

**OPERATION 'AURE': Northern Nigerian Military Counter-  
Rebellion July, 1966**

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## **BACKGROUND**

**I**n the early hours of January 15, 1966, citing a laundry list of complaints against the political class, there was a military rebellion in Nigeria against the first republic [http://www.dawodu.com/nzeogwu2.htm]. Led by a group of Majors who were predominantly of eastern origin, the Prime Minister, a federal minister, two regional premiers, along with top Army officers were brutally assassinated. A number of civilians were also killed. [http://www.gamji.com/NEWS1103.htm]

The coup succeeded in Kaduna, the northern region capital, failed in Lagos, the federal capital, and in Ibadan, the western regional capital, but barely took place in Benin the midwestern capital, and Enugu the eastern capital.

The majority of those murdered were northerners, accompanied by some westerners and two Midwesterners. No easterner lost his or her life. On January 16, rather than approve the appointment of Zanna Bukar Dipcharima, a politician of northern origin, as acting Prime Minister, the acting President, Nwafor Orizu, himself of eastern origin, handed over power to Major-General JTG Aguiyi-Ironsi, the GOC of the Nigerian Army, also of eastern origin. This was allegedly at the behest of the rump cabinet, allegedly to enable Ironsi put down the revolt which, as of then, had already failed in southern Nigeria. Until it became apparent recently in separate testimony by Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Chief Richard Akinjide, it had always been publicly assumed in the lay Press that the hand-over was voluntary although unconstitutional - since no such provision existed in the Nigerian constitution. However, it does seem that as far back as 1969, Martin Dent pointed out the involuntary nature of the so-called hand-over in an academic paper, based on an interview with Alhaji Shettima Ali Monguno.

In July 2000, at a public book launching ceremony in Nigeria, Chief Richard Akinjide stated:

“Talking on the first coup, when Balewa got missing, we knew Okotie-Eboh had been held, we knew Akintola had been killed. We, the members of the Balewa cabinet started meeting. But how can you have a cabinet meeting without the Prime Minister acting or Prime Minister presiding. So, unanimously, we nominated acting Prime Minister amongst us. Then we continued holding our meetings. Then we got a message that we should all assemble at the Cabinet office. All the Ministers were requested by the G.O.C. of the Nigerian Army, General Ironsi to assemble. What was amazing at that time was that Ironsi was going all over Lagos unarmed. We assembled there. Having nominated ZANA Diphcharima as our acting Prime Minister in the absence of the Prime Minister, whose whereabouts we didn't know, we approached the acting President, Nwafor Orizu to swear him in because he cannot legitimately act as the Prime Minister except he is sworn- in. Nwafor Orizu refused. He said he needed to contact Zik who was then in West Indies.

Under the law, that is, the Interpretation Act, as acting President, Nwazor Orizu had all the powers of the President. The GOC said he wanted to see all the cabinet ministers. And so we assembled at the cabinet office. Well, I have read in many books saying that we handed over to the military. We did not hand-over. Ironsi told us that "you either hand over as gentlemen or you hand-over by force". Those were his words. Is that voluntary hand-over? So we did not hand-over. We wanted an Acting Prime Minister to be in place but Ironsi forced us, and I use the word force advisedly, to handover to him. He was controlling the soldiers. The acting President, Nwafor Orizu, who did not cooperate with us, cooperated with the GOC. Dr. Orizu and the GOC prepared speeches which Nwafor Orizu broadcast handing over the government of the country to the army. I here state again categorically as a member of that cabinet that we did not hand-over voluntarily. It was a coup. “

Corroborating Akinjide's account, according to Shehu Shagari, in his Book "Beckoned to Serve",

".....At about 7.00 am, I returned to Dipcharima's residence to meet with some NPC ministers who had gathered there. Dipcharima was then the most senior NPC minister available. We received the latest reports on the situation, first from Alhaji Maitama Sule, Minister of Mines and Power, who had visited the PM's residence by bicycle! We then heard from Alhaji Ibrahim Tako Galadima, the acting Minister of Defence, who had brought along with him Chief Fani-Kayode.

Chief Fani-Kayode said he had been fetched from Ibadan early that morning by rebels and locked up at the Federal Guard Officers Mess in Dodan Barracks, where the mutineers initially made their headquarters. Disguised in army uniform, loyal troops handed him over to Alhaji Galadima, who had called in at the barracks, which was a stone's throw of his residence.....The acting Minister of Defence assured us that Major-General Ironsi was doing his best to arrest the situation.

Maitama Sule and I were separately detailed to explore with our absent NPC and NCNC colleagues the possibility of naming someone to stand in for the PM. I was consulting with NCNC ministers at Dr. Mbadiwe's residence when we heard that the Northern and Western premiers, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Chief Akintola respectively, had been assassinated. Hence I rushed back to Dipcharima's residence, where I found my colleagues in a state of shock and desperation.

However, we decided to recognize Dipcharima, a Kanuri from Bornu, as our interim leader; and to ask the acting President, Dr. Orizu (President Azikiwe was away on leave), to appoint Dipcharima acting Prime Minister. We also summoned Major General Ironsi and gave him full authority to use every force at his disposal to suppress the rebellion. He

moved his headquarters temporarily to the police headquarters at moloney street to facilitate easy communication with army units in the regions.

While at Dipcharima's residence, we contacted the British High Commission and requested for military assistance in the event that our loyal troops should require any. The response was positive, but the British insisted that the request must be written by the PM; or, in his absence, by a properly appointed deputy. We, therefore, drove to the residence of Dr. Orizu, and requested him to appoint Dipcharima acting prime minister. Dr. Orizu requested to see our NCNC colleagues to confirm whether they supported our proposition, and they joined us soon afterwards. They had apparently been caucusing at Dr. Mbadiwe's residence. He (Mbadiwe) was their choice of acting Prime Minister. This was naturally unacceptable to us since the NPC was the major governing party.

While we were at Orizu's residence, Major-General Ironsi, who had seemingly secured Lagos, came in with some armed escorts. He requested for a tete-a-tete with Orizu. The two had a 40 minutes discussion in another room, while we waited anxiously in the sitting room, with the armed soldiers standing and staring at us. When Major-General Ironsi finally emerged, he talked to Dipcharima sotto voce; and then drove off with his troops. Dr. Orizu then joined us, regretted his inability in the circumstances to oblige our request. He suggested we all return to our homes and wait until we were required. All efforts to get any clarification failed, and we left in utter desperation.

I was about to break the Ramadan fast on Sunday 16th January, when all ministers were asked to report to the Cabinet Office at 6.30 pm. The whole premises was surrounded by soldiers in battle order that some of us initially hesitated to enter. In the Cabinet chamber were Major General Ironsi, Bukar Dipcharima and Ibrahim Tako Galadima. There were no officials present.

Major General Ironsi admitted to us that he had been unable to suppress the rebellion, which he said was getting out of hand. He stated that the mutineers were in control of Kaduna, Kano and Ibadan, and had killed two regional premiers, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Chief Akintola. They had also murdered a number of his best officers, including Brigadiers Maimalari and Samuel Adesujo Ademulegun, the Commander 1st Brigade Headquarters in Kaduna. Ironsi was full of emotion and even shed some tears. When we asked him about the whereabouts of Sir ABubakar and Chief Okotie-Eboh, he said he still did not know but averred efforts were being made to locate them. At this stage Mbadiwe broke down and kept crying: "Please where is the Prime Minister?"

When we reminded Major-General Ironsi if he needed to avail himself of the British pledge of assistance, he replied it was too late as the army was pressing him to assume power. Indeed, he confessed his personal reluctance to take over because of his ignorance of government; but insisted the boys were adamant and anxiously waiting outside. He advised it would be in our interest, and that of the country, to temporarily cede power to him to avert disaster. Accordingly, we acceded to his request since we had no better alternative. Ironsi then insisted that the understanding be written.

Surprisingly, there was no stationery to write the agreement; and all the offices were locked while no official was around. Alhaji AGF Abdulrazaq the Minister of State for the Railways (former NPC legal adviser), managed to secure a scrap paper on which he drafted a statement, which we endorsed. That was the so called voluntary hand-over of power by the Balewa Government to Major General Ironsi! It was agreed that the statement would be typed and Dipcharima would sign it on our behalf. We were then advised to return home and await further instructions. I only got to break my Ramadan fast around 9:30 pm.

Later at 11.50 pm, Dr. Orizu made a terse nationwide broadcast, announcing the cabinet's voluntary decision to transfer power to the armed forces. Major General Ironsi then made his own broadcast, accepting the "invitation". He suspended certain parts of the constitution; set up a national military government, with the office of military governors in each region; and briefly outlined the policy intentions of his regime. Nigeria's first democratic experiment was effectively over. And although the mutiny had by then practically collapsed, military rule had arrived. It was a fact.

The following morning, 17 January, Alhaji Kam Salem, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police (then also doubling for the Inspector-General, Mr. Louis Orok Edet, while on vacation), called at my residence to confide that both the PM and Chief Okotie-Eboh had been confirmed killed. He then hinted that Major General Ironsi was still negotiating with the rebels in Kaduna, led by Major Patrick Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu"

Then Lt. Col. (later General) Gowon, who was not physically present when the rump cabinet was handing over, says he was later told by Ironsi and other officers (who were outside the cabinet office chambers, and thus did not themselves witness the event) that it was voluntary. He recalls asking three separate times to be certain, but now says that had he known it was not, he would have acted differently on that day as the Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion at Ikeja which supported Ironsi in putting down the Ifeajuna-Nzeogwu revolt.

The substantive President, Nnamdi Azikiwe, also of eastern origin, had left the country in late 1965 first for Europe, then on a health cruise to the Caribbean, after allegedly being tipped off by his cousin, Major Ifeajuna, one of the masterminds of the coup and, some say, overall leader. Interestingly, (assuming reports that he had foreknowledge are true) Azikiwe did not notify his alliance partner, the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, with whom he had clashed over control of the armed forces during the Constitutional crisis of January 1965, following the controversial December 1964 federal elections. [<http://www.gamji.com/nowa11.htm>]

In fact President Azikiwe's personal physician, Dr. Humphrey Idemudia Idehen, abandoned him abroad when he got tired of the "health trip", having run out of his personal estacode allowance, unaware that there may have been a good reason why Azikiwe did not want to return to Nigeria, after their original planned return date in December 1965 passed. Not even the Commonwealth Leaders' Conference hosted for the first time by the country in early January was incentive enough for the President to return, for obvious reasons of protocol. However, after the coup, in a statement to the Press in England on January 16, among other things, Azikiwe did not condemn the coup per se, but said:

"Violence has never been an instrument used by us, as founding fathers of the Nigerian Republic, to solve political problems. ....I consider it most unfortunate that our 'Young Turks' decided to introduce the element of violent revolution into Nigerian politics. No matter how they and our general public might have been provoked by obstinate and perhaps grasping politicians, it is an unwise policy.....As far as I am concerned, I regard the killings of our political and military leaders as a national calamity...."

Major Ifeajuna was later to be accused by Major Patrick Nzeogwu, leader of northern operations, of bungling or ignoring an apparent understanding to assassinate General Ironsi in Lagos - an oversight, or "misguided consideration" (to use Nzeogwu's words) that caused the failure of the coup. Indeed, Nzeogwu bluntly declared publicly that the execution of the coup in the South was tribalistic. Captain Emmanuel Nwobosi (rtd), leader of operations in the Western region, has since corroborated the view that operations in Lagos were compromised by nepotism. For this and other reasons, over the years, some analysts have come to view Nzeogwu, who was recruited two full months after the plot was already in progress, as a tool in a plot he never fully understood. Indeed, in offering condolences for the death of the Sardauna of Sokoto, ex-Senate President Nwafor Orizu told Alhaji Shehu Shagari that Major Nzeogwu was "an unknown entity among the Ibos (sic) in the Eastern region."

Those who have defended the January mutiny as being motivated by nationalistic, rather than tribal instincts, say Ironsi escaped because he had gone for a party on a Boat along the Marina that night and was not at home when mutineers allegedly came calling. Tenuous explanations exist for why the Igbo speaking Premiers of the Midwest and Eastern regions were spared and no Igbo commanding or staff officer was specifically targetted. January apologists also say that there were a few non-Igbo officers involved (although none were entrusted with key targets and most were brought in at the last minute). It is argued that the mainly Igbo speaking plotters intended to release Chief Obafemi Awolowo (a westerner) from jail in Calabar to make him leader. Others interpret the same information, combined with the highly specific pattern of killings, to mean that the coup was carried out by officers sympathetic to the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), although hijacked by the GOC of the Nigerian Army, possibly encouraged by Senate President Nwafor Orizu, and urged on by officers like Lt. Col. Victor Banjo, Lt-Col. Francis Fajuyi, Lt. Col. H. Njoku, Lt. Col. C. O. Ojukwu and Major Patrick Anwunah.

