immediate return, they were travelling back to Apankwa barracks. But the top government functionaries mistakenly thought the feared reprisals from the barracks was about to begin. Treadwell's report continued:

"They will come here and kill us,' said the Chief Justice, trembling. Making vaguely reassuring noises, I left them soon afterwards but returned almost at once in response to another telephone request from the Chief Justice. He said the police had now advised him to leave Enugu for safety's sake and they were accordingly moving to Onitsha until calm was restored. Towards the midnight, the acting commissioner of police, Mr J.W. Okocha, arrived at the house with two Land Rovers containing armed police and with this escort, Sir Louis and Lady Mbanefo left somewhat hurriedly….We next called on the commissioner of police. He was weary and anxious. He seemed certain of an explosion. 'I am an Igbo,' he said, 'and I can tell you that if it had happened the other way round; if Hausa officers had killed Igbo officers, other Igbos would take revenge."

The following day – Sunday 16th January – around 10am, Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu called. He was surprised Gabriel Okonweze was not the one who answered the phone but David Ejoor. According to the coup script, at that time, hungry worms supposed to be convening over the decomposing carcass of Ejoor and feast as they were doing to the others dead. Nzeogwu then asked Ejoor to confirm whether he was loyal to the Revolution or against it. Ejoor answered he was loyal to Ironsi and the government of Nigeria. He then asked Ejoor if he wanted to go on air to that effect. Ejoor banged the phone on him. He did not feel the least answerable to a Major even as reports confirmed that they had killed Brigadier Ademulegun and his deputy Col Shodeinde, and Nzeogwu had become the *de facto* Brigadier and King of North. Ejoor then tried to update Ironsi in Lagos. It was Gowon the centripetal force behind stamping down the mutiny who came on line. The previous night, they were both at Maimalari's cocktail party. And they had both escaped easy death by refusing the rooms Ifeajuna allocated to them. Gowon told him he had been in touch with Major Madiebo and other loyal but passive forces in Kaduna and they told him Nzeogwu was trying to mobilise other mutineers to attack the South and finish the job. Gowon then said he had ordered Major Nzefili the acting CO of 4th battalion in Ibadan to go and defend the Jebba Bridge which was the only link between North and South West. Gowon wanted Ejoor to also secure the East against Northern aggression. When Ejoor asked for more arms and ammunition, Gowon offered to send a plane load from the Army Ordnance Depot and Unegbe's Armoury. Quick, Ejoor began troop and equipment mobilisation and defensive fortifications.

According to Ejoor, all the places he asked troops to be placed, his 2ice Okonweze negated them all. His suggestions were places that were strategically meaningless and tactically useless in defence against Nzeogwu's aggression. It was then Ejoor said he concluded his 2ice was certainly with the mutineers. Okonweze even suggested that they disarm all the soldiers and publicly destroy the ammunition so that civilians would feel safe. There had been rumours that since the death of Sardauna was announced, that Northern soldiers in the barracks will break loose and avenge his death. But Ejoor frustrated all Okonweze's efforts to aid the Revolution's agenda while Okonweze kept on denying he had anything to do with them. To Okonweze, Ejoor had become eligible for fresh death. He was too much in the way.

And so as night fell, Ejoor received an urgent phone call from Mr J.W. Okocha the acting Police Commissioner of the Eastern Region asking him to come over for a crucial information. He was asked to come alone and unarmed so as not

to arouse suspicion and panic. Ejoor wondered what kind of information that could be. He checked on the members of his family who had been admitted to hospital for gastric malaria. He decided not to go. He did not trust anyone. But he then considered that Okocha was the head of the region's security infrastructure and his partner in providing assurance of safety to the people of the region. So he decided to go but armed and doubling his security entourage.

It turned out that Mrs Shirley Chude-Sokei the 29-year-old Jamaican wife of Major Chude-Sokei had gone to the police concerned about the safety of her husband. Ejoor was surprised to see her crying at the residence of the police chief when he arrived there. Her husband was in faraway India attending a course. So why the worry? Also being a solider and an officer, the police was not the place to seek help; there was him, his 2ice or the battalion adjutant to approach for an assurance of her husband's safety. What Ejoor did not know until later was that Ifeajuna and Okafor were at her house. They arrived in Enugu the previous day around 2pm to rouse the battalion to finish the job in Lagos. They were not only surprised to see that Ejoor was alive but that he had reached Enugu before them to consolidate his command of the battalion. All the while Okonweze was thwarting the plans of Ejoor over troops deployment, he was under the influence of Ifeajuna and Okafor. To eliminate Ejoor without enhancing mutiny in the barracks, they had fed false news to Mrs Chude-Sokei about the whereabouts of her husband. They asked her to go to the police commissioner whom they had already connived with. The scam was similar to the one Ifeajuna used the previous day to end Largema by asking the receptionist to rap his hotel door and call him out to pick an urgent non-existent phone call. He had planned to murder Ejoor on the way had he come alone without armed escort. Ejoor returned to the barracks with his escort and did not visit Mrs Shirley Chude-Sokei. It was the second time that weekend that Ejoor refused to die.

Frustrated, Ifeajuna fled to see Okigbo in Ibadan and then Ghana to see Brigadier Hasan Ghana's Director of Military Intelligence and Lt Col David Zanlerigu, commander of Nkrumah's Soviet-trained-and-equipped presidential bodyguards. (He was Ghana's equivalent to Major Donatus Okafor, Commander of Federal Guards). Ifeajuna was intent on raising a specialised expeditionary force of 100 troops to finish the job while Okafor remained in the East until his arrest by Ojukwu two weeks later and subsequently transferred to Kirikiri. Ifeajuna's decision to go to Ghana was grotesque and enigmatic just as his decision to come over to Enugu without informing

Anuforo and Ademoyega. It must not be ruled out that Ifeajuna was already suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and acute stress disorder so his sanity was no longer steady. For instance, from January 14 – 18, he did not sleep at all. Even before that, being the chief engineer of the Revolution, he worked harder than anyone plotting the moves, recruiting and mobilising resources, planning cocktail, organising brigade conference and other cover-ups, yet still fulfilling his duties as Maimalari's chief of staff to give the appearance that nothing unusual was going on. The accumulated stress must have prevented him from being normal and ensured he continued to make relentlessly irrational decisions.

Ifeajuna could have gone to team up with Nzeogwu in Kaduna where the Revolution was fruitful; he would not only have had a battalion to himself but the whole 1st Brigade which was the most powerful in the Army. But he and Nzeogwu had diverging egoistic agendas. The master plan was:

- Phase 1: kill all senior military officers, abduct the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and the regional premiers;
- Phase 2: the abducted would be forced to willingly sign and transfer power to the new highest ruling body in the country, Supreme Military Revolutionary Council which would then unite all the four regions under its dictatorship. Make a national broadcast to this effect and suspend the Parliament.
- Phase 3: Free Obafemi Awolowo who had been unjustly stored in jail; manufacture their long-awaited Revolutionary Prime Minister out of him. Their ally S.G. Ikoku was there to persuade him if he disagreed.

But Nzeogwu went on air with a pre-recorded broadcast announcing his takeover of the Northern government and listed the public offences punishable by death (corruption, peddling rumours, homosexuality, etc). He appointed as the new Head of Government, Sardauna's secretary Ali Akilu who he had earlier regarded as the face of corruption and almost shot had he not fled to the residence of a British diplomat seeking asylum. Nzeogwu made all other appointments while his Southern brethren were in disarray looking for strength and direction. The unbridled clash of egos compelled Ifeajuna to disdain seeking support from Nzeogwu whom he thought was flawed and blindsided by the zeal for glory. Ifeajuna absurdly chose to go to Ghana for help. Spending a day in Dahomey, he was picked up by David Zanlerigu and SG Ikoku one of Awolowo's henchmen after being driven there by Okigbo dressed as a young and stressed lady. He quickly sat down to write a book as a ferocious critique of Nzeogwu who had gone on air and into the limelight to claim leadership of the North and the Revolution. (Achebe ignorant of the context later described the manuscript as self-serving; he did not know it was written against the self-almightyfication of Nzeogwu who was claiming what was not his. Only an ego

roar could achieve that ferocious critique). The coup plotters wanted to manage Nigeria better than the politicians; they could not even manage themselves first.