On January 17, Major General Ironsi established the Supreme Military Council in Lagos and announced Decree No. 1, effectively suspending the constitution, although it was not formally promulgated until March. Later that day Major PCK Nzeogwu, the leader of the revolt in the northern region negotiated a conditional surrender in which Ironsi agreed not to bring the mutineers to military trial. The next day, military governors were appointed for each of the four regions (Major Hassan Katsina – North, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu – East, Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi – West, and Lt. Col. David Ejoor, Midwest).

Colonel Adeyinka Adebayo was briefly summoned back from the Imperial Defence College where he was undergoing a course. Brigadier Babatunde Oguno, erstwhile Chief of Staff, Nigerian Defence Forces, was made Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters. Lt. Col. Yakubu Chinwa Gowon, the most senior surviving northern officer, who was in the process of assuming command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion at Ikeja on January 14/15, a unit which proved critical to restoration of order in Lagos, was made Chief of Staff (Army).

Other early military appointments include:

Chief of Staff (NAF), Lt. Col. George Kurubo (East, non-Igbo)

Commanding Officer, 2 Bde, Lt. Col. H. Njoku (East, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, 2 Bn, Major H. Igboba (Midwest, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, Abeokuta Garrison, Major G. Okonweze (Midwest, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, 4 Bn, Major Nzefili (Midwest, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, Federal Guards, Major Ochei (Midwest, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, 1 Bn, Major D. Ogunewe (East, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, 1 Bde, Lt. Col. W. Bassey (East, non-Igbo)

Commanding Officer, 3 Bn, Major Okoro (East, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, Depot, Major F. Akagha (East, Igbo)

Commanding Officer, 5 Bn, Major M. Shuwa (North)

It is said that there was initial euphoria by the public, even in the far north, against old ministers. However, there were some early problems too, which, to discerning eyes, were pregnant with foreboding. In his book “Years of Challenge”, Brigadier Samuel Ogbemudia (rtd) recalls:

“Before January 15, 1966, I had thought that the Nigerian soldier was not blood thirsty, thus ruling out the possibility of a bloody coup. Events proved me wrong and forced me to change my opinion about the Nigerian soldier. Although the ordinary man on the street welcomed the change of government, rejoiced and danced away in ecstatic jubilation, the atmosphere was muggy.”

For example, in the West, AG/UPGA supporters settled scores against supporters of former Premier Akintola's NNDP, creating a major crisis which evolved into an international refugee problem. It is said that 2000 refugees fled across the border to neighbouring Dahomey before the border was closed from January 16-26. No less than a thousand people were killed in the melee before Lt. Col. FA Fajuyi, the new military governor, detained surviving NNDP supporters allegedly for their own protection. In the North, there were some subdued early signs of a recoil among civilian elite, while unrest simmered in the Army. The net result was that Ironsi quickly felt threatened by Nzeogwu's supporters on one hand, and upset northern troops on the other.

### ***REFLECTIONS OF AN IGBO DIPLOMAT***

In his book, "No Place to Hide - Crises and Conflicts inside Biafra", Bernard Odogwu, then a Nigerian diplomat, but destined to become Chief of Biafran Intelligence, reveals that shortly after the coup of January 15, 1966 he and a fellow diplomat called Adamu Mohammed at the Nigerian mission to the United Nations in New York had a frank discussion about it. Odogwu wrote that "we were both in agreement that the so called 'revolutionaries' had performed very badly, in view of the one sidedness of the operation and the selectiveness of the killings." Following this discussion Odogwu made an entry on January 23, 1966 into his personal notebook:

"With all the returns in, we now seem to have a complete picture of the coup, the plotters, and the casualties. Reading through the newspapers, one gets the impression that this national catastrophe which is termed a "revolution" is being blown greatly out of proportion. It does appear to me though, that we have all gone wild with jubilation in welcoming the so-called 'dawn of a new era' without pausing to consider the possible chain reactions that may soon follow.....I shudder at the possible aftermath of this folly committed by our boys in khaki.; and what has kept coming to my mind since the afternoon is the passage in Shakespeare's MACBETH - 'And they say blood will have blood'.

First I ask myself this question; ‘What will be the position as soon as the present mass euphoria in welcoming the ‘revolution’ in the country fades away?’ There is already some rumour here within diplomatic circles that January 15 was a grand Igbo design to liquidate all opposition in order to make way for Igbo domination of the whole country. What then is the Igbo man’s defence to this allegation in light of the sectional and selective method adopted by the coup plotters?

Although, sitting here alone as I write this, I am tempted to say that there was no such Igbo grand design, yet the inescapable fact is that the Igbos are already as a group being condemned by the rest for the activities of a handful of ambitious Igbo army officers; for here I am, with the rest of my Igbo colleagues, some thousands of miles away from home, yet being put on the defensive for such actions that we were neither consulted about, nor approved of. Our Northern colleagues and friends now look on us Igbos here as strangers and potential enemies. They are now more isolated than ever before. Their pride is hurt; and who would blame them?

Secondly, I ask myself the questions posed to me this afternoon by my colleague; What would I do if I were placed in the position of the Northerner? What do I do? How do I react to the situation? Do I just deplore and condemn those atrocities or do I plan a revenge? I do not blame the Northern chaps for feeling so sore since the events of the last few days. They definitely have my sympathy, for it must have been shocking to say the least, for one to wake up one fine morning to find nearly all one’s revered leaders gone overnight. But they were not only Northern leaders as such, and I am as much aggrieved at their loss as any other Nigerian, Northern or otherwise. I am particularly shocked at the news that Major Ifeajuna personally shot and killed his mentor, Brigadier Maimalari. My God! That must have been Caesar and Brutus come alive, with the Brigadier definitely saying ‘Et tu Emma’ before collapsing.....”

“.....As for the new man at the helm of affairs, Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi, he too like the majority of the Majors is an Igbo, and that has not helped matters either. ....”

“.....Granted that he is such a good soldier as he is reputed to be, the question is: ‘Are all good soldiers necessarily good statesmen? Again how well prepared is he for the task he has just inherited?’ I do hope that he is also as wise as he is reputed to be bold, because if you ask me, I think the General is sitting on a time bomb, with the fuse almost burnt out. We shall wait and see what happens next, but from my observations, I know the present state of affairs will not last long. A northern counter-action is definitely around the corner, and God save us all when it explodes.”

### ***MISUNDERSTANDING AND SUSPICION***

Indeed, misunderstandings and suspicions in Ibadan and Kaduna led to the deaths of Major S. A. Adegoke (who was accused of running a checkpoint but was actually killed on suspicion of cooperating with the mutineers) and 2/Lt. James Odu respectively, several days after the Nzeogwu-Ifeajuna January mutiny had already been put down. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Ibadan, northern troops drove Igbo officers out of the barracks and refused to cooperate with Major Nzefili, a midwesterner from Ukwuani and the 2ic to late Lt. Col Largema, for no other reason than he was ‘Igbo speaking’. Nzefili had absolutely nothing to do with the January coup and, paradoxically, first heard of it via early morning phone calls to the barracks from the American and British embassies in Lagos looking for information. Nevertheless, four weeks later, he had to be replaced by Lt. Col Joe Akahan, a Tiv officer from the North, just to placate the soldiers. In exchange, Nzefili was made the General Manager of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, where he had previously worked in the days prior to joining the Army.

In Kaduna, when Odu was killed by soldiers, several northern officers actually ran away from the barracks, fearful for their lives. In the Federal Guards Company in Lagos, northern rank and file fuming over the role of their commander, Major Donatus Okafor,

in the coup, refused to accept Major Ochei as their new commanding officer unless Captain Joseph Nanven Garba was redeployed from Brigade HQ and appointed his second in command. While all this was going on, about 32 officers and 100 other ranks were initially detained at KiriKiri prison on suspicion of complicity in the coup. Captain Baba Usman, General Staff Officer (II) Intelligence, was appointed military liaison to the Police and was responsible for transporting them daily to Force Headquarters Moloney where most were interrogated by a Police team on their part in the coup. This team included Isa Adejo, MD Yusuf, and Mr. Trout, an expatriate who was then Head of Special Branch. When the interrogations were completed in March the detainees were distributed away from each other to other prisons, all of which were in the South, but predominantly in the East - which proved to be another source of suspicion. The report was then submitted to the government and a panel nominated to court-martial the detainees, chaired by Lt. Col Conrad Nwawo, the midwestern Igbo speaking officer and personal friend of Nzeogwu who had negotiated Nzeogwu's surrender in January. However, even this panel found that every time it wanted to sit, the date was postponed by directives from Supreme Headquarters, a process that repeated itself again and again until overtaken by events in July.

On Friday January 21, acting on a tip off, the decomposing corpse of the slain Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and others were discovered by Police at Mile 27 on the Lagos-Abeokuta road. The only hint that gave away the identity of the late Prime Minister's body was the 'frog and bridle pattern' of the white gown he had worn when arrested by Major Ifeajuna. The next day, coinciding with the moslem festival of *Id-el-fitr*, the Prime Minister's death was officially announced and he was buried in Bauchi. However, the Ironsi government decided not to publicly announce the deaths of others who had been killed in the coup, including all the top military officers, leaving room for rumors and innuendos. Indeed their deaths were not officially publicly announced until Ironsi was overthrown.

The shape of Ironsi's advisory team became clear as time went on. Chief among them was Francis Nwokedi, former permanent secretary in the ministry of external affairs, who had become close to him during his days in the Congo. Others were Pius Okigbo (economic

adviser) and Lt. Col Patrick Anwunah who was later Chairman of the National Orientation Committee. However, most of General Ironsi's advisers were faceless civilians. The most common complaint was that, although highly qualified and distinguished, they were either all Igbos or Igbo speaking. I have no way of verifying or refuting this allegation. Knowing how other governments in Nigeria have behaved (and continue to behave), it is hard to know what to make of these observations, but they were recorded by observers across ethnic and regional boundaries.

On February 12, Ironsi took his most sensitive decision to date when he made Nwokedi the *sole* commissioner for the establishment of an administrative machinery for a unified Nigeria - even though he already appointed a separate Constitutional Review Panel under Rotimi Williams which had not submitted a report. Four days later he promulgated the *Suppression of Disorder Decree* making allowance for military tribunals and martial law. About this time too, he abolished the compulsory Hausa language test for entry into the northern civil service - a decision which appealed not just to non-Hausa speaking northerners but also to southerners eyeing northern public service careers as well. Ironsi also authorized a counter-insurgency campaign against Isaac Boro's "Peoples Republic of the Niger Delta". The internal security operation in the Kaiama area of present day Bayelsa state that captured Boro was led by Major John Obienu of the Recce regiment supported by infantry elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion in Enugu, prominent among whom was then Lt. YY Kure. Boro, (along with Samuel Owonaru, Nottingham Dick and Benneth Mendi) was eventually convicted of treason and sentenced to death only to be released by the subsequent Gowon regime and die fighting during the civil war.

The fissures in the polity were becoming increasingly glaring. For example, on the one hand, Peter Enahoro (Peter Pan) criticized Ironsi's indecisiveness with national issues. On the other, the murder of northerners in January and lack of prosecution of those responsible was the focus of increasingly strident write-ups in *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo*, a Hausa newspaper. In the background, increasing food prices as a result of the delayed effect of 1965 crises in the west on planting was beginning to affect the prices of food stuffs everywhere.

Anyway, on February 21<sup>st</sup>, General Ironsi announced a bold reform policy. A few days later on the 25<sup>th</sup> the former President, Nnamdi Azikiwe, quietly returned to the country, only to become the focus of controversy when subsequently dismissed by Lt. Col Ojukwu as Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

On March 7, sensing some heat, former leading politicians in the Western and Eastern regions were detained, but those of the northern region were left alone because of political sensitivities resulting from the coup. Indeed, Ironsi made an effort - ultimately insufficient - to walk on eggs with the North. The way his advisers saw it, he had appointed and promoted the son of the Emir of Katsina as the new military Governor, released NPC ministers who were detained by Nzeogwu in Kaduna, reappointed Sule Katagum to the Public Service Commission and placed Malam Howeydi in charge of the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria. In May, among other promotions, he promoted three substantive northern Captains (Ibrahim Haruna of Ordnance, Murtala Muhammed of Signals and Mohammed Shuwa of Infantry) who were then acting Majors to the ranks of temporary Lt. Cols. But he fell short on more culturally sensitive matters. For example, the military governor of the northern region, then Major Hassan Katsina, was discouraged by the Ironsi government from attending the funeral of the late Prime Minister Balewa in Bauchi. Proper funerals were not allowed for the other victims of the January coup.

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, military governors were asked to join the federal executive council, thus enlarging its membership. On April 14, native authority councils and local government entities in the North were dissolved. By then the concept of unification was garnering controversial attention. Mustafa Danbatta and Suleiman Takuma wrote strong public letters against unification in April 7 and 19 respectively. Takuma was arrested, in part because he raised the sensitive issue of trying the January plotters.

On 12 May, proposed Decrees 33 and 34 were discussed by the SMC. Decree No. 33 was a list of 81 political societies and 26 tribal and cultural associations that were to be dissolved. Decree No. 34 divided Nigeria into 35 provinces and made all civil servants part of a unified civil service. It is said that there was opposition and that the final version was watered down. Even then, although Ironsi did not legally require approval of the SMC

for decisions, there continues to be doubt about whether Ironsi fully appreciated the depths of opposition which Decree 34 would create in the North. How vigorously did Katsina, Kam Salem, and Gowon, for example, forewarn him of consequences? Had he by then become hostage to a kitchen cabinet outside government?

The answer may have been provided by two sources. According to Brigadier Ogbemudia (rtd) who was then Brigade Major at the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, during a visit to Kaduna, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Commander Lt. Col Bassey tried to advise General Ironsi to back off from the controversial decree, but a civilian adviser who came along with the General retorted saying: "Colonel, the General understands Nigerians more than you here. You will find that the people will soon see him as the much sought redeemer of our dreams. Do not worry. Everything is under control." It was claimed that national surveys had been done to show that the decree was welcome all over the country. More recently General Gowon has said the matter was still being discussed in the SMC when the government suddenly promulgated the decree. That said, Eastern region Governor Lt. Col. Ojukwu did not help matters for the General when, the next day after promulgation on May 24, he publicly announced in Enugu that on the basis of seniority, Igbo civil servants would be transferred to other regions and Lagos. Needless to say, he unintentionally sent shivers through the northern civil service because that region was not only educationally disadvantaged but traditionally paid the lowest salaries in the federation, automatically relegating northerners to the bottom of any unified civil service.

Caught between radical (pro January 15) and conservative (anti January 15) polarities, Ironsi could be said to have promulgated the 24<sup>th</sup> May decrees to satisfy the radical intelligentsia in the southern press while projecting vision, authority and control. But funny enough the leading spokesman for the January coup, Major Nzeogwu, was later quoted during his last interview in April 1967 (with Ejindu) as saying the Unification decree was "unnecessary, even silly". It is also on record that a group of lecturers at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka opposed unification. So it would seem Ironsi was responding to other impulses.

According to Norman Miners, the unitary concept advanced by Ironsi's advisers was more likely motivated by ideological, personal and economic agendas. In the book "The Nigerian Army 1956-66", he expresses the opinion that the theoretical foundations date back to the 1951 party congress of the NCNC. Indeed, the concept of federalism which we now all sing about, was regarded by columnists in the West African Pilot in the fifties as a colonial "divide and rule" contraption cooked up by Britain as a concession to the North after the April 1953 riots in Kano. The second plank upon which unification was built was the cost argument. Unification was economically cheaper than multiple layers of administration in the country - a position that was argued by Dr. Sam Aluko, a notable economist. The third plank was the personal motive factor. Unification offered southerners (including Igbos) vast new employment opportunities in the "northern frontier". The flip side of this was the provocation of morbid fear of domination in the North, fear which united hitherto antagonistic northern political constituencies.

## **PROVOCATIONS**

While all of this was going on, complaints about "Igbo provocations", were increasing. Northerners filed reports about parties being called by their Igbo colleagues to celebrate what they called the "January Victory". Offensive photographs showing Major Nzeogwu standing on the late Sardauna of Sokoto were said to be distributed in the open including market places. Some Igbos were even alleged to have worn stickers to that effect and were eager, in conversations with northerners, to point to Nzeogwu saying '*Shi ne maganin ku*', meaning "he is the one who can knock sense into you". Gramophone records with machine gun sounds were released, to remind Northerners, it is said, of the bullets that felled their leaders in January. Celestine Ukwu, a popular Igbo musician allegedly released a piece titled "*Ewu Ne Ba Akwa*" meaning "*Goats are crying*" in Igbo (although there is an account that claims that this song originated from a non-Igbo artiste from Rivers). Derogatory remarks about Northerners were reportedly commonplace, even in Army Barracks. To compound matters, resentment began building against Igbo traders who had allegedly raised the prices of their foodstuffs to match the increases in the West. All of these factors were shrewdly exploited by an unlikely coalition of disenfranchised politicians, petty contractors, marketing board and northern development

corp debtors, civil servants and university students of northern origin fearful of future career prospects in the public service. As former President Shehu Shagari put it in his biography "Beckoned to Serve", ...' >From the northern viewpoint, the implications of all this in terms of distribution of power, the allocation of public resources and amenities, the prospect of Igbo and southern domination, and the threat to mainstream northern ways of life were unmistakable.' Opposition to unification in particular was spearheaded by northern students and civil servants.

### **THE MAY RIOTS**

Following General Ironsi's broadcast on Tuesday evening May 24, making Nigeria a Unitary State, initially peaceful demonstrations by civil servants and students began on Friday May 27. On Saturday May 28 copies of the June edition of Drum magazine arrived in the North, containing two provocative articles; "*Why Nigeria Exploded*" by Nelson Ottah which allegedly derided northern leaders, and "*Sir Ahmadu rose in his shrouds and spoke from the dead*" by Coz Idapo, which allegedly featured a cartoon in which the revered late Premier was asking for forgiveness from Idapo. Some authors have blamed these articles for the subsequent outbreak of wanton violence and barbarity on Sunday May 29 continuing through to June 4-5 which led to at least 600 Igbo deaths (according to the London Telegraph), particularly in northern provinces like Kano, Bauchi, Sokoto, Katsina, and Zaria. Indeed the Hausa phrase "A raba" meaning "Let us separate" may first have been used by Bauchi rioters in May. Interestingly, there were no May riots in Borno, Ilorin and Makurdi. The riots were particularly bad in Gusau. But in Sokoto township the combination of intervention by the Sultan, the deployment of an Igbo dominated mobile Police Unit and the decision by Igbo traders there not to fight back led to quick stabilization of the situation.

One development during the May riots which exposed the military vulnerability of the Ironsi government was the fear to deploy troops for internal security duties. Back in March, increasingly concerned about restive northern troops, General Ironsi had issued an order that soldiers were not to be issued ammunition even for target practice. During the May riots in the north, because of the dominance of northerners in the rank and file of

infantry units it was feared that soldiers would not take orders to shoot against fellow northerners in defence of Igbos.

The Ironsi regime, shaken by the riots and unnerved by its lack of confidence in the state machineries of coercion, reacted to the riots by blaming foreigners. It deported Major Boyle (rtd) along with British correspondents Schwarz and Loshak, and took the conciliatory position that the May decrees were only transitional measures pending the return of civil rule. The government promised massive assistance to educationally backward areas of the Country and sent campaign vans to explain itself in vernacular all over the country. Unfortunately, one of the deported British journalists (Walter Schwarz) went back to Britain and wrote an article in the Guardian on June 25, titled: "General Ironsi's trust in his friends leads Nigeria back to tribal strife".

On June 1<sup>st</sup>, General Ironsi issued orders that anyone displaying provocative pictures or singing offensive songs should be arrested for incitement and would face 3 months imprisonment or 50 pounds fine or both (Decree 40). Realizing the folly of hitherto ignoring traditional lines of communication, he sought to enlist the support of the Emirs to calm down the people. During a June 1 conference of Northern Emirs and Chiefs with Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina, the regime even went as far as saying that the May decrees did not affect the territorial divisions of the country, and promise a constituent assembly and referendum on any new constitution.

On June 8, the regime restated its constitutional position. After this, the Sultan of Sokoto broadcast an appeal for calm on June 17 and asked those who had left the North in fear to return. On June 24, the government announced that it would set up military courts to try nepotism and corruption. Simultaneously, nine (9) northerners were detained (including the editor of *gaskiya ta fi kwabo*), and an Army company was deployed to Sokoto as a permanent garrison allegedly under an Igbo Major. This otherwise routine internal security move which resulted from intelligence reports following the May riots caused apprehension locally since no such military unit had been deployed there for many years going all the way back to the days of the British and the Satiru rebellion. The editor and cartoonist of the "Pilot" in the Eastern region were also detained for a cartoon which

showed the Ironsi government as a large Cock (which used to be the NCNC symbol) crowing 'One Country, One Nationality'. Subsequently, on June 26, the Brett tribunal was appointed to inquire into the May disturbances - to the consternation of the North.

Still, the issue of what to do with the January boys remained a sore point and mutual suspicion remained. On July 13, Ironsi announced military prefects at local

level, and proposed rotation of military governors. Northerners interpreted this as meaning that Ojukwu, already being viewed with suspicion for his public pronouncements about unification, was to be posted to Kaduna. There is, however, no evidence that this is what was intended.

In the meantime, other than one exploratory meeting with Lt. Col Hassan Katsina, old NPC politicians like former Defence Minister Alhaji Inua Wada (who was also an uncle to Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed) and Aliyu Makaman Bida may have had unhindered access to unaudited NPC funds. Wada is alleged by some to have wooed disaffected NEPU and UMBC leaders like Aminu Kano and Joseph Tarka to share a common northern political vision threatened by the new order. However, Military and Police intelligence completely missed the boat when, based on nothing more than his personal relationship with the late Prime Minister and Premier, Alhaji Shehu Shagari was invited to Lagos in late July for 3 days of questioning about disposition of certain NPC funds during the first republic. The intelligence community was barking up the wrong alley - although it is also true that the houses of Inua Wada, Daggash and others were searched.

This was not to be the only alleged failure of intelligence in establishing the civilian linkages to and sponsorship of the events of May and subsequent coup in July. Ojukwu claims that he gave a tape of a conversation made in Kano about the planned July 29 coup to Ironsi who then passed it on to acting Police IG Kam Salem (a northerner), who by implication, buried it. Madiebo cites a flurry of other intelligence failures in the North including an alleged leak from an informant called Alhaji Suya who was supposedly a cousin of the late Sardauna.

## ***TENSIONS WITHIN THE MILITARY***

Quite apart from the shenanigan that led to General Ironsi's assumption of power (also known as "civilian hand over"), the fundamental crisis of confidence within the military was borne out of the failure to try the January plotters according to the manual of military law. General Ironsi became hostage not only to radical opinion in the southern Press that hailed them as heroes but also to the curious five point agreement he had negotiated with Nzeogwu in Kaduna back on January 17. Meanwhile tension and suspicion was rising in officers messes and barracks. Placatory visits were made to Barracks by Lt. Col. Gowon to appeal to northern troops to forgive and forget. Based on discussions and assurances by Ironsi, other northern officers like Major Danjuma also tried to calm down the troops and assure that the January mutineers would be tried in due course since the C-in-C had described them as rebels. On his part, every time he was asked, General Ironsi would respond by saying "Justice will be done". On one occasion he offered a pay raise to troops.

In the years since the end of the Ironsi regime it has been alleged by commentators and propagandists that Ironsi personally tasked Gowon to investigate the January coup. Gowon tacitly denies this. The coup had already been investigated by the Police. That report, according to then Captain (now Brigadier) Baba Usman (rtd), Ironsi's liaison with the Police, was ready in March 1966. In fact, according to Professor Elaigwu, a panel was set up under Col. Nwawo to follow up the Police report with formal charges but it never sat. Meanwhile, as is eloquently described in the book "Why we Struck" by Major Ademoyega, each time the matter was brought up for discussion at the SMC, Colonel Fajuyi, Governor of the West, was opposed to any trial. (Funny enough, as will be seen later, when trying to contain the revolt in Lagos on July 29, Brigadier Ogundipe tried to sell a dummy by telling Captain JN Garba that the report on the January boys had only just reached him that morning)!