Joan Mellors, a British expatriate in Eastern Region's Ministry of Town Planning under Chief Nwoga had been living in Nigeria for five years. She summed up the people's reaction at the university town of Nsukka in a report to the British Deputy High Commission Enugu:

"The reaction of the people was remarkable – without exception all with whom I spoke made comments that could be summarised in 'Let us pray that they [coup plotters] have the strength and organisation to carry through what they had begun – something like this was bound to happen for things could not go on as they have been doing.' The [Nzeogwu's] broadcast from Kaduna radio, giving the reasons for the "mutiny" was hailed for all fortunate to hear it, and when after the broadcast, the National Anthem was played, lecturers at the University of Nigeria [Nsukka] confessed to me that was the first time they had stood for their Anthem because that was the first time it meant anything to them. Now they began to think, it might be possible to work for ONE Nigeria free of corruption, nepotism, tribalism and bribery – now maybe qualifications for jobs would be based on ability and not one's place of origin and relationships."

Nigeria was a mounting mess seeking a ceiling; it was overheating and in dire need of sorting out. What the coup plotters did not foresee was that by using the agency of selective murders to actualise their lofty ambition, they polluted their own vision and inevitably set the scene for the wide scale massacres to come.

Kaduna

In the morning of 15th January, Nzeogwu summoned media executives to his new office which still had Brigadier Ademulegun's possession to co-opt them into his Revolution. According to the description given by Bernard Floud the British MP who was supposed to honour his appointment with the old Sardauna that morning but was then summoned to meet a new Sardauna, Nzeogwu was "very young, calm and polite to him, the KTV station manager, the Nigerian news editor and another British expatriate engineer." Nzeogwu only told them that their daily programming should continue as normal provided that a

statement which he had taped should be broadcast before 1pm that day and regularly thereafter. Just that? Thank you and they left.



Nzeogwu: Took control of Northern Nigeria

The tape began to spool at 1135am and Nzeogwu appeared in many people's sitting rooms and emerged from several other radios. Poet Okigbo who was one of the enablers of the Revolution jubilated with his Ibadan intellectual circle at Risikatu restaurant when they heard:

"In the name of the Supreme Council of the Revolution of the Nigerian Armed Forces, I declare martial law over the Northern Provinces of Nigeria. The Constitution is suspended and the regional government and elected assemblies are hereby dissolved. All political, cultural, tribal and trade union activities, together with all demonstrations and unauthorized gatherings, excluding religious worship, are banned until further notice."

He then issued the 'Extraordinary Orders of the Day*': "You are hereby warned that looting, arson, homosexuality, rape, embezzlement, bribery or corruption, obstruction of the revolution, sabotage, subversion, false alarms and assistance to foreign invaders, are all offences punishable by death sentence. …Illegal possession or carrying of firearms, smuggling or trying to escape with documents, valuables, including money or other assets vital to the running of any establishment will be punished by death sentence… Demonstrations and*

unauthorized assembly, non-cooperation with revolutionary troops are punishable in grave manner up to death… Doubtful loyalty will be penalized by imprisonment or any more severe sentence… Refusal or neglect to perform normal duties or any task that may of necessity be ordered by local military commanders in support of the change will be punishable by a sentence imposed by the local military commander… Tearing down an order of the day or proclamation or other authorized notices will be penalized by death… Spying, harmful or injurious publications, and broadcasts of troop movements or actions, will be punished by any suitable sentence deemed fit by the local military commander….

Nigerians wanted change. They got one. But they didn't know the kind of change it was. But it was still change so they welcomed it. Floud, the British MP noticed that the BBC which Radio Kaduna had been retransmitting was describing Nzeogwu and his coup plotters as "rebels." He then asked the news editor and the station manager to consult with the Brigade Headquarters as to the suitability of this description. Nzeogwu again thanked them for bringing this to his notice. He told them to discontinue forthwith with BBC's mischaracterisation and retransmission. It was sabotage, subversion, obstruction of the Revolution hence punishable by death.

It was a fact: military rule had arrived.



Ahmadu Bello: killed by Nzeogwu during Ramadan

The Cabinet's Takeover

At the very time Ifeajuna shot his boss Maimalari, Shehu Shagari, a devout Muslim who later became president of Nigeria woke up at his Bourdillon Road residence at the other side of Ikoyi to eat his predawn meals and say his prayers as the Ramadan period required. When he was the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary, it was he whom Sardauna tasked with housing over 200 hooligans in the legislative quarters- that was the block of flats meant for the nation's lawmakers. The hooligans who were on the ruling party's(NPC) payroll were meant to protect Northern politicians ('Yan Carter Bridge- Sardauna's name for them) from Western thugs who depending on the political temperature of the debates in the parliament made it a sport to attack the Northern politicians as they commute on trains from Lagos back to the North. Under the leadership of John Lynn the colonial police officer turned British expatriate head of CID, Alagbon, the police in conjunction with the Federal Guards swooped on the hooligans. The operation in the Army's *Nigerian Magazine* was called *The Arms Swoop*. According to Shagari in his straight-faced memoir *Beckoned to Serve*, it was his responsibility even as the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister to go and bail the hooligans. That mass arrest prompted many NPC legislators to hasten to Shagari's residence to deposit their arms and ammunition for safe keeping pending the time John Lynn stopped sniffing around. And oh there was a mountain of weapons: guns, ammo, knives, swords, daggers, bow and arrows, cleavers, hatchets. "A ministerial dwelling had become an arms depot!" Shagari observed.

That morning of the Revolution, when Ahmadu Kurfi, the Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence alerted him that the Prime Minister had been abducted under gunpoint by unknown soldiers, Shagari said: "my immediate reaction was to telephone the Sardauna in Kaduna but the telephone was dead." Such was the power of Sardauna's political machinery that the PM's Cabinet colleague's immediate reaction was not to call the police or other security forces when his boss was missing but to call the Sardauna instead. Like many politicians, civil servants and diplomats who lived in Ikoyi, they heard sporadic gunfire, but they conflated them with the noise of the Tiv dancers at Maimalari's party that rent the air hours earlier. Therefore, as the destiny of the country was violently changing, they were at peace, sleeping.

After Ifeajuna left with the Prime Minister, his ADC, Kaftan Topolomiyo went to inform Hamman Maiduguri, the Lagos commissioner of police and Tanko Galadima, the Minister of state for Defence. Both were Northerners. Northern politicians passed the news to Northern politicians and Eastern politicians

informed Eastern politicians. Obsession with seeking ethnic advantage otherwise called tribalism was an obstinate pattern that organised Nigerians' tastes and decisions even when they were not conscious of its influence. Tribalism preceded the facts that supposed to call forth or justify its own existence. The first politician to cross the tribal barrier was Shehu Shagari who quickly informed his next door neighbour Chief Adeniran Ogunsanya, the NCNC Minister of Housing. He then left to alert Zanna Bukur Dipcharima, who was the Minister of Transport and the most senior NPC minister in the cabinet. By 7am, most of the NPC ministers including Maitama Sule, the Minister of Mines and Power, Tanko Galadima, the Minister of Defence had converged at the home of Dipcharima on Bourdillon Road, Ikoyi. They were more confused than shaken. Who could have abducted Mallam Abubakar and Okotie-Eboh? It was later information came in that Akintola was dead, his body found, that even Sardauna, the most powerful politician in the history of the country had been gunned down and his house burned to the ground that fear, real fear squashed their minds and almost choked their breath. More so, it was reported that the coup plotters were mobilising from the North to kill them too. Dipcharima hastened to his neighbour Donald F. Hawley, the British Deputy High Commissioner and asked him to summon his boss Francis Bruce-Cummings (FBC) for an urgent meeting.