Meanwhile rumors were swirling. It was alleged that the mutineers were being treated specially in prison, illegally receiving full pay along with a prison allowance, some getting promoted, and granted access to their families. Some of these rumors can now be

confirmed to have been false. The controversy about their pay can easily be settled by referring to Sections 149 and 150 of the Military Forces Ordinance No 26 of 1960. Part VII on Pay Forfeitures and Deductions states that pay should continue before the verdict. At the time of the Ironsi regime that law was in force. However, what was not allowed under the law was an arbitrary delay in proceeding with trial, any form of prison allowance or artificial separation from other political prisoners.

Regarding the widespread reports about seven of the plotters being promoted in Jail, that too is untrue. Only one officer among those arrested, 2/Lt Ojukwu, no relation of the Colonel, was promoted Lt - and it may have been an error. As regards a 'Major Okafor' being promoted, Major DC Okafor/N74 was the one promoted, not Major DO Okafor/N73. Major DO Okafor was the January plotter.

Another source of suspicion in the Army was the promotion exercise carried out in May. There were three complaints about it. First that it should not have happened at all because there was a moratorium on promotions in force at the time. Second that it "favored" Igbo officers and consolidated their control of the military. Third, that northerners were also "favored" along with Igbos while Yoruba officers were "marginalized". The sources of each of these lines of thinking is easy to guess. Eleven (11) Majors were promoted substantive Lt. Cols while fourteen (14) Majors were made temporary Lt. Cols. Of these, 19 were Igbo or Igbo speaking easterners and midwesterners, 5 northerners (Katsina, Akahan, Shuwa, Muhammed, Haruna) and one Yoruba (Olutoye). On the surface, it looked a crude attempt to favor Igbo or Igbo speaking officers. But in reality no Igbo or Igbo speaking officer was promoted who was not due for promotion, considering that between 1955 and 1961 the vast majority of officer recruits were of Igbo or Igbo speaking origin. There was no quota system for officers at that time and those who joined then had risen to middle level ranks by 1966. However, the appearance of a sudden lopsided "pro-Igbo" promotion exercise carried out by an allegedly "Igbo regime" when there was a moratorium in force and tension in the barracks was a public relations disaster, particularly since there were quite a few Yoruba officers (Obasanjo, Sotomi, Adekunle, Ayo-Ariyo and Rotimi) who were clearly bypassed. There is a body of opinion that, unknown to the public, three Igbo Majors

(Obienu, Aniebo and Chude-Sokei) were also bypassed, but followed soon after by the Unification decree, the imagery of the promotion exercise removed all doubts about prevailing conspiracy theories.

Northern civilian propagandists used the tools of psychological warfare and worked tirelessly to incite the northern military. In the Army's official history, General Gowon said "The northern politicians infiltrated the Northern soldiers and officers, trying to convince them that there was a need for them to retaliate." General Babangida put it this way: "There was a very calculated and subtle but very efficient and effective indoctrination of the Northern officers by civilians. They kept hammering on it that our leaders had been killed and we were doing nothing; that we were cowards." General Shuwa (rtd) described documents passed around Kaduna purporting to show plans for senior Igbo officers to meet at Hamdala Hotel to plan the liquidation of remaining northern officers after January. But Babangida also said: "...there was a threat that the Igbos wanted to take revenge. Now sitting down and looking at it, quite honestly in retrospect, I think we used that so as to gain support, to get people committed so that you didn't get caught. It was preemptive." Indeed the rumors were so detailed that operational code names using animals were even ascribed to parts of the alleged grand Igbo plot to continue Operation Damisa (Leopard) which had already taken place on Jan 15. These were Operation Kura (Hyena) to eliminate certain chiefs, Operation Zaki (Lion) to eliminate remaining chiefs and finally Operation Giwa (Elephant) to carve the country up into individual districts administered by Igbos. This kind of uncorroborated preposterous disinformation is what informed the nervousness with which certain traditional rulers approached the conference of traditional rulers in Ibadan on July 28.

However outlandish they were, civilian agents provocateur were unwittingly aided by inept handling of public relations by the Ironsi regime and real provocations by some Igbo civilians and soldiers. In his biography titled "Power with Civility" by Oleka and Ofondu (Neskon 1998), Rear Admiral Ndubuisi Kanu, an Igbo easterner who later fought in the Biafran Navy, states: "That Igbos, including soldiers in the barracks, teased their Northern counterparts about what they regarded as swapping of fortune, served to fray tempers. It was not long before Northerners vented their spleen on their Igbo guests. An

orgy of killing of Igbos throughout all nooks and crannies of the Northern Region kicked off.”In his book, “Revolution in Nigeria, Another View” late General Garba describes how his soldiers in the Federal Guard broke down in tears in Jankara market in Lagos when they heard the album “Machine Gun” .General Danjuma (rtd) says even the wives of Igbo soldiers were taunting the wives of Northern soldiers.

All of this was amplified not only by the truly very violent nature of the January take over, but by a whispering campaign of highly provocative but unproven stories about the grotesque manner in which some of the northern politicians and soldiers had been killed in January. There are northern officers I have spoken to who still say Prime Minister Balewa had his phallus cut off and placed in his mouth by Majors Ifeajuna and Okafor. Another story had it that a kola nut was placed in his mouth after being shot to taunt the northern custom of eating kola nuts - a curious story considering that all Nigerian tribes, especially the Igbo, value kolanuts in their custom. Yet another tale had it that he was asked to turn around and pray and that while he was praying he was shot from behind creating a large hole. All of this was embellished by the story that he cursed all Igbos before he died. On careful thought, such a large hole could have been an exit wound, meaning he was more likely shot from the front - although an entry wound from a concentrated burst of SMG fire can be big. But if any given northern NCO had *believed* that he was so mistreated, one can see how Major Okafor was singled out for extreme treatment.

Same goes for Lt. Col Largema, Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, who was shot outside his room at Ikoyi Hotel. As late as the year 2000, former Army Chief Lt. Gen Danjuma (rtd) was still of the opinion expressed in the Army’s official history - which he has probably held over the years - that Largema’s corpse was thrown out of the 11<sup>th</sup> floor window at Ikoyi Hotel by Ifeajuna to the ground. However, I visited Room 115 in the old wing of Ikoyi Hotel myself to physically appreciate the setting in which that fine officer was killed. The room, right next to a stairwell, is on the first floor. The building has no 11<sup>th</sup> floor. His corpse was more likely dragged one floor down the steps to the waiting Mercedes car in the parking lot. It is bad enough and inexcusable that he was murdered in cold blood but if his corpse had really been thrown out the window from the 11<sup>th</sup> floor,

Ifeajuna is lucky Ojukwu got to him before northern troops from Largema's 4<sup>th</sup> battalion did.

Likewise, Nzeogwu's destruction of the Premier's lodge using an anti-tank weapon and killing of his wife offended the sensibilities of many officers and gentlemen including some Igbo speaking officers I have spoken to who shared Nzeogwu's Sandhurst background. For example, in a telephone conversation, Lt. Col. Alphonsus Keshi (rtd) then Brigade Major of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, described late Major Nzeogwu to me as a "murderer". Onwatuogwu on the other hand, not only shot Brigadier Ademulegun but killed his pregnant wife - an abomination in African tradition. For some weeks after the coup one could get a guided tour of Ademulegun's blood spattered bedroom in Kaduna with the right connections at 1 Brigade HQ. Those who went for the tour did not emerge from it with any feelings that mercy should be shown if the perpetrator was ever caught. These were the sorts of emotions that friends and family and professional colleagues of the slain officers and politicians were dealing with in the months leading to July. For the military casualties in particular, the typical question was, "If your quarrel was with politicians why did you kill our loved relations, colleagues and senior officers in the military?"

In an interview back in the early eighties with Radio Kaduna, then Brigadier (later Major General) Mamman Vatsa, now deceased, is quoted by Elaigwu as saying:

"The July coup was motivated by the actions in January 1966 whereby an illegal action was legitimized. If you do that, you expect a counter reaction. July 29, 1966 was a reaction to an inaction against an illegal action.... Right from the beginning, the GOC, Nigerian Army regarded these people as 'rebels'. If that was accepted, the immediate thing was to take the necessary action to get them disciplined legally. If this was not done, then the GOC was condoning indiscipline or treason. Rather than punish men from his army who were on mutiny, he was now asking the civilian government to hand over to him before he could maintain

discipline in an organization of which he was in charge....In the first instance, he shouldn't even have taken over the power.....”

In the final analysis, though, certain events conspired to push northern troops over the edge. In July, many northern recruits were turned away from the Army depot in Zaria and preference allegedly given to southerners. For example, the entire batch from

Sokoto province was rejected. It is entirely possible that such rejections were based on principle but in the prevailing environment of suspicion the implications were alarming. Secondly, General Ironsi told the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion a week before the mutiny that they would rotate with 1st battalion in Enugu, which happened to be Governor Fajuyi's former unit which he had commanded for three years. Unfortunately for Ironsi the announcement not only caused anxieties usually associated with change but played right into an unfounded rumor that had been making the rounds that a train carrying the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion was to be derailed by Igbo sappers between Makurdi and Otukpo. All of this for a battalion that lost three former commanding officers in January (Maimalari, Kur Mohammed and Largema) and was a thoroughly politicised pro-Akintola outfit, moulded in the furnace of Ibadan politics. When, therefore, soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion were asked to provide guard duty for Ironsi and Fajuyi at the Government House Ibadan on July 28, 1966 it was like asking the Fox to guard the Hen House. On July 29, 1966, mutinous soldiers, taking a cue from their colleagues elsewhere surrounded the premises, arrested the General and his host and eventually kidnapped them both, taking them to mile 8 on Iwo road where they were shot and buried.

By the time the July 1966 mutiny had run its course, no less than 213 predominantly Igbo officers and other ranks had been killed. An untold number of civilians also lost their lives.

### ***PLANNING TO OVERTHROW GENERAL IRONSI***

There is no doubt that fairly soon after January 15, the motive for a northern counter-coup also known as “return match” was established. What remained were the means and the opportunity. In Kaduna, the Platoon Commanders Course at the NMTC provided an

opportunity for young northern subalterns to come together to share ideas and vent frustration. These officers included Lts. Shelleng, Hannaniya, Muhammadu Jega, Sani Abacha, Sali, Dambo and others. They held secret meetings and even wrote a letter of protest to the Chief of Staff (Army)- Lt. Col. Gowon - openly stating that if senior northern officers did not take action within a certain time frame, they would, and that senior northern officers would have themselves to blame for the catastrophe. Indeed, the Ironsi government was sufficiently alarmed that on at least two occasions the course was suspended. For a brief period, thereafter, things were relatively quiet, but not for long. Matters began to stir in Lagos.

Although it is said that practically all northern officers serving in Lagos, Abeokuta, Ikeja and Ibadan eventually became involved, three officers formed the innermost circle of the plot to overthrow Major General Aguiyi Ironsi. They were T/Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed (Inspector of Signals), T/Major TY Danjuma (General Staff Officer II, SHQ) and Captain Martin Adamu (2nd Battalion, Ikeja). The coup leader was T/Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed.

According to late Major General Garba (rtd), others involved in planning in the South include Captain JN Garba, Lt. William Walbe and Lt. Paul Tarfa (Federal Guards), Lts. Muhammadu Buhari and John Longboem (2nd battalion), Lts. Pam Nwatkon (Abeokuta garrison, Recce), Lts Jerry Useni, Ibrahim Bako and Garba Dada (4th battalion, Ibadan), and Lt. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (Adjutant, 1st battalion, Enugu). Air force conspirators included Majors Musa Usman and Shittu Alao. However, other officers were clearly involved because Muhammed compartmentalized the planning and also encouraged officers to recruit additional local conspirators and storm troopers. Examples include Lts. Nuhu Nathan and Malami Nassarawa at Ikeja, IS Umar in Abeokuta, Abdullai Shelleng, Haladu, Magoro, Obeya and Onoja in Ibadan and Captains Jalo and Muhammadu Jega in Enugu, among others.