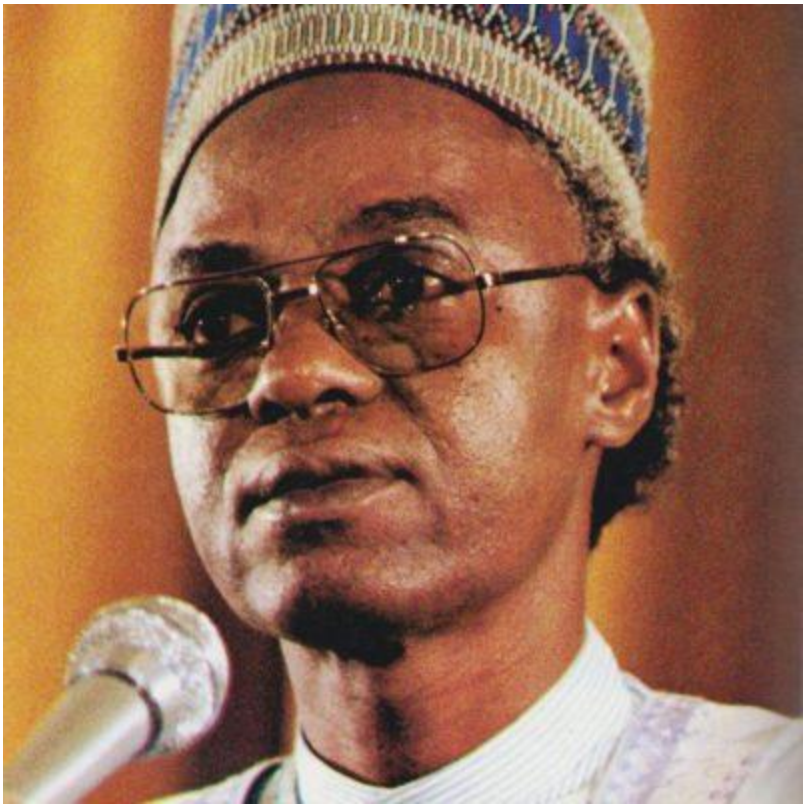
Yakubu Gowon

Gowon had met Galadima at the Prime Minister's residence and he had told him that not the whole army but a renegade section was responsible and that the GOC was in Ikeja issuing orders. When Galadima availed the gathering of

this information, Dipcharima ordered the Police to bring in Ironsi for a review and way-forward meeting. At Ikeja, just before Ejoor left Ironsi and Njoku to proceed to the Airport for a security flight to Enugu, a helicopter hovered over the 2nd battalion prompting the B Company to quickly put themselves in firing positions as the helicopter landed close to the parade ground. Out came L.A. Marsden, the Acting Deputy Inspector General of police and Duckett, the Assistant Superintendent of Police. Ironsi and Njoku who did not travel with Gowon on Land Rovers to confront the coup plotters promptly joined the British expatriates on a flight back to Lagos for the meeting. Francis Cumming-Bruce (FBC) wrote of the meeting in a despatch to London on 16th January 1966:

"Dipcharima was in the chair with Minister of External Affairs, Acting Minister of Defence and Attorney General with Cabinet Secretary in attendance. Dipcharima said that an approach was being made to me on behalf of those members of the Cabinet that had been able to assemble at his house. He was under considerable strain but coolheaded. When Elias (the Attorney General), who had heard nothing until he joined the meeting wept at news of assassination and expressed his fears for Abubakar's life, Dipcharima rebuked him for showing emotion; need was for firm action. He gave me summary of situation as understood by Government. Acting Inspector General of police and G.O.C. were then called in and asked to give summary statements of situation."

The previous night, Taslim Elias transmitted to the Prime Minister an urgent message from Dr Busia, the head of opposition to Nkrumah's government in Ghana warning that a coup in an advanced state was about to break out. For four years since the commencement of the Western Region crisis, he had been receiving secret messages of bloodletting and impending doom on his person on a constant basis even from high places. Just on that very day, he had received two warnings. First, Shagari had received warning from a man who came to his house and described himself as "NPC intelligence man." He said that the custom officers who had been in industrial dispute with the Federal Government some time had made the borders porous; that weapons of military grade were being smuggled in easily from the borders. That the keg of gunpowder which the country and in particular, the West was sitting on was about to explode.



Shehu Shagari: he later became president of Nigeria

But the message from the Attorney General was the most specific yet, stating who and who would be terminated and the night the terminations would take place. But Abubakar characteristically did not allow his heart to skip a beat as Elias delivered the message. He was a simple and humble man who refused to live in a fortress or have a fortress mentality. And so when Elias was told at the special cabinet meeting that a mutiny had taken place and the PM was missing, more than the others, he knew straight away the PM was dead. He burst into tears.

Dipcharima on behalf of the cabinet wanted FBC to transmit an urgent request for British military assistance to stabilise the situation. The main fear was that the army would dissolve and law and order would break down completely with loyal troops willing to shoot down mutineers and the battalions becoming warring bands. The ministers thought that a show of force from an external power would deter Nzeogwu and the rebels who had promise to march down on the South. FBC went to the meeting with his First Secretary Mr P.D. McEntree who took down minutes. The high commissioner responded that since this was a country-to-country request, it had to be written down and signed by the appropriate authority. The ministers looked round at themselves. But who was the appropriate authority in the absence of the Prime Minister when there was no deputy prime minister?

After the 1959 Federal elections to usher in a government for the soon-to-be independent Nigeria, there was no clear winner between the three main parties NPC, NCNC and AG. A coalition government had to be formed. Azikiwe and Okpara of the NCNC went to Kaduna to forge an alliance with Sardauna's NPC simply to deny Awolowo and his Action Group the power to have a say in the affairs of the new nation. The moved shocked many. Southerners had spent the previous 15 years complaining that the colonial masters had imposed a powerful North on Nigeria to continue to dominate and hold back the progress of the rest country. And yet there came the opportunity to nullify once and for all the colonial design. Azikiwe refused partnership with AG and went up North to form a coalition government with Sardauna and the NPC. That was Nigeria's original sin which Ifeajuna and his Ibadan progressive intellectuals wanted to undo with the coup. But a government without Awolowo was still a government about Awolowo.

Abubakar expressed his wish that Awolowo deserved to be part and parcel of the historic government not only for the recognition of his remarkable role during the colonial times, but that his brilliant ideas, his practical and sustainable policies which were there to see in the West were needed for the development of the young nation in general. Therefore, instead of offering NCNC's parliamentary leader and coalition partner Dr Ozumba Mbadiwe the post of Deputy PM, Abubakar offered Awolowo. Awolowo refused, preferring to be positioned across the bench as the head of opposition. A democracy without a rigorous and robust opposition was like a ship without its sails. Since 1960, Abubakar left the post vacant even with the insistence of Azikiwe, the titular head and owner of the government.

In the absence of Abubakar, the minister of defence, Muhammadu Ribadu usually acted as the PM. Ribadu had been in Council of Ministers with Abubakar since it was formed on Thursday 24 January 1952 according to sections 162 -164 of the order in council. But he died in on 1 May 1965 and Inua Wada took over. On the coup day, Wada was in London en-route Zurich for an eye operation. The next on the power organogram was Dipcharima. He was initially a highly articulate NCNC politician and the former president of Zikist movement who with Azikiwe and four others went to London in 1947 to campaign for repealing of the four "obnoxious ordinances" of Arthur Richard's government and to demand self-government for Nigeria. The delegation almost came to blows in their London hotel and they could not come to any agreement on what they were in the UK for and how to conduct themselves. Many students like Ayo Rosiji studying in the UK who went to watch them slug

it out with the Secretary of colonies were ashamed to see them fighting themselves publicly instead of the colonial chiefs. The students had seen how the Nehru-led delegation comport themselves to argue and demand Independence for India but the Nigeria delegation led by Azikiwe were utter embarrassment. When the delegation arrived back home after 2 months, *Daily Times* editorial of 15 August 1947 berated them; Adeyemo Alakija and H.O. Davies of the rival Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) used their columns in *Daily Service* to demand they accounted for the £13,500 crowd-sourced from all over the country to fund the trip. Azikiwe, who was the head of the delegation then shocked reason by stating that the barrage of criticisms were directed only at him because he was Igbo when, according to him, the Yoruba on the delegation, that is, Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti, Prince Adeleke Adedoyin, Dr. A. B. Olorunnimbe were to blame for the "mismanagement" of money and failure of the trip. Then commenced an extended heated press war between Azikiwe's column *Political Reminiscences* in *West African Pilot* and H.O. Davies' *Political Panorama* in *Daily Service* with Igbos in Lagos rushing to buy machetes in self-defence thinking a tribal war was imminent. The colonial governor Arthur Richards and his General Secretary, Hugh Foot – whom ironically the delegation had gone to London to protest against – had to invite both Azikiwe and Davies to the Government House to call them to order. But Dipcharima being 29 years old and being the youngest on the delegation had grown disillusioned; he resigned from the NCNC and politics altogether and went to become a manager at John Holt in Bida. In 1954, he was invited back by Abubakar and was elected as a NPC Federal House Member representing Bornu province after defeating Ibrahim Imam. Since then he never lost an election. He was appointed as the parliamentary secretary for the minister of Transport in 1956. He was later made a minister without portfolio the following year and so by 1966 he became the most senior NPC politician in the Council of Ministers in the absence of Abubakar and Inua Wada.