Active planning for the coup began after the promulgation of the Unification decree. In fact there was a brief scare in Kaduna when false rumors of Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina's arrest in Lagos by Ironsi after the May riots rent the air. Katsina had gone to Lagos for a meeting at which fruitless efforts were made to get the decree repealed. When he eventually returned to Kaduna he found the airport surrounded by irate northern soldiers.

Captain Garba was recruited in Lagos by being told that northerners were planning a coup to "pre-empt" an expected one by Igbo officers. This so called expected Igbo coup was also known as "Plan 15" - part 2 of the so called final solution to the northern problem perhaps (as the propaganda went) made all the more urgent by the killings of Igbos in the North during the May riots. Lagos conspirators, who were being closely watched, met in various locations, including their private cars, Muhammed's house, Garba's house, and during games at Abalti barracks.

At Ibadan, Lt. Col. Muhammed would often drive into town from Lagos, pick up Ibrahim Bako and Abdullai Shelleng at a pre-arranged location and drive around without stopping while they discussed.

The Kaduna group was not as formally organized as the Lagos-Ikeja-Abeokuta-Ibadan axis at this stage although it later consolidated and was in the habit of having meetings at Lugard Hall with northern civilians. However, Capt. Ahmadu Yakubu was the liaison who would drive from Lagos to Kaduna with messages from Lt. Col. Muhammed for Lts ADS Wya, Ibrahim Babangida, Garba Duba, BS Dimka, Dambo, Sani Abacha, Hannaniya, Salihi and others. Messages were also passed to the 5th battalion in Kano under Lt. Col. Shuwa primarily for reasons of coordination. But Lagos was to be the fulcrum.

In order to keep tabs on what was going on inside the government, Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed maintained contact with northern civil servants in Lagos (like Muktar Tahir), while Captain Baba Usman of military intelligence provided insights into what the Army knew and did not know. Nevertheless, the Ironsi government had other mechanisms of information gathering outside official channels. For example, at least one officer, Lt. Jasper, then the intelligence officer at the 4th battalion in Ibadan, was suspected of passing information directly to Supreme HQ and perhaps even to Ironsi himself, bypassing the Army. All sorts of self appointed civilian informants were also known to mill in and out of Army formations passing rumors to Igbo commanders who would then find ways to get it to Ironsi. Major Danjuma, at that time a staff officer, was attached to General Ironsi as a military scribe, dutifully taking notes at his public hearings.

At the outset of planning for the coup, late General Garba says in his book "'Revolution in Nigeria', Another View', that "We intended explicitly to kill no one. The aims were, firstly, to get Decree No. 34 abrogated; secondly, to bring the coup makers of January 15 to trial; thirdly, to accord due honour to the military and political leaders - especially the Prime Minister - who had been killed."

However, as we now know, the rebellion was anything but bloodless as other agendas took center stage when all hell broke loose. Garba insists that there was no specific plan to annihilate all Igbo officers and soldiers - although it appeared so to neutral observers from the way many northern NCOs (aided by some officers and civilians) were carrying on with reckless abandon and total disregard for life and property. Garba himself admits that they went "berserk". The late General says, though, that had there been such a formal plan, specific Igbo officers would have been targeted and "no one would have escaped".

In my view, it is hard to know what to make of this comment, seeing as it means little considering the scale of killings. Nevertheless, thankfully to God, although many died, most Eastern officers, the vast majority being completely innocent of any connection either to the January 15 coup or to the Ironsi government, survived the July 29 rebellion. Unfortunately, thousands of innocent civilians were murdered in orgies of deliberate and mindless bloodshed that began in May and continued until September. There can be no justification for what transpired, although the circumstances have been explained and the sensitivity of the issues involved better understood with the passage of time. Interestingly, the vast majority of those soldiers detained for the January coup escaped primarily because they had been kept in jails located in the eastern region.

As planning developed, loose as it was, it was influenced (as are all coups) by issues of timing and opportunity. It is said that at least four plans were discussed. The first was to seize State House and place the Head of State under arrest. However, this would have entailed much bloodshed because of the security set up inside the State House grounds, bristling with weapons. In any case the General was also fond of leaving without warning to sleep on a Boat along the Marina which, on occasion, would set for sea. A decision was, therefore, made to stage the coup when he was outside Lagos to minimize bloodshed. The second was when initial plans were being considered for the transfer of

the 1st battalion at Enugu to Ibadan in exchange with the 4th battalion. Lt. Shehu Yar'Adua was to be the coordinator of that plan. He would create some kind of confusion as a signal for the coup. This too was put off, likely because the decision to exchange both battalions also kept being put off and was not formally announced until late July. In any case, rumors (again, without foundation) soon had it that the regime may have been aware of a "battalion switch plot" and that the 4th battalion would be derailed by Igbo sappers.

On July 14, however, the government announced plans for General Ironsi to undertake a Nationwide tour. The tour would take him first through Abeokuta, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Jos, and Benin. He would return to Ibadan from Benin for a meeting of traditional rulers on July 28, spend the night, return to Lagos on July 29 and then resume his tour in early August to the East. The third plan, therefore, was to abduct General Ironsi during a visit to the North on July 19th. It too was put off, some say in deference to northern traditional leaders, while others say it was for reasons of military coordination. For one, Ironsi hardly slept outside Lagos thus reducing the window of opportunity to get him, and secondly, then Captain Garba, who was practically in command of the Federal Guards company in Lagos was scheduled to be in Fernando Po for a basketball game and would not be on the ground to help seize the capital.

The fourth plan, therefore, was to take place on July 28/29 during Ironsi's visit to Ibadan for the National conference of traditional rulers when he would be arrested by troops from the 4th battalion. His decision to spend the night there, guarded by the 4th battalion, provided a perfect opportunity. The code word for the coup was "Aure", a Hausa word for "marriage". Conspirators in southern Nigeria made coded reference to it by talking about "Paiko's wedding", Paiko being the nickname for (and hometown in Niger Province of) one of the northern subalterns at the 4th battalion who was to be the spearhead. But even this plan was put off by Lt. Col. Muhammed when it became apparent to him and Captain Martin Adamu that it had leaked, likely through Lt. Jasper. This is why Major Danjuma did not go to Ibadan with his combat dress.

A rough plan for early August when Ironsi would be in the East was thus discussed but not finalized. Nevertheless, Captain Baba Usman (GSO II, Int) had left for Enugu to

coordinate with Lt. Yar-Adua when news of what happened in Abeokuta on July 28 came through, taking him by surprise. He is not the only one who was taken by surprise. Difficulty in getting the message of cancellation across to all parts of the country and all conspirators without using regular Army signals (then dominated by southerners) led to some complications elsewhere, including Kaduna, where Lt. BS Dimka was arrested on July 27/28 by Major Ogbemudia for attempting to break into the armoury, albeit drunk. As will be apparent later, a combination of panic, unplanned coincidences and accidents eventually triggered off the July 29 rebellion when northern NCOs at Abeokuta took matters into their hands.

### ***ABEOKUTA GARRISON, THURSDAY, JULY 28, 1966***

Shortly before 2300 hours on July 28, 1966, Lt. Col. Gabriel Okonweze, Commander of the Abeokuta Garrison was tipped off by Lt. Col. Patrick Anwunah, General Staff Officer (1) for Intelligence at Army HQ in Lagos, that the long anticipated Northern counter-coup was scheduled to begin that night. What Anwunah did not know for sure was that the coup had in fact, once again, been put off by its chief planners on account of a leak.

Earlier that evening Anwunah had confronted Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed in Yaba, Lagos with information that he was behind a planned counter-coup, leading to a mean-spirited (some say violent) exchange between them. Anwunah initially thought this confrontation would in fact deter the plot from going forward, and planned to do nothing. But having been prompted by Lt. Col. Alexander Madiebo to take some precautionary steps, and perhaps being in receipt of additional information, he took it upon himself to alert some unit commanders, one of whom was Okonweze. (An alternative account says Okonweze was also alerted by Njoku)

Lt. Col. Okonweze, therefore, called a meeting in the mess of all available officers (Igbo and non-Igbo) at the Abeokuta Garrison where he made the following announcement:

"Gentlemen, I have just been informed that there is going to be a coup tonight. Anyone of you who knows anything about the coup should please tell us. You may know the beginning but you never know the end. I am not ambitious. My only ambition is to become a full Colonel. If you know

anything, please let me know; I am not going to report anyone. What we are going to do is to avoid what happened in January where officers were taken unawares. We are going to wake up all soldiers, ask them to go to the armoury to get issued with arms and ammunition."

Officers present included Okonweze himself, Major John Obienu (Recce Commander), Lt. Gabriel Idoko, Lt. DS Abubakar ("Datti Abubakar", Recce), Lt. IS Umar, and Lt. AB Mamman (Arty). Lt. E.B. Orok (Recce) later came in his Volkswagen. Captains M. Remawa (Recce 2ic) and Domkat Bali (Artillery Battery Commander) were at the Abeokuta club. Captain Ogbonna (Infantry company commander) was also in town.

Thereafter, an Igbo NCO went around the barracks, waking soldiers excitedly and saying "Come out, come out, there is trouble; go to the armoury and collect your armour."

This alert woke up Sergeant Sabo Kole, an NCO from the Bachama area of Adamawa State. In the charged atmosphere of prevailing rumors at that time, Kole wrongly interpreted the Igbo NCO's actions as an attempt by Okonweze to selectively wake up Igbo soldiers who would thus have an advantage in what was alleged to be an effort to finish what they did not finish in January. He, therefore, woke up another neighbor, Corporal Maisamari Maje, also Bachama, who happened to be the armourer of the unit. He told Maje to go to the armoury and ensure that only northerners would be issued weapons. Meanwhile, assisted by Corporal Inua Sara, he mobilized a small guard of northern soldiers to protect the armoury against any attempt to dislodge them while he made arrangements to disarm the quarter-guard. Having secured the armoury, Sgt. Kole issued weapons and ammo to a section of assault troops. Assisted by Maje, and including Corporal J. Shagaya, the group advanced to the Officers Mess under the direction of the duty officer, Lt. Pam Mwadkon, younger brother of the late Lt. Col James Pam who was shot in Ikoyi by Major Christian Anuforo in January.

Once in the mess they ordered all officers present to raise their hands. When Okonweze challenged them, he was summarily executed right there and then. Major John Obienu, Commander of the Recce Squadron, sitting next to Okonweze, was also shot dead. Lt. E Orok, driving in to join them, saw what was happening, shouted at the soldiers, and was himself shot dead right under the tree where he parked his car. In the chaos, some

northerners were shot too, notably Lt. Gabriel Idoko, mistaken for Igbo because he was wearing an "English dress". He was lucky to survive. Some Igbo soldiers (other ranks) in the garrison were subsequently rounded up and shot.

### ***INITIAL CONTACTS WITH IBADAN, LAGOS, ENUGU, AND KADUNA***

Not all Igbo officers in the Abeokuta garrison were killed. Ogbonna escaped and was the one who initially made urgent informal phone calls to Lagos (2nd Battalion), Ibadan (4th battalion) and much later to Enugu (to Lt. Cols Ogunewe – 1<sup>st</sup> Bn - and Ojukwu at the State House).

Almost simultaneously, Lt. Pam phoned Lt. Garba Dada (Paiko), the Adjutant of the 4th Battalion in Ibadan at Mokola Barracks saying "Look, we have done our own oh! If you people just sidon there, we have finished our own..... We have finished the Igbo officers here. We liberated our unit." He was wrong, though, because Ogbonna was alive. Lt. John Okoli also survived.

When Captains Remawa and Bali returned to the Barracks from town, they met the dead bodies of Okonweze, Obienu and Orok in or around the mess. They changed quickly into combat dress and got themselves armed.

Captain Remawa then contacted Army HQ in Lagos to notify Lt. Col. Gowon of events. Gowon ordered Remawa to collect the corpses, secure the garrison, and await further instructions. This order from Gowon to Remawa sent shivers down the spines of the junior northern officers at Abeokuta like Lt. DS Abubakar who feared that they would all be arrested for the killings in the Mess. Therefore, they decided that come what may, they would fight to finish to ensure the end of the Ironsi regime. The impulse was primarily self preservatory.