Dipcharima was already chairing situation meetings, he was already coordinating with the Police and the Army to arrest the situation and find the abducted. The first official radio and television announcement of the coup and the press release to local and foreign media was signed by him. Then FBC, the British High commissioner gave a condition that for British security assistance to happen, a written request had to be made by someone in a constitutionally-approved position of authority. What did the Ministers do next? With the roaring pace of development in the fifties, Nigeria was called the Giant of Africa. In the early sixties, the country was called Sleeping Giant. What happened next laid the foundation for Nigeria to be called a Buried Giant.

When FBC arrived at the High Commission at Kajola House, 62-64 Campbell Street, his First Secretary, Mr P.C. McIntyre who only took down minutes at Cabinet meeting then voiced his opinion. He advised his boss to be careful about the Ministers' request for security assistance. He said from what they knew so far, the coup seemed to be an insurrection against the North. Britain sending troops would be used to reinforce the false narrative out there that Britain was "backing up the North." FBC saw merit in the analysis. By noon the following day, he went to see Dipcharima at his Bourdillon Road, Ikoyi residence to withdraw his promise of cooperation. They also jointly agreed that should they be asked by the press, they would deny such a security request was ever made.

The privacy of the tête-à-tête with FBC gave Dipcharima the confidence to speak his mind. He told FBC that the GOC's loyalty remains a major question mark. He said his behaviour in various respects had been very odd and that his guess was that he had been associated with the mutineers at some stage. He said the GOC told him at the end of the meeting the previous day that he was prepared to participate in some form of civilian-military regime to give the appearance that the army is helping to clean up the administration. FBC only listened. He was careful not to voice his thinking or give hints of the intelligence assessment the High Commission's military adviser, Col Tom Hunt was conducting.

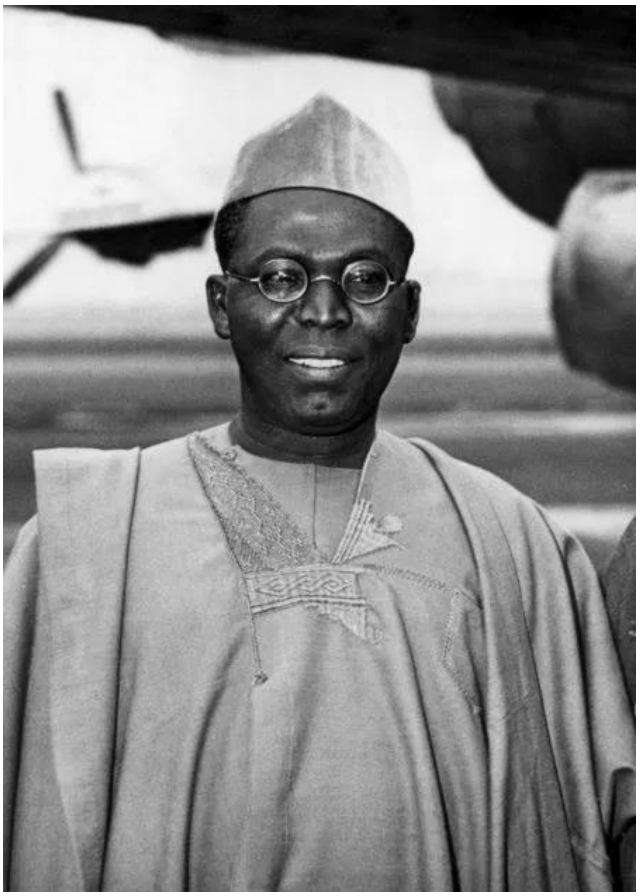
Meanwhile as FBC left the Council of Ministers meeting the previous day, the Ministers started a disagreement over whom should be taken to the Senate President to be sworn in as the Acting Prime Minister to fulfil the British condition. Dipcharima was already acting being the most NPC politician in the Cabinet. But the NCNC ministers challenged this basis saying Dr Ozumba Mbadiwe, the Minister of Trade and the NCNC parliamentary leader should be sworn in instead because he was the most senior minister in the Cabinet.

This was true. Mbadiwe joined the Council of Ministers after Azikiwe resigned from being leader of Opposition in Western House and went to take over the leadership of the Eastern House in 1953. New elections were held and Mbadiwe left for the central legislature in Lagos. The party that won the federal elections in each of the three regions was supposed to nominate three ministers to the federal council of ministers for the next five years. As the country's independence was being negotiated, the office of Prime Minister was

created in September 1957 and the Governor General Sir James Robertson asked the twelve cabinet ministers to nominate one person out of themselves to be the experimental Prime Minister. Abubakar nominated himself and never backed down. Mbadiwe explained that he was supposed to be the PM afterall NPC had only 4 ministers and the NCNC had 8 ministers – 4 each from Eastern and Western regions.

Awolowo had insisted that as from 1 April 1953 capitation tax would increase to *10 shillings and 6 pence* in the whole of Western Region except in Lagos where due to their lower economic status, the new rate will be *10 shillings and 3 pence*. It was to fund the radically new and uplifting but widely unpopular free education, free healthcare and other public development schemes that would be rolled out in the Western Region in January 1955.

NCNC the party in opposition in the West, seized the public dissatisfaction and deployed Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kola Balogun, Ozumba Mbadiwe, Dennis Osadebey and Adegoke Adelabu to campaign that Free Education was a scam; free healthcare was a trick to punish people with more taxes; that the AG was interested only in causing pain to the people unlike the NCNC. Resoundingly, the AG lost the Federal elections and the four AG's Federal ministers, Bode Thomas (Transport), Arthur Prest (Communication) and Samuel Akintola(Labour) and Oba Adesoji Aderemi(no portfolio), who were hailed national heroes for resigning their posts on 31st March 1953 to debate Anthony Enahoro's Self-Government-Now bill, were cleared from their posts to make way for the four extra NCNC Federal Ministers. If it boiled down to a vote among the council members, Mbadiwe would have become Nigeria's first PM as a result of Awolowo's loss of Cabinet influence. However, by willing to forego this influence, defy public opinion, flout pressures from his own ministers, invite election defeat for the sake of free and compulsory education for all children living in the West, Awolowo willed himself into a god. His programmes later placed the West beyond the reach of other regions and he in turn became the best politician ever in the history of Nigeria.



Obafemi Awolowo

The additional four NCNC ministers did not deter Abubakar from standing his ground as the right nominee for the PM. According to Mbadiwe, he did not press the case because he did not want to give the British an excuse to delay or derail Nigeria's unstoppable march towards Independence and so the post slipped away from his clutch like a breeze between his fingers.

When the post of Deputy Prime Minister was mooted, it was offered to Awolowo who promptly rejected it. Again that opportunity slipped Mbadiwe like a dream on wings. These previous near-misses strengthened Mbadiwe and the NCNC ministers' resolve to ensure that on the day of the coup, the post never eluded his grasp. However, the NCNC ministers pushing his candidacy were so careless to the optics of their cause and the combustive boxes they were ticking: Azikiwe, the head of government, Igbo. Tick. Mbadiwe, the proposed interim PM, Igbo. Tick. Nwafor, the existing senate president, Igbo. Tick. Nzeribe, the deputy speaker of the parliament, Igbo. Tick. Then the coup plotters who were mostly Igbo complained of corruption overdose in government only to end up killing some non-Igbos in government while leaving corrupt Igbos unkilled. Tick. This was one of the seductive narratives of Igbo domination that the dispossessed Northern politicians and the coalition

of the offended succeeded in impressing on consciousness of the distracted nation in the following three months. The result? An organised mass slaughter, the like of which Nigerians only read in foreign news and in the final pages of the New Testament.