Gowon then contacted Brigadier Ogundipe, then Chief of Staff, SHQ and got orders to mobilize Army units in Lagos. Both Ogundipe and Gowon initially tried to reach Ironsi directly in Ibadan and failed. (It was when Gowon was trying to get Col. Njoku at the guest house that he spoke to Major Danjuma). Ogundipe then notified the Police hierarchy, including the Commissioner in Ibadan, whose first attempt to investigate events

at the 4th battalion was strongly rebuffed by the Battalion adjutant who told him to steer clear. "Flying Policeman" Mr. Joseph Adeola eventually got through to Government House Ibadan, sometime around 1 am (some say 0030), to notify General Ironsi of events. (Adeola replaced Timothy Omo-Bare as the Commissioner of Police in the Midwest and was one of those kidnapped by Biafran forces to Enugu in August 1967.) By this time Major Danjuma, Lt. James Onoja and elements of the 4th battalion were in process of arriving to cordon off the building.

Before he was finally arrested shortly before 8am, Ironsi had made requests for a Police helicopter from Lagos and made other efforts, as are described elsewhere in this essay, to mobilize loyal units. By the time a helicopter arrived, though, he and Colonel Fajuyi had been taken away. General Ironsi's last formal military contact was with Kaduna to mobilize the 1st Brigade. The commander, Lt. Col. Wellington "Papa" Basse was not around so he spoke to Major Samuel Ogbemudia, then the Brigade Major, telling him "All is not well." Unfortunately, the Brigade was too far away to be of immediate tactical value, even if it wanted to be.

Ogbonna's call to Lt. Col. Igbo at the 2nd battalion in Ikeja preceded Remawa's call to Army HQ. Unfortunately, it was intercepted by Lts. Nuhu Nathan and Malami Nassarawa. Nathan was the duty officer and had been contacted earlier by Murtala Muhammed about the postponement of the coup. When Ogbonna gave him the message to deliver to Igbo about events at Abeokuta, he immediately contacted Murtala Muhammed instead, who, having just gotten off the phone with the boys at Ibadan, finally realized that events were moving faster than he thought initially. Muhammed gave the go ahead to Nathan and Nassarawa to mobilize northern troops at Ikeja and launch operations to pre-empt predictable efforts by the establishment to regain control. They secured the armoury, distributed weapons selectively, and got busy rounding up Igbo soldiers. Northern NCOs and ordinary soldiers later went wild. If their officers did not explicitly give an order for an Igbo soldier to be shot they would shoot him anyway and shout "accidental discharge, sah!"

Meanwhile, Muhammed began making rounds of Army units all over Lagos to see things for himself and wake up other coupists in the Lagos area asking them to "adjust to the new situation". Two of those he woke up himself were Captain JN Garba and Lt. Paul Tarfa at the Federal Guard. As they were dressing up, the call from Gowon came in. By the time Muhammed got to Ikeja, Captain Martin Adamu, Lts. Nathan, Nassarawa, Muhammadu Buhari, Alfred Gom, Longboem and a bunch of NCOs were already in control of the battalion, having executed several Igbo soldiers and officers (including Major B Nnamani, one of the company commanders) and arrested many others by cordoning off the quartermaster section of the barracks or grabbing soldiers as they came out for morning PT. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Henry Igboba, narrowly escaped a dragnet deployed around his house by Lt. Longboem and got away.

Muhammed reportedly gave orders to stop the killing, and focus instead on securing the perimeter as well as approach roads and taking measures to ensure the eventual success of their activities. Captain Martin Adamu went to Army HQ and placed himself in the intelligence center to monitor information and disseminate disinformation. Muhammed then contacted Abeokuta garrison directly and asked Lts. DS Abubakar and Pam Nwadkon to fuel up, arm a troop each of armoured vehicles (ferrets) and head out for Lagos and Ibadan respectively, accompanied by a section of assault troops to provide support in case of any shoot out with loyal troops being mobilized by Lt. Col. Gowon, Lt. Col. Anwunah, Major Mobolaji Johnson and Brigadier Ogundipe from SHQ. Sergeant Paul Dickson, a fearsome Idoma NCO who was later to acquire a reputation as a bloodthirsty savage, was despatched to take Ikeja Airport. A typical example of a coded order (in Hausa) for the murder of an Igbo captive was: "Take him to the house of chiefs."

Later that morning, after Abubakar and Pam had left for Lagos and Ibadan, northern NCOs from the Abeokuta garrison set up check points in town and decided to pay a visit to the Abeokuta Prison where Major DO Okafor, former Federal Guards Commander, January 15 co-conspirator and alleged co-executioner of the late Prime Minister was held. He was tortured and killed in the courtyard, some say buried alive. The soldiers did not stop there. At one of the checkpoints, 2/Lt A.O. Olaniyan, oblivious of events, was stopped. As he tried to identify himself, he was summarily shot dead. The situation was clearly out of control.

## **LAGOS, JULY 29, 1966**

After being alerted, first by Lt. Col. Muhammed, then Lt. Col. Gowon, Captain Garba and Lt. Tarfa secured the Federal (then known as 'National') Guards Barracks at Obalende, better known as 'Dodan Barracks'. It is named after a town called Dodan in the Arakan peninsula in Burma where Nigerians fought back in World War 2. They rounded up all Igbo soldiers and locked them up in safety. Not a single Igbo soldier in that unit lost his life. Garba and Tarfa overcame a challenge by a northern soldier called Adamu Lamurde who emotionally threatened to kill them both if he was not allowed to avenge the death of Brigadier Maimalari by liquidating the Igbo soldiers in the unit. Indeed, this achievement was one of the very few successes of northern officers against northern NCOs seeking revenge. Garba later got a letter of commendation and appreciation from Col Hilary Njoku, his erstwhile Brigade Commander, when all the Igbo soldiers including Sergeant Vidal, Private Oligbo, Private Calistus Chukwu and others in the unit eventually arrived back safely in the east.

After Lt. Col. Gowon completed the first round of calls to Army commanders in Lagos early that morning, a decision was made to establish an operations room at the Police HQ on Moloney Street in Lagos. Brigadier B. Ogundipe, then Chief of Staff, SHQ, was joined by acting Police IG Kam Salem, Commodore Wey of the Navy, Lt. Col. Gowon (Army COS), Lt. Col. Anwunah (PSO I), and Major Mobolaji Johnson. Although he had previously served as DAQMG at the 2nd Brigade in Apapa under late Brigadier Maimalari, on this day Johnson was a fish out of water because he was supposed to be the second-in-command to Lt. Col Akahan at the 4th battalion 100 miles away in Ibadan where junior officers had run amock. However, he had long since settled down as Lagos military administrator. The commander of the 2nd battalion at Ikeja could not be reached. Meanwhile, Lt. DS Abubakar had arrived from Abeokuta with his troops of ferrets, only to run into an ambush mounted by troops from the 2nd battalion under Lt. Longboem at Ikeja from which he was very lucky to escape. Longboem had recognized him at the last minute when he stuck his head out of the hatch. Apparently Lt. Nassarawa had forgotten to alert the boys that Abubakar was coming with ferrets on Muhammed's orders. Anyway,

once this misunderstanding was resolved, Muhammed deployed DS Abubakar to Abalti Barracks for "mopping operations". This essentially meant that Muhammed was now in control of Ikeja, Dodan and Abalti Barracks as well as the airport. Indeed, Sergeant Dickson's boys took control of two BOAC VC10 aircraft at the airport and ordered the Captains to fly northern families of soldiers back to Kano before returning to Lagos to pick commercial passengers. The soldiers involved had been completely taken in by frivolous rumors of a "second Igbo coup" and, like northern civil servants, wanted to get their families away.

After a quick appreciation, a decision was made by Brigadier Ogundipe to scrap together a fighting force from Army HQ elements commanded by an Igbo Captain. They were to go to Ikeja and try regaining control of the airport, by then under the control of Sergeant Paul Dickson of the 2nd battalion. This group advanced right into an ambush of machine gun nests along Ikeja road, losing about 30 soldiers in the process. In the confusion, two expatriates (including the General Manager of Bata Shoes in Lagos) were killed in cross-fire.

Lt. Col. Gowon volunteered to go to Ikeja Barracks to negotiate with the rebellious troops. By this time he and Brigadier Ogundipe were already aware from reports coming from Ibadan that General Ironsi and Colonel Fajuyi had been snatched from Major Danjuma and were probably dead. When he arrived at Ikeja some reports say he was initially detained, but there is no corroborative evidence that this really occurred. Aghast at what he saw, he was, however, said to have issued orders in support of Muhammed's earlier orders that there should be no more shooting. This order was quickly sidelined by northern soldiers who proceeded to use other methods, not firearms, to slaughter their victims. Daggers and other more primitive contraptions for ritual murder became weapons of choice. In one illustrative case, northern soldiers at Ikeja airport took Captain Okoye, then based at Abalti Barracks but enroute to the US on a course, tied him to an Iron cross, whipped him unconscious and then left him to die in the guardroom. Okoye was suspected of being an informant for the Igbo underground network in Lagos.

About this time, first Major Johnson and then Brigadier Ogundipe himself gave an order to a northern NCO deployed to the Federal Guards Company. The soldier blatantly said

he would not take orders from the Brigadier unless approved by Captain JN Garba. So, Captain Garba was sent for and came to the Police HQ. He was initially interrogated by Lt. Col. Anwunah, searching for information about what was happening in the country. Garba then aggressively confronted Anwunah with the grievances of northern soldiers and why they had struck. When Anwunah reported Garba's intransigence to Ogundipe, Ogundipe told Garba:

"I wish you boys had waited. I have just received the report about the January coup this morning and it's on my table right now. Try to talk to your friends in Ikeja, and I am sure we can settle this matter, even at this stage."

Capt. Garba, now placed in a difficult position, went back to his office to make a call to Murtala Muhammed in Ikeja and brief him about what had just transpired. Muhammed endorsed Garba's actions and instructed him to maintain contact. Garba says he later discovered that Ogundipe had been bluffing about the report. Indeed, at the Military Leaders Meeting at Aburi, a full six months later, Commodore Wey said:

"A decision has been taken on the boys of 15<sup>th</sup> January.....They were to be dealt with in August but later on it was shifted to October."

Meanwhile, Brigadier Ogundipe made a public broadcast on Radio Nigeria at 2:30pm which was repeated in 30 minute cycles until about 8:30pm:

"As a result of some trouble by dissidents in the army, mainly in Ibadan, Abeokuta and Ikeja, the National Military Government has declared a state of emergency in the affected areas. Consequently, the following areas have been declared military areas under the Suppression of Disorder Decree of 1966: Ibadan, Ikeja and Abeokuta. Military Tribunals have been considered and accordingly set up. Curfew has been declared in the affected areas from 6:30 pm. The National Military Government wishes to state that the situation is under control and hopes to restore peace and tranquility very soon. The government appeals to the public for cooperation in its effort to restore law and order in the affected areas."

At about 3pm, though, Ogundipe sent for Garba again and instructed him to contribute a platoon to a second assault force which he was sending to dislodge the boys at Ikeja. Garba notified Muhammed at Ikeja and then contributed a platoon to Ogundipe under one 2/Lt. Osuma (then known as "Usman") with separate orders that should he be ordered to shoot at fellow soldiers he was to refuse and return to base. 2/Lt. "Usman" did exactly as he was told before subsequently escaping from Lagos on August 1st himself. When he got back to the east, he used his real name (Osuma) to request that his property be sent back to him there. Needless to say that Ogundipe's second attempt to establish military supremacy had failed.

Meanwhile phone calls and signals were coming in from other parts of the country, including Enugu (from Lt. Col. C. Ojukwu, the governor). At one point Ojukwu was able to speak to Lt. Col. Gowon at Ikeja. It is said that Gowon told him that he was no longer a "free agent". Ojukwu encouraged Ogundipe to keep fighting even though he himself at one point escaped from Enugu to Onitsha from where he was calling Ogundipe. The rebels later made Brigadier Ogundipe aware that they would only accept Captain JN Garba as his intermediary for negotiations. Meanwhile, angry about the phone calls from Ojukwu, Lt. Col. Muhammed began making plans to march on Enugu - from which he was eventually restrained.

### ***LAGOS, SATURDAY JULY 30, 1966***

At about 0600 hrs, Capt. JN Garba was ordered back to Police HQ. Over the course of that day he made three trips back and forth to Ikeja on behalf of Brigadier Ogundipe, including one trip in which his vehicle was even shot at by northern troops. Emotional demands were made back and forth, including initial declarations that they no longer wanted to share barracks with Igbo soldiers, and demands that either the North be allowed to secede or that the Unification decree be repealed with a return to the position before January 15 under a civilian government. As John de St. Jorre put it, "It was the northern soldiers, roaming around outside the conference room in their dark, satanic mood, who were the ultimate arbiters of power".

It was during this back and forth ado that Gowon is said to have been pressurized by the soldiers at Ikeja to participate in the discussions and lead them as the senior northern officer. This may have been assisted by calls from Kaduna and Kano by Lt. Cols Hassan Katsina and Mohammed Shuwa. Having been alerted overnight of goings on, Ojukwu had now joined the chorus of phone calls and signals coming in from other parts of the country seeking clarification. He was even able to speak to Lt. Col. Gowon at Ikeja. It is said that Gowon told him that he was no longer a "free agent". Ojukwu encouraged Ogundipe to keep fighting even though he himself at one point escaped from Enugu to Onitsha from where he was calling Ogundipe. Angry about the phone calls from Ojukwu, Lt. Col. Muhammed began making plans to march on Enugu - from which he was eventually restrained.

Another authority (Kirk-Greene) claims that Gowon's change of status from government messenger to rebel representative occurred when Ogundipe declared that he could not accept the proposals being put forward by northern soldiers and wanted to remove himself from the negotiation seeing as he could not exert his authority over them. Indeed Captain Alfred Gom had bluntly told him that they no longer wanted to deal with him or the SHQ at all. More recently, Gowon has revealed that main grouse the mutinous soldiers at Ikeja had against dealing with and accepting orders from Ogundipe was that he had sent two separate assault teams to attack them. General Olusegun Obasanjo, however, thinks an additional reason was that Ogundipe "did not belong". According to Biafran propaganda, a northern flag was even flown at this point over the Ikeja Barracks, but no other independent source, local or foreign has ever confirmed this allegation.

Meanwhile Lt. DS Abubakar of the 2 Recce Squadron Abeokuta and his troops of Ferrets were ordered from Lagos to Ikeja Barracks. But he was first ordered to secure Carter Bridge which was when he told the notorious Sergeant Lapdam to man the checkpoint while he left for Ikeja. Lapdam later shot Major Ibanga Ekanem, Provost Marshall, who was on his way to SHQ, allegedly with a list of northern officers who were behind the revolt. [As a Captain, Ekanem survived injuries sustained in combat as an officer in the 4QNR in Katanga during Congo Operations in 1961]. Quite a few other soldiers (and possibly civilians) were also killed on Carter Bridge and at least two southern airforce officers later rescued from him. When Lt. DS Abubakar got to Ikeja, as reported in the

Army's official history, Col. DS Abubakar (rtd) recalls that one of those who was most strident about separation was Lt. Nuhu Nathan who reportedly told Gowon:

"Let us all leave now - we all go back if we cannot form a confederation". Gowon replied: "What is that word you mentioned"? Nathan said "Confederation", to which Gowon retorted: "What does that mean"? As Nathan proceeded to explain, Lt. Malami Nassarawa said "I have an encyclopedia". DS Abubakar explains that "They brought an encyclopedia and Gowon saw the meaning of confederation in it. He was about to buy the idea - thank GOD the British High Commissioner and some of the permanent secretaries advised against it." DS Abubakar says 'the British High Commissioner said: "If you dare do this kind of thing - confederation - that is the end of you". So that is why we came back to federalism.'

Others who were present include Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed, Major Shittu Alao and Captain Baba Usman.

While Captain Garba was away on his second visit to Ikeja, Federal Permanent Secretaries met with Brigadier Ogundipe at the Police HQ. He told them that the soldiers at Ikeja were not willing nor ready to assume responsibility for running the country at that point. On his part he was not ready to do so either unless he had both legal and military backing. Although he had suspicions that Ironsi was already dead he was not absolutely certain. To compound Ogundipe's position, the Attorney General, GC Onyiuke advised him that there was no provision for an acting Supreme Commander in the Constitution, as amended by Decree No. 1 of 1966. Having rendered this advice, Onyiuke left Ogundipe at the Police HQ and then proceeded to depart Lagos for safety. Others did too, abandoning him and Wey there with no clear answers.

During Garba's third visit to the Ikeja Barracks he was accompanied by the delegation of senior civil servants including Musa Daggash, Abdul Aziz Attach, HA Ejueyitchie, Yusuf Gobir, BN Okagbue, Ibrahim Damcida, Allison Ayida, Phillip Asiodu, along with Justice Adetokunbo Ademola, acting Police IG Kam Salem, Sule Katagum, Muktar Tahir, Justice Mohammed Bello, and Ali Akilu. When Garba arrived at Ikeja with them, he confirms that Muhammed was the "leading personality" in the room, doing most of the

talking until he suddenly turned to Gowon and said: "You are the senior, go ahead." This acquiescence may have been influenced by other senior northern officers as noted previously, citing seniority. DS Abubakar recalls that there was certainly an argument about who should take over and Major Abba Kyari was even briefly mentioned. However, after Gowon took over the discussions, Muhammed kept interrupting until Gowon had to turn to Muhammed and say: "Look, it's either you have deferred to me and will allow me carry on this discussion, or you have not, and you can continue." Garba pointedly recalls that Allison Ayida, permanent Secretary for Economic development, forcefully insisted that Nigeria not be broken up and kept repeating this view "despite the fact that Murtala was far from receptive to such a view; instead he was constantly telling Ayida, his eyes red with rage, in effect to shut up."

After complex informal negotiations brokered by Lt. Col. David Ejoor, Military Governor of the Midwest, involving Commodore Wey and Lt. Col Hassan Katsina, Gowon was finally quietly sworn in late that day, Saturday July 30, 1966, at Ikeja but he did not make an announcement to the nation until Monday August 1st. He spent the time notifying senior Police officers like Kam Salem and Hamman Maiduguri, getting information and consolidating his 'control' over other parts of the country - except, as later became apparent, the eastern region. In an interview with Elaigwu, Gowon described his emotions when he was anointed as C-in-C as follows:

"Honestly, I felt as if I was under a battle. I had a feeling of death - virtually choking me. I felt my throat go dry immediately. I was cold and yet sweating. If I could then I would have run away. But two things kept me on - one, a strong belief in God who had seen me through the Congo and two, a number of questions I kept asking myself - 'Are you not a man? Are you not a soldier? 'What would people and history say of you?' ..... My first objective was to restore discipline in the army and to prevent killings. I called the soldiers, and as I stood on the rostrum, tears were in my eyes. I was angry and at the same time moved. I told myself that if I cried, the soldiers would have had me. I took courage and addressed them. I told them that if I heard of any more killing, they should also remember that I was a soldier, and that I could and would, kill."

In his speech to the nation on August 1<sup>st</sup>, Gowon said, among other things:

“This is Lt. Col. Y. Gowon, Army Chief of Staff, speaking to you.....I have been brought to the position today of having to shoulder the great responsibilities of this country and the armed forces with the consent of the majority of the members of the Supreme Military Council as a result of the unfortunate incident that occurred on the early morning of 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1966.....”

“.....As a result of the recent events and the other previous similar ones, I have come to strongly believe that we cannot honestly and sincerely continue in this wise, as the basis of trust and confidence in our unitary system has not been able to stand the test of time. I have already remarked on the issues in question.Suffice to say that, putting all considerations to test - political, economic, as well as social - the base for unity is not there or is so badly rocked, not only once but several times.I, therefore, feel that we should review the issue of our national standing and see if we can help stop the country from drifting away into utter destruction....”

”All members of the armed forces are requested to keep within their barracks except on essential duties and when ordered from SHQ.Troops must not terrorize the public, as such action will discredit the new National Military Government.....”

“...I promise you that I shall do all I can to return to civil rule as soon as it can be arranged.I also intend to pursue most vigorously the question of the release of political prisoners.Fellow countrymen, give me your support and I shall endeavour to live upto expectations.Thankyou.”

Shortly thereafter, on the same day, Lt. Col. Ojukwu, Military Governor of the East, made a counter-broadcast from Enugu.The next morning Gowon signed an instrument of pardon for Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro, and others who had been convicted and jailed in September 1963 for treasonable felony, conspiracy to commit a

felony and conspiracy to effect an unlawful purpose in 1962 with the object of forcefully removing Alhaji Tafawa Balewa from office as Prime Minister.

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, Lt. Col. David Ejoor made a public speech as the Military Governor of the Midwest, in support of the new regime. Likewise, on August 4, Colonel Adeyinka Adebayo, Military Governor of the West, broadcast his support for the new government as Gowon was addressing a press conference at the Lagos City Hall, having earlier that day released Isaac Boro and others. Gowon was later to announce his plans for return to civilian rule four days later, followed the next day by a meeting of delegates representing the Regional Military Governors.

However, Gowon or no Gowon, northern NCOs were still running amock killing people arbitrarily, even threatening northern officers who stood in their way. Lt. DS Abubakar was very nearly shot at Ikeja airport in this manner by one Edward William allegedly for "hiding some Igbo people". Lagos Garrison Commander, Lt. Col. Eze, barely escaped a mob of northern soldiers on August 2<sup>nd</sup> but his staff officer, Captain Iloputaife, was not so lucky. Indeed, a few days after the mutiny, a northern corporal at Ikeja summarized his own motives for the mutiny by telling Norman Miners: "The Ibos killed our leaders in January; they were taking all the top jobs; we had to get rid of them. Now we have only got Northerners in this barracks; all the Southerners have run away." In fact northern NCOs and soldiers were in the habit of taking uniforms of dead Igbo officers and NCOs and wearing their ranks. On August 8, all Igbo soldiers at the Army workshop in Yaba were expelled. But as the nation was to find out, the worst was yet to come. Colonel DS Abubakar (rtd) recalls:

"At that time, if an other rank does not like the face of another person he will just kill him like an animal and nobody will do anything."

But it would be simplistic to presume that some northern officers did not take part in the killings in Lagos. Lt. Nuhu Nathan, for example, was later personally credited in eastern publications with the execution of some Igbo soldiers at Ikeja. There were undoubtedly others.

## **KADUNA, JULY 29 WEEKEND, 1966**

The weekend of July 29, 1966 was not the first time northern soldiers had contemplated action in the North. As previously noted, quite aside from tensions during the Platoon Commanders Course, when there were false rumors of Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina's arrest by General Ironsi in Lagos after the promulgation of Decree #34, northern soldiers surrounded the Kaduna airport waiting to see who would alight from his returning plane. Things were so tense that Hassan ordered his ADC, then Lt. Ugokwe (Recce), not to step out of the plane before he did, lest he be shot because he was Igbo.

On June 15, there was a false alarm in Kaduna when the sound of planks being offloaded from a Goods Train at the Train Station was misinterpreted as rifle shots. According to Madiebo, all hell broke loose as northern and southern officers and men at the Brigade HQ (including the commander, Col. Bassey) fled in different directions asking themselves: "Who is doing it this time.?"

During Ironsi's trip to Kano in July, Lt. Garba Duba of the 1<sup>st</sup> Recce Squadron had been tasked to take a troop of Ferrets from Kaduna to Kano to provide security for Ironsi, only to find himself stopped and nearly arrested in Zaria, accused by furious northern infantrymen and civilians of betraying the North by providing security for Ironsi in Kano. After much ado, he was allowed to proceed. Later on when Ironsi was scheduled to arrive at the Zaria Civil aerodrome, enroute to Kaduna, there was an accidental discharge from an armored car in his receiving security detail. Therefore, upon finally arriving at the Officers Mess at Kaduna, all Army officers were rigorously searched before being allowed entry to meet the C-in-C. The situation was anything but normal.

Anyhow, on July 29, Major General Ironsi telephoned the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade HQ in Kaduna at about 0730 hrs to alert the Brigade about events in Ibadan and seek help. He revealed that as of that time he had not been able to get a helicopter sent from Lagos. This was most likely because there were no night flying helicopter capabilities in Nigeria then and certainly no night landing facilities at the government house, not to mention the fact that any such Police helicopter would likely have been shot down by disloyal troops that had already ringed the premises. They were even armed with a 106 mm recoilless rifle which

could have destroyed any helicopter. As it were, a helicopter did eventually show up, but it was too late for the General although his son was smuggled out of Ibadan by the Police in the third Class compartment of the Train to Lagos.