Meanwhile, the meeting at the conference room at the Police Headquarters was rancorous. Teslim Elias, the Attorney General with no party affiliation was called upon to interpret the law in such a circumstance. He knew Abubakar was not coming back so he said: the absence of Abubakar did not mean the end of his government. It was the NPC and NNDP alliance that won the election and they were the ones President Azikiwe called upon (albeit forced) to form the government. Abubakar always believed that Nigeria was not ripe for oppositional politics and that Nigerian democracy should be an ethnic commonwealth that gave each constituent tribe a fair place under its umbrella even if they had lost at the polls. Mbadiwe, Okotie-Eboh, Wachuku, Adeniran Ogunsanya and 10 other NCNC ministers were invited to join the cabinet as a form of government of national unity. They lost at the polls.

Elias concluded that NPC-NNDP held the mandate not the NCNC and so the most senior NPC politician should fill the post of the Prime Minister. The NCNC ministers disagreed arguing that it should be the most senior minister in the cabinet, not merely in the party, and with Mbadiwe as the acting PM, the government was still that of the missing Abubakar. Then the rancour resumed. Ironsi sat there watching and listening not like a sphinx in Egypt guarding the pyramids but like a terrible judgement that would soon find its word.

Meanwhile earlier that morning, around 8:30 am, at the Parliament buildings at Onikan, the legislators converged in the open air. Out of 312 parliamentarians, only 33 were present. Few knew a coup was on going. One of them was R.N. Okafor. He was only appointed the Minister of State for Trade the previous day by Abubakar after months of lobbying by Mbadiwe the senior minister. Okafor was the chairman of ceremonies planning whose efforts culminated in a 3-day extravaganza to commission Mbadiwe's Palace of the People at Arondizuogu in Orlu three weeks earlier. He was also with Mbadiwe on 3-4th January at the secret meeting the NCNC parliamentary leadership had with Dauda Adegbenro, their UPGA partner and AG's acting Leader at Dr Okpara's residence in Enugu. In the absence of the Speaker, the Deputy speaker, Benjamin Nzeribe observed there was no quorum – only 33 mostly NCNC of 312 members of the House were present – Okafor then moved for the adjournment of the House "in view of the incidents of the last few

hours". The parliament was adjourned and would remain adjourned for the next 13years. The whole pre-determined proceedings took less than 15 minutes. They then moved to Mbadiwe's residence in Ikoyi where they were told that there was going to be an emergency Cabinet meeting at the Force HQ.

After the rancorous emergency meeting ended with the NPC and NNDP ministers vowing to kick start the process of swearing in Dipcharima, Ironsi called Njoku and asked him to summon Gowon and all other senior officers to the Force HQ which had become the Joint Operations Centre through the efforts of the British expatriates of the Police at the HQ: Leslie Alfred Marsden, the acting Inspector General of Police, George Duckett, Assistant Superintendent of Police, and Arthur Stacey Barham, Assistant Commissioner of Police. They were all included in the Queen's Birthday honours later in June for their effort in keeping Nigeria united and containing the bloodshed. However, a month later the full-scale massacres started. Meanwhile, at exactly 5:45am, Marsden, went to the British Deputy High Commissioner D.F. Hawley's Bourdillon Road residence to alert him that a coup was going on. He went again at 10:45am after flying to Ikeja to procure Ironsi and Njoku. He said the hierarchy of the Police Force was loyal but they were not sure of the loyalty of the Armed Forces. And so to harmonise loyalties, it was best, argued Marsden, Duckett and Barham to establish a Joint Operations Centre at the Force HQ where there was no fear renegade soldiers would burst in to abduct or shoot anyone. FBC endorsed the place by agreeing to meet Dipcharima only at the Force HQ. Dipcharima had no choice but to move the council of ministers' meeting there.

Marsden again later went to inform the British diplomats that Ironsi and his officers were planning to take over the government and he and Barham were asked to write the takeover speech and Ironsi's provisional statement of policy. According to the report FBC later wrote to London, Barham who was an assistant superintendent of police in Palestine used a Palestine precedent and Ironsi's speech ended up resembling the one Nzeogwu gave the previous day without the fatwas on homosexuality, bribery, rumour mongering etc etc. In the middle of the night of Ironsi's takeover, Marsden again went to advice FBC that to have an edge for British interests, he should be the first to pay Ironsi a symbolic visit in the morning. This FBC promptly did to confirm they were not backing up the North but any one in power.

The Inspector General of Police, the 54-year-old Louis Orok Edet was on holiday at his native home in Calabar. Edet joined the police force as a mere clerk in 1932 and rose through the ranks after helping the colonial police track down ritualists who beheaded human beings for cultural sacrifices. Edet was roundly criticised by his villagers for joining "the enslavers," "imperialists," "colonial exploiters," the destroyers of native cultures." His villagers never saw anything wrong or inhuman in the beheadings; it was the generational preservation of their ancestral culture that mattered. When he was appointed as the first indigenous IG in 1964, given his background, he was sceptical of the call for rapid Nigerianisation of Police. He refused to terminate the contract of the several colonial officers still within the top hierarchy of the police force.

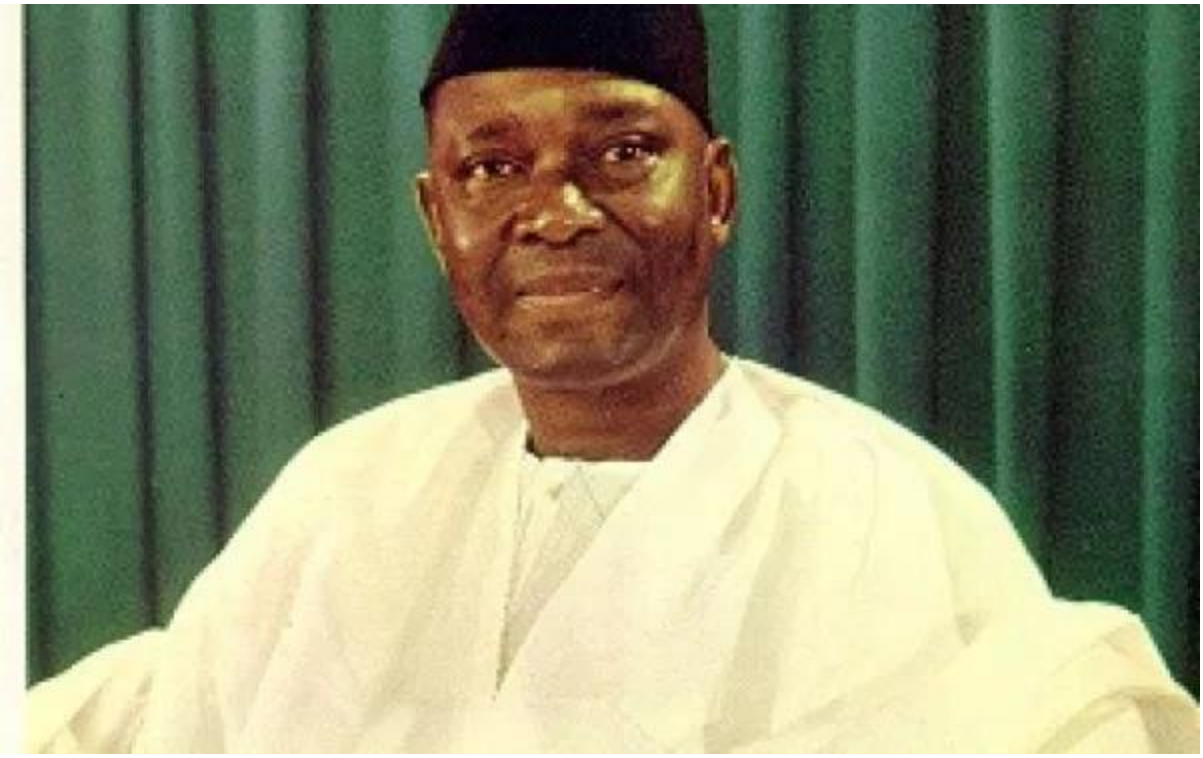
With the politicians gone after their rancorous Cabinet meeting, Ironsi summoned all the senior officers alive in Lagos for an emergency meeting. Commodore Wey, the head of the Navy, Lt Colonels Victor Banjo, the head of NAMAE in Yaba, Lt Colonel Francis Fajuyi, head of the Abeokuta Garrison, Lieutenant Colonels Gowon and Njoku were all there. Ironsi narrated the coup as he knew it and Gowon narrated his effort to rally the army under him, find the abducted politicians and officers. Excepting Gowon who kept on maintaining that the army should avoid political leadership, the consensus was that this was the army's opportunity and Ironsi as the head of the army should not waste it. As Njoku later wrote of that day in his book *Tragedy Without Heroes*, he told Ironsi during the earlier tête-à-tête at Ikeja to take over the affairs of the state; that the younger officers may actually be doing the nation a favour. Njoku knew that in Chinese language, crisis and opportunity meant the same thing. That confirmed earlier Gowon's suspicion that Ironsi and Njoku showed zero zeal to liquidate the mutiny. They sat down faraway safely in Ikeja until the British expatriates came to pick them up by helicopter.

To Banjo, the young officers had apparently provided the boots on the ground for the takeover, it was totally unfair that only senior officers should enjoy the seats at the table. He then went further to suggest that Nzeogwu who with his broadcast had emerged as the face of the coup must be invited to join the proposed Supreme Military Council. Ironsi said the Ministers were on their way to the Ikoyi Crescent home of the Senate President to arrange the swearing in. They must be stopped.

On Sunday 16 January around noon, Shehu Shagari, Richard Akinjide and some other NPC-NNDP ministers waited in Senate President's sitting room. At the other side of Ikoyi, Dipcharima was at his Bourdillon Road residence awaiting the outcome. Then came FBC, the British High Commissioner who withdrew the promise of transmitting the request for British security to the Commonwealth office in Downing Street and had a gentleman's pact with Dipcharima to deny such a request was ever made. The Ministers still sat there with the Senate President not knowing that the need for the office of the Acting Prime Minister had been voided. Had the request not been made, it was not likely that Ironsi would have been motivated to seize power then. The Senate President who also was the acting President and Head of Government continued to work the phones upstairs away from the ministers. He was struggling to get in touch with Azikiwe who was recuperating in the UK after contracting a lung infection during his holidays.

But something mysterious was happening.

Late on Saturday, 15th January, at his Surrey hotel, Azikiwe heard the news of the disappearance of the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and the death of two premiers on the BBC. The details of who did what were yet to emerge. The coup plotters had shut down the telephone exchange and all external communications facilities. In fact, at the private meeting between Ironsi and FBC on 17th January, Ironsi narrated how he was lucky to escape death because Pam phoned him around 3:00am that a mutiny was ongoing. FBC later wrote that he doubted if a phone call was possible at the time because some of their diplomats living in Ikoyi heard gunshots and the menacing troop movements. They tried to contact their High Commission for security assurance but the phones were down. Unlike Ibadan telephone exchange that was fully automatic, Lagos telephone exchange was partially automatic and when Major Ademoyega's unit arrived to relieve the manual connectors of their posts, the automatic exchange to which all officers' lines emanated was still connecting calls for 20 minutes in the basement before Ademoyega's men finally reached it and shut it down. That 20 minutes window gave Pam the opportunity to warn Maimalari and Ironsi. If not for Pam, Ironsi and Maimalari – two high value targets – would have been slaughtered in their respective residences. The rebels would have consolidated their HQ at the Federal Guards officer's mess and commenced the second phase. Pam's quick call was instrumental to the failure of the Revolution.



Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe

Betty Emery, Azikiwe's private secretary arrived at the Nigerian High Commission in London from "Suite of the President of Nigeria, Burford Bridge hotel, Box Hill in Dorking, Surrey" where Azikiwe was recuperating on public finance. She brought a letter stamped Top Secret that Azikiwe wanted transmitted to Lagos. His usual hotel phones and cablegram facilities were avoiding Lagos and so he sent Miss Emery to the Nigerian High Commission in London. But the High Commission too was having problems connecting to Lagos so in company of Mr Dosunmu, the Acting high commissioner and Brigadier Ogundipe his military attaché, Emery proceeded to the Commonwealth Relations Office(CRO) in Downing Street to connect with the British High Commission in Lagos. They arrived there at around 4pm. British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson who left Nigeria three days before the Revolution had given Arthur Bottomley the CRO's secretary of state up to 8pm to submit a report of what happened in Nigeria, how they were caught unawares and what could be done to locate their friend and ally Sir Tafawa Balewa Abubakar. FBC had already forwarded a long preliminary report of what they knew so far and whom was currently steering the affairs of the nation. The DI 4(a), Defence Intelligence under the Ministry of Defence and Col Hunt the military adviser had been tasked to find how an operation of such scale eluded British spies. Nigeria had been extra vetted for security in order that the Queen's cousin, Prince William of Gloucester could serve at the High Commission there. Nigeria held Britain's fourth largest diplomatic outpost in the world.

St John Chadwick an Assistant Under-Secretary at the CRO was the first to notice to whom Azikiwe's letter was addressed. He gently corrected Emery/Azikiwe's ignorance saying when next they wanted to send a letter to the person running the country, they should address it to Zanar Dicharima, c/o Council of Ministers and not to Major General Aguiyi Ironsi. But Azikiwe knew something they did not know.

The letter read:

Dear Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi,

The news is now wide-spread about the unfortunate events which have occurred in the last two days in our dear country. I am very much perturbed to learn that all lines of communication between Nigeria and the outside world have been temporarily disconnected, so I am obliged to use the good services of a friendly medium because I understand that you are now actively engaged in restoring order in the capital and other parts of the country.

Since this is a Herculean task which must be undertaken by all of us who are interested in the peace and stability of our Federal Republic, I now inform you of my desire to return home immediately in order to be in position to discharge any duty, Constitutional or otherwise, in which my services may be required.

As you appear to be the only means of communication to my Government, I hope that you will be kind enough to give me your considered advice, at you earliest convenience, through the bearer of this letter.

Sincerely yours,

Signed

NNAMDI AZIKIWE

President of the

Federal Republic

of Nigeria.

The letter was striking more for what it did not contain. The Prime Minister and Finance Minister and some top officers were missing; Akintola and Sardauna

had been confirmed dead. Azikiwe offered no word about how the abducted would be found or commiseration with the family of the deceased. He only asked Ironsi to clue him into any decision, "Constitutional or otherwise" and expressed his wish to come home immediately. The CRO diplomats advised him not go. He would later arrive the country on 12 February 1966, two days before Ifeajuna and proceeded straight to Nsukka after the takeover of his State House Mansion by Ironsi on 26th January. At a dinner party held for Sir Kerr Bovell the outgoing Inspector of Police in 1962, Abubakar told Bovell sitting next to him that: "*When there is trouble you can always tell it because Zik will not be there – he will be in England, or America, or somewhere. He always thinks he is going to be assassinated, but he won't be*." He then told Azikiwe seated on the other side: *"Your Excellency, I am Muslim, and if it is the will of God for me to be shot, I'll be shot."* Abubakar was so much like Shaihu Umar the hero of his eponymous novella.

Orizu had been using all excuses to deny the ministers their request to swear Dipcharima in. First he told the ministers that he would not be able to oblige their request because the absence of NCNC ministers implied their lack of consent. When eventually some NCNC ministers were produced, Orizu buried himself in a side room and was trying to call Azikiwe on a phone line that was not working. Ironsi then turned up in the sitting room with his menace-looking armed bodyguards. He requested to have a word with Orizu in his side room and for 40 minutes the ministers were patiently waiting for them. The presence of the soldiers terrified them. Was it not their colleagues that had wrecked lives and wreaked havoc on the nation? The fear of being next to be killed or abducted loomed large over them. Ironsi emerged and left without saying a word to the ministers. Afterwards the Senate President emerged to tell them he would not be able to oblige their request; there was a new development. Without going into details, he dismissed the ministers and said they should await further instructions. The ministers were shocked; it was fishy that for six hours, Orizu dragged his feet but the secret meeting with the GOC portended something very, very ominous.

The truth was: Dr Abyssinia Akweke Nwafor Orizu being a crook should never have held any political office had Nigeria been a proper country. In 1946, Orizu presided over a new form of heartless fraud. Families and whole villages in the East sold their possessions to send a single student from their village to university because like Awolowo, they were passionate for the benefit of good education. Orizu a PhD holder, formed an agency, American Council on African Education (ACAE) to find these village students admission into American

universities. He collected the maintenance funds from their parents and other sponsors and diverted them partly or totally to other personal and business schemes. In 1947, two prominent African Americans Alain Locke and George Schulyer resigned over Orizu's conduct of affairs. Horace Mann Bond, the African American president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania who provided Orizu's agency with many tuition-free scholarships complained regularly and bitterly about Orizu's failure to financially support the students whom Orizu had placed in his school.

The 32-year-old Orizu was found out and on 2nd of February 1953 was arrested. Azikiwe, Mbonu Ojike and Kola Balogun went to bail him out. On 9th February, his brother Joseph Onyekusi Orizu was arrested in Gusau and taken to Port Harcourt. On 12th February both brothers were charged in a statement that read: "That you between May 1, 1946 and December 31, 1951 at Port Harcourt, in the Port Harcourt Magisterial District, conspired together with other persons unknown to defraud such person as might be induced to deposit money with you as officers and agents of a body known as the American Council on African Education Incorporated, and you thereby committed an offence punishable under the Criminal code." When their lawyer told the court that Orizu was a honourable man, a PhD holder, a royal Prince in Nnewi, a member of the regional legislature, and also Azikiwe's nominee for Minister of Local Government, Magistrate Dickson retorted: "This court is not a department under the Government and it is not subject to any political party." Orizu was later jailed for 7 years. On Tuesday 22nd September 1953, he arrived Lagos Prison by train under escort to serve his term. At the House of Commons debate of 29 April 1953, James Johnson the MP for Kingston upon Hull West berated Oliver Lyttelton, the secretary of Colonies for taking so long to arrest the Orizu brothers: "Is not it somewhat disgraceful that it has taken so long to investigate this case of defrauding parents and students?" Hence allowing him to cause untold hardship to his own people?



Herbert Macaulay

The so-called father of Nigerian nationalism and founder of NCNC, Hebert Macaulay was working in the Ministry of Land and Surveys when he was caught twice for diverting public lands for personal benefits. In 1914 he was convicted for forgery and in the second instance he was convicted of perjury. As an ex-convict, he could not hold any elected office despite many pleas for pardon to first Lord Lugard and later to Donald Cameron the colonial governor who enabled elective politics in Nigeria. To Cameron who was then the warmest, friendliest governor with the Lagos high society, there was nothing politically-motivated in Macaulay's conviction, it was pure criminality. Hence no pardon. His son, Oged (Ogedengbe) Macaulay lost his eligibility for elective office when in 1952 as a councillor on Lagos Town Council, he swindled J.M. Jazzar, the Lebanese transport magnate in Lagos by falsely pretending that he was in a position to influence the councillors of the Lagos Town Council to get him a bus route permit. (This was even different from the 1-year sentence handed him in 1950 for sedition and being a member of Zikist movement that promoted violence to achieve anti-colonial agenda). The logic behind the rule was that the government was a sacred job; if crooks were allowed to determine the destiny of the people, the people would suffer indefinitely.



Nwafor Orizu: convicted for fraud

But in the case of Orizu, who was the intellectual proponent of Zikism, Mbonu Ojike, Azikiwe, Mbadiwe started to entrench the false narrative that Orizu was convicted by the British colonial government not for embezzlement but as a revenge for his fiery anti-colonial speech given at the 1947 Enugu Coal riots

rally. Never mind that more important figures such as H.O. Davies also gave fiery speeches at the rally too but were not fraudsters hence not fated for conviction by the colonial government. But in the case of Orizu, colonialism became the excuse for a crook to be turned into a national hero. Azikiwe made Orizu whole by nominating him unopposed to represent Nnewi in the Federal elections of 1959 that ushered in self-rule.

The existence of colonialism provided Nigeria's moral system the perfect excuse to develop and strengthen the disdain for the objective perception of value on which any civilised society must rest. When colonialism expired in 1960, the disdain remained alive and thriving through the force of habit. In 1961 for instance, Dr Okejukwu Ikejiani, the pro-chancellor of University of Ibadan was caught lying about a certificate he never had. A visiting scholar from University of Toronto who happened to be from the same department which allegedly awarded Ikejiani's certificate was the first to point out that Ikejiani never had that esteemed Doctor of Science degree. Ibadan erupted and there were calls for Ikejiani to resign and be prosecuted. To Azikiwe who was the head of government, the visitor to the university and in charge of such appointments, Ikejiani was being "persecuted" because he, Azikiwe, had dared to appoint an other Igbo after Francis Ibiam as the Pro-chancellor and head of the governing council of a flagship Federal University in a non-Igbo region in particular when the Vice chancellor was already an Igbo. Before departing Toronto University where he rightly earned his undergraduate medical degree, Ikejiani seduced and frequently unhooked the lovely secretary at the Vice Chancellor's office until she embossed a Doctor of Science certificate in his name complete with authentic signatures but with no education behind it. After the Toronto University investigation into the matter, the secretary realised her wrongdoing and quietly accepted her dismissal. But that was Canada. In Nigeria, one of the criteria of eligibility for being considered a national hero was to be a bonafide crook. When Ikejiani was forced to finally resign, being a medical doctor, Azikiwe made him whole like Orizu by appointing him to the State House as one of his personal physicians. He was not done: Azikiwe then reappointed him again to his former unfilled post less than two years later. He still was not done: In 1964, Azikiwe decorated him with the national honour – Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON) – pun unintended – 'for his service to the nation.' If anyone is interested in why Nigeria ended up being a pit latrine of implacable corruption where intelligence cannot assert itself in the conduct of public affairs, the Orizu and Ikejiani Affair is where to begin. Azikiwe put into disorder all considerations based on value. And the absence of the objective perception of value produced the will to tribalism which eliminated the prospect of any meaningful progress for the nation.

Had the ministers who came to Orizu for the swearing-in request been from his party NCNC, had the candidate they presented been Ozumba Mbadiwe, Orizu would never foot-dragged or pretended to be calling Azikiwe on a phone that lacked dialling tone. Ironsi too would have looked the other way, gone back to his subordinate officers and inform them that according to their code of conduct, the military must aid civilian power not to take over it. Orizu who claimed he needed Azikiwe's consent before considering swearing in Dipcharima would later publicly hand over the government to Ironsi without the need for Azikiwe's consent. The Northern soldiers saw through all these phonies and they quietly fumed.

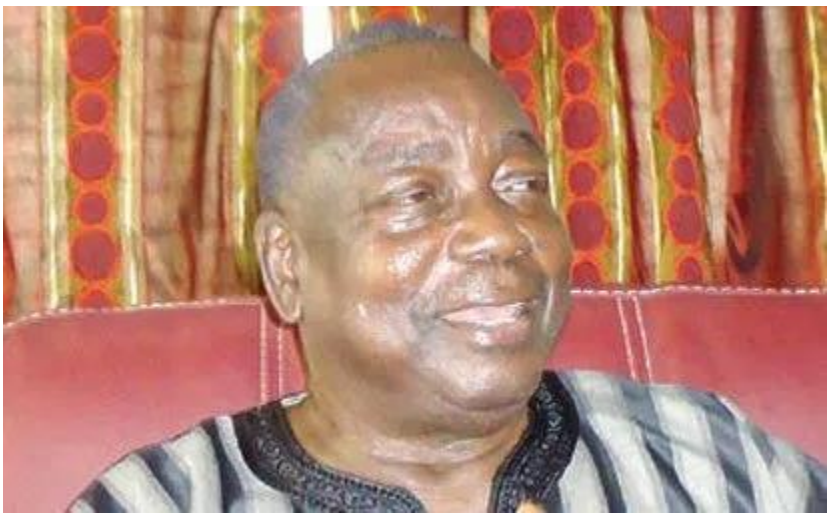
Why was the Revolution regarded necessary in the first place? A false analysis of the Nigerian condition grounded in weak data and rapid decadence of the love of truth resulted in a widely believed myth of Northern domination. Whereas the truth was more salient: One, for 50 years since 1912, the North was the richest region in the country with even the highest employment opportunities for anyone willing to work. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Emeka Okujwu, Bola Ige, Sonny Odogwu and Maryam Babangida were born by parents who like millions of Southerners went to seek economic fortunes in the prosperous North. Two, Kaduna and Kano had more than military installations than the whole of South combined. This is because Northerners joined the army's lower ranks than Southerners when Britain needed troops for the colonial and world wars. That was why the colonial government built more military institutions in the North. However, only the 1st Recce Squadron in Kaduna was headed by a Northerner, Major Hassan Katsina. All the other units where headed and administratively staffed by Southern officers and very few expatriates. Three, on 26th January 1953, Awolowo's Western Regional Government published the list of 200 successful candidates for the highly coveted scholarship scheme for teacher training courses and university studies. Western scholarships were also given to Eastern students resident in the West but no Northerner was on the list. On 2nd February 1953, the Eastern Regional Government published the list of its own 121 scholarship awarded. There was no Western or Northern student on the list. On 6th April 1953, Northern Regional Government published the list of 60 successful candidates. There were Easterners and Westerners on the list.

Four, 1st October 1960 only marked the final process of independence from Britain, but the first stage started in January 1952 with the inauguration of indigenous regional governments. Sardauna was the first to appoint non-Northerners to the Northern Regional Assembly. He appointed Felix Okonkwo an Igbo Easterner, as special interests' representative of Kano and Solomon Oke James a Yoruba Westerner resident in Kaduna. Awolowo reciprocated by

appointing Alhaji Mukthar, Seriki of Sabo in Ibadan. There were already Easterners in the Western House. The Eastern Regional Assembly never reciprocated the gesture by appointing any Northerner or Westerner. Other Regions opened up to embrace non-natives in their governments. Except the East. It was true then; it is true today. The myth of Northern domination then was an organised distraction from something else.

The origin of "Igbo Coup"

The Revolution was very popular along the length and breadth of the country. It was hailed as freedom from bad luck: "the end of corrupt regime." *Daily Times* the leading newspaper in the country led the chorus: it called Nigeria since 1960 a sick bay: "Something just had to be done to save the Federation. Something has been done. It is like a surgical operation which must be performed or the patient dies. The operation has been performed. It has proved successful. And it is welcome." The National Union of Nigerian Students welcomed the coup. All the trade unions issued statements supporting the Revolution. The northern party, NPC too not wanting to be left out of the party expressed support. Sultan of Sokoto whose Prince the dead Sardauna was prayed for the success of the new regime. His press statement read: "Both regimes, the old and the new, came to us from God."



Samuel Ogbemudia

Prof Adeyemo Elebute is the biographer of Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies who like Ajayi Crowther and Aina Forbes Bonetta was one of Nigeria's founding fathers. Elebute was also one of the founding members of LUTH. In an interview with this author, he confirmed he was one of the doctors who treated Nzeogwu's neck injuries when he was brought to LUTH prior to his proposed absorption into the Ironsi government that was used to deceive him

into coming over to Lagos. For months, burnt people including children partially turned into carbon were brought to LUTH everyday from Western Region's *Operation wetie*. The hospital staff, bed spaces and medical resources had been overwhelmed many times over. Yet LUTH was only at the periphery of the Western crisis. UCH and other General hospitals all over the Region were completely swamped by the crisis. According to Elebute, it was the coup that provided the hospitals the much needed relieve. When eventually, Nzeogwu arrived at LUTH, he was feted like a rock star by the staff. The revolutionaries were seen as Igbo Beatles and Nzeogwu was their John Lennon. *I Want to Hold Your Hand:* The doctors, nurses and other health officials were ecstatically eager to catch a glimpse of him in his heavily guarded ward and shake his hands. To many, the general joy was comparable to the day the Israelites left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. But to deeper minds, it was comparable to the day Albert Einstein published the theory of general relativity (what was heinous murders to some can be called national liberation to others). Great intelligence specialises in heresies.

The first set of people to call the coup an Igbo coup were Igbos. According to M. Chidi and C. Usonos who were traders in Kano at that time, since the coup was popular and welcomed all over the country, it was a thing of joy and pride that their brothers had 'saved' Nigeria. When Ifeajuna won Gold in 1954 Commonwealth Olympics, because of its immense popularity, it was first regarded as a victory for the black race, then victory for Africa, then Nigeria. Eventually it was rightly and naturally claimed as a victory for Igbos just as Jesse Owen's victory in the presence of Hitler in 1936 Olympics was a victory for all Americans and later narrowed down by black Americans as an exclusive victory for them.

Major Samuel Ogbemudia, a non-Igbo was an instructor at the NMTC; he shared the same office with Nzeogwu but did not know about the imminent Revolution. His other colleague Major Timothy Onwuatuegwu, an Igbo was co-opted as the deputy commandant of the Northern operations of the Revolution. Major Olusegun Obasanjo, another Hausa-speaking non-Igbo was Nzeogwu's best friend. He was serving with 1 Field Squadron (Army Engineers). He arrived the country two days before the coup and slept in the same room with Nzeogwu in the bachelor's quarters at No 13, Kanta Road barracks just as before he left the country. He was not told of the Revolution too but his deputy, Captain Ben Gbulie, an Igbo at the same 1 Field Squadron (Army engineers) was invited and was tasked with securing the Brigade HQ and other key points.

With the public adulation that hailed the execution of the Revolution, Ogbemudia and Obasanjo went to the brigade HQ the morning after and asked Nzeogwu, "Why didn't you tell us?" They saw the Revolution as history in the making and they were jealous. According to Ogbemudia in an interview he had with this author, Nzeogwu's response was, "We couldn't tell everybody." But what criteria did they use to determine who to invite, who to exclude, who to eliminate with extreme prejudice? Why did Nzeogwu after killing Sardauna hastened to the home of Major Hassan Katsina, the only Northerner heading a military unit in the North to demand at gunpoint if he supported the Revolution or not? Had Katsina said he was against it, he would have been shot in front of his wife and children. But why did Nzeogwu not perform the same stunt with Major Alexander Madiebo, another Igbo Easterner heading a combat unit (1st Field Battery(Artillery))? According to Madiebo in his book Nigerian Revolution and Biafra War (pg 16): *"Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, for instance, invited me for lunch* (on 12 January 1966*), during which he expressed a view that an immediate coup was the only solution to the nation's numerous political problems. In agreeing with him, I expressed doubts on the chances of the success of such an exercise in a country where tribal loyalties were much stronger than the national and ideological ones. He immediately changed the topic of conversation and never mentioned it again."* So Nzeogwu knew Madiebo who was already in Kaduna was not for the Revolution yet he never accompanied his gun with *gra gra* to Madiebo's bedroom to give him the Katsina treatment. Madiebo rightly knew and said that the ethnic loyalties binding the coup plotters would be stronger than any national or ideological ones no matter how they choose to spin it to the contrary. He knew that instead of being hailed as national youth service corps, they would end up damned as ethnic youth service corps.

When the dust of euphoria that greeted the selective assassinations finally settled after 3 months, it became crystal clear to Igbos and non-Igbos alike that the list of those killed and those left un-killed can neither be a fluke nor a coincidence; that the lack of equal opportunity to the assassinations was the result of a lack of equal representation amongst the assassins; that it would be difficult to escape the conclusion that the Revolutionaries had removed a predatory domination of the country by North only to impose another predatory domination by the East.

With the promise of revenge, the Igbos who were proud to say our boys did it began to beat a frightened retreat: "It was not an Igbo coup, a Yoruba man was among… Nzeogwu is Igbo in name only he is actually a Northerner…No,

no, the coup plotters wanted to hand over to Awolowo… (This never featured in Nzeogwu's speech) …etc…etc…"

But in the North and all over the barracks, driven by the desire for vengeance and by the conviction that hell was not even half full yet, the first of the many revenge massacres of 1966 started on 29 May in Kaduna and Kano. A war followed the following year. All because of an ill-conceived Revolution.

In 2001, at the age of 65 years, Elizabeth Pam, a Northerner and the widow of James Pam went to see Humphrey Chukwuka in Enugu the former capital of Eastern Region. She was 30 years old in 1966 when Chukwuka took James away and never returned him to her as promised. Elizabeth did not call for justice as an alternative to the loss of her beloved husband neither was she avid for tribal accusations that was common to Chukwuka's people. She just uttered those difficult words: "I forgive you." She died soft on 10th of May 2011 surrounded by her children and her illustrious moral superiority. Amazing Grace.

Damola Awoyokun, an engineer, is a writer and historian. This excerpt is from his forthcoming trilogy on Nigerian history from 1700 – 1970. He can be reached on twitter @osoronga or email osoronga@yahoo.com