The substantive Brigade Commander, Lt. Col. W. Bassey, was on leave. The acting Brigade Commander, Lt. Col. Phillip Effiong was away, engaged in community outreach. The Governor, Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina was also away on tour. Ironsi spoke to Major Samuel Ogbemudia, the Brigade Major, who in turn informed him of prevailing tensions in Kaduna. Two nights before he had arrested Lt. Buka Suka Dimka in a drunken state trying to break into the armoury after he had earlier been spotted going from house to house of northern officers passing messages. After checking with Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina, he locked Dimka up until he could be sober enough to be interrogated. During interrogation Dimka denied any wrong doing and accused Ogbemudia of mistreating him because he was a northerner. He was later released. Other northern officers and NCOs had also been spotted milling around army facilities apparently aimlessly, essentially “casing the joints” and quite a few were briefly detained. Although it was not yet apparent, a few southern officers had already been kidnapped on the 28<sup>th</sup> and were later killed “attempting to escape.”

Lt. Col Alexander Madiebo, Commander of Artillery Regiment, whose aircraft had departed Lagos 10 minutes before Sergeant Dickson’s boys seized the airport, acting on Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed’s orders, was in Kaduna on July 29<sup>th</sup>. For some reason, Anwunah had failed to alert him of the mutiny when he found out about it in Lagos at about midnight. Having been met at the Kaduna airport by one of the Brigade Staff Officers (Captain Dilibe) he was apprised of developments in other parts of the country. Madiebo took charge as the senior officer on the spot and contacted Lagos. The person on seat at military intelligence was none other than Captain Martin Adamu who denied that anything unusual was occurring. But Madiebo wasn’t fooled. He ordered Ogbemudia to order all units to surrender their weapons and have them locked up in unit armouries which were then to be guarded by mixed combinations of northern and southern troops. Some units refused, citing fear of being attacked. One notable example was the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion under Lt. Col. I. C. Okoro (an easterner) whose Regimental Sergeant

Major, one Ahmadu Bello, a northerner, advised against the move. Okoro told Madiebo that he had extracted a pledge of loyalty from his troops at a muster parade. He went further to say that Bello advised that the entire battalion be disarmed except a platoon specially selected by Bello himself.

Ogbemudia recalls that although the day started out well, things became increasingly tense as it progressed and news began filtering in from the south. Initially, it was not clear whether the coup was a northern counter-coup or the rumored so called radical "Plan 15" Igbo coup. Indeed even foreign news media were not so sure initially. The New York Times reported that radical Igbo officers were leading a revolt against Ironsi. This confusion was later clarified in Kaduna as signals poured in from Ibadan and Lagos. Madiebo recalls that T/Major C.C. Emelifonwu, DAQMG, openly condemned the apparently northern inspired coup in the south to the hearing of Major Abba Kyari of the Artillery regiment who disagreed. Although subsequently accused in eastern publications of chairing private tribunals to condemn Igbo soldiers to death, Kyari was, however, later to save the lives of many southern officers and men in Kaduna when northern troops mutinied.

At this point, though, Madiebo contacted Lt. Col. Ogbugo Kalu, then Commandant of the NMTC to discuss options. At about 1330 Lt. Col. Madiebo, Lt. Col. Kalu, T/Major Emelifonwu, T/Major Ogbemudia and T/Major A.D. Ogunromet in Lt. Col. Effiong's house. Unfortunately, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion, Lt. Col. Okoro did not attend. He completely misjudged the threat, perhaps misled by his long service in that battalion and assumed bonds of loyalty forged in combat, bonds which had long been shattered by the events of January 15. As far back as June 1961, then Captain Okoro served in the same 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion (then called 3QNR) at Kamina in the Congo under then Lt. Col. ABM Kavanagh. In late July that year, the amiable Okoro was in charge of a regimental welcoming parade for Katanga President Moise Tshombe. When they met, Tshombe was said to have spoken French to Okoro, who promptly replied in Igbo!

Later that night, at a pre-midnight party at the Brigade Officers Mess, a young officer who had just completed a course at the NMTC, T/Capt. I.U. Idika was summarily

executed, having refused all entreaties by Madiebo to leave. Following this 'signal', Lt. Col. Okoro was shot dead at midnight of July 29/30 in front of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion guardroom, allegedly by Lts. Dimka and Dambo, after being lured there by his RSM (Bello). After despatching a landrover to take his corpse to the military hospital, the group - joined by others, including Lt. Saninegeria Abacha - disarmed the quarter guard, rallied the battalion for a muster parade on the hockey pitch where easterners were separated, and then locked them up in the guard room (if they were lucky). Then they went hunting for others at the Brigade HQ, NMTC, Engineer Unit, Recce Squadron and in their homes.

Initial arrests were guided by lists of so called "jubilators" who had allegedly taunted them or celebrated in the days after the assassination of the Sardauna. Those northerners who had attended "January Victory" parties had used the opportunity to take names of their southern hosts. Many were shot immediately, but six were taken to the undamaged Guest House at the late Northern Premier's Lodge, wine and dined, given a visual tour of the damage wrought by Major Nzeogwu's 84 mm Carl Gustav anti-tank guns, then interrogated about the alleged "Plan 15 Igbo coup", before being made to kneel in front of a portrait of the Sardauna and bow in awe ("yi gaisuwa"). Then they were led out and executed before their corpses were then transported to locations along the Jos, Lagos and Kachia roads and either left for hyenas to devour or shoddily buried.

After being hunted down, those who were spared the Premier's Lodge 'pre-operative' treatment were simply trucked out to mile 18 on the Kaduna-Jos road where they were shot (allegedly under Captain Ahmadu Yakubu's supervision) and then reportedly robbed of personal belongings. The process was not totally successful, however, because thankfully, some who feigned death were able to crawl away to safety. Interestingly, others were protected by Captain Swanton and the same RSM Ahmadu Bello who had earlier set Okoro up for his execution at the outset of Kaduna operations. When guardrooms were too congested or unsafe, eastern, (particularly Igbo) soldiers and officers were taken to the Kaduna Prison for safe keeping.

Madiebo, Kalu, Okon, Ogbemudia and many others eventually escaped back to their home regions from Kaduna, while some, like Major Olusegun Obasanjo were later

smuggled to Maiduguri for safe-keeping. But others were not so lucky. As the days progressed, however, it was clear that there was inconsistency in the degree of discrimination being made between southerners or “jubilators”. T/Capt. L.C. Dilibe (Staff Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Bde), T/Major Emelifonwu (DAQMG, 1<sup>st</sup> Bde) and T/Major Ogunro (Chief Instructor, NMTC) were murdered. Major A. Drummond, half cast Igbo-Scot, was killed on Sunday July 31<sup>st</sup>. Major OU Isong (Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Recce Squadron) who had actually expressed scepticism about the January 15 coup, risking death at the hands of Major Nzeogwu, was also killed during the July rebellion in Kaduna, among others. The details of his death have never been fully clarified but the young northern officers in his squadron at that time include Lts. Ibrahim Babangida, Garba Duba, Sunday Ifere and others.

After hitchhiking with Igbo contacts across the North, Madiebo escaped across the Benue bridge at Makurdi by hiding in a water tank dressed in a firesuit, avoiding capture by a detachment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion commanded by T/Major Daramola during the penultimate leg of his relay race back home. Ogbemudia’s escape from death at the hands of Lt. BS Dimka was partly made possible by Major Abba Kyari and Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina, as well as sheer luck. Hassan himself had allegedly been briefly detained by mutinous troops and then released, only to be falsely accused of being behind the whole plot (along with Ali Akilu). It was already known that Dimka was not happy that Ogbemudia had arrested him earlier, although Dimka did not know that it had been sanctioned by Hassan who had his ears to the ground. When, therefore, Dimka was making plans to gather soldiers to seize him, and was talking carelessly about Ironsi’s phone call and its implications, Ogbemudia was tipped off and advised in the nick of time to escape. A landrover was immediately provided which Ogbemudia jumped into (armed with an SMG) and sped out of town (without bothering to pack) chased by a landrover load of northern soldiers led by the Lieutenant. Ogbemudia got a pass from Governor Hassan Katsina as a form of protection but this proved to be useless.

Dimka’s group pursued him to Kontagora where he refueled, barely eluding them at the catering rest house. But they refused to give up, chasing him all the way to Jebba, crossing the Niger Bridge behind him, sometimes shooting. They followed him all the way to Owo

in present day Ondo State where he ran out of fuel, abandoned his vehicle and scaled a six foot fence into dense jungle. At that point they gave up and began their journey back to Kaduna. Ogbemudia later hitched hiked back to Benin City laying low for some time, moving from house to house until things cooled down. The strange thing is that Major Ogbemudia was Nzeogwu's deputy at the NMTC in January and had been asked by Nzeogwu to take leave so he would be out of station during the coup. Nzeogwu did not take him into confidence. In fact, for a brief moment after discovering - at a road block - that there was a coup in progress led by his boss, Ogbemudia considered moving against Nzeogwu but was stuck with his desperately ill daughter who had to be taken to hospital. But paradoxically, here he was in July barely escaping death from Dimka, who was convinced that he was part of the so called "Plan 15"!

Indeed, Ogbemudia was not the only example of this paradox. There were many others. Then Major H. Igboba, who barely escaped death on July 29 (as a Lt. Col. and CO of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion), had led one of the companies from the battalion that helped in crushing the January mutiny along with Major Anago (a Camerounian) both under Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon who was transitioning in to replace Hilary Njoku. Njoku, for unclear reasons, was still at his post even though already posted out. But Igboba fully cooperated with Gowon, who in turn, was supporting Ironsi. In fact, according to Ben Odogwu, Chief of Biafran Intelligence, Col. Igboba later met his death at the Benin Prison in September 1967 at the hands of ex-January 15 mutineers he had manhandled in detention after they were arrested in Lagos.

### ***KANO, JULY 29 WEEKEND, 1966***

The 5<sup>th</sup> battalion in Kano was under the command of T/Lt. Col. M Shuwa, one of the two battalions in the country commanded by a northern officer - the other one being the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion in Ibadan. On July 28, 29, and 30 the unit was deceptively quiet although Shuwa was abreast of events elsewhere. However, on the night of July 31/August 1<sup>st</sup>, three Igbo officers and a midwesterner were suddenly hunted down and shot. It remained relatively quiet again until September when all hell broke loose at the Kano International Airport. As Lt. Col Hassan Katsina put it at Aburi, "I have seen an Army mutiny in Kano and if

you see me trembling you will know what a mutiny is. .... for two good days I saw a real mutiny when a C.O. of Northern origin commanding soldiers of Northern origin had to run away. "One northern officer was actually reportedly killed by angry northern soldiers for giving them an order to protect Igbos. The slaughter of Igbos at Kano airport by elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> battalion was one of the more gruesome events of that era.

### ***ENUGU, JULY 29 WEEKEND, 1966***

According to the transcript of tape recordings of the military leaders meeting from January 4-5, 1967, held at the Peduase Lodge, Aburi, Ghana, then Lt. Col. C. Ojukwu, Military Governor of the eastern region, said (among other things):

"When this affair of the 29th July occurred, I remember for certain, the first 24 hours nobody thought it necessary to contact the East from Lagos. I made the contact later and I know the advice I gave Brigadier Ogundipe at that time. I said to him, 'Sir, the situation is so confused that I feel that somebody must take control immediately. Also, I would suggest that you go on to the air and tell the country what has happened and that you were taking control of the situation.' Then I was told about concern for the whole country. I knew that if this thing resolved itself into factions we would get ourselves into so much trouble that we would never or we would find it difficult to get out. I maintained and still do that the answer would have been for the responsible officers of the Army to get together thereby trying to get the Army together to solve the problem that we had on our hands. I said to him 'As soon as you have made your speech I guarantee you within 30 minutes, I needed time to write my own, in 30 minutes I would come on to the air in the East and say that I, the entire Army in the East and the entire people in the East wholeheartedly support you."

Indeed, official circles in the eastern region were "blacked out" initially from information flow, particularly during the first 24 hours of the revolt. The commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion in Enugu, Lt. Col. David "Baba" Ogunewe, a thoroughly professional and

experienced officer who had risen from the ranks, found out about the Abeokuta mutiny late at night on July 29 by accident. Captain Ogbonna had tried to reach the battalion from Abeokuta.

The duty officer at the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion (who happened to be a northerner) was not on seat when Ogbonna's message came through, so it was passed directly to Lt. Col. Ogunewe, thus giving him an early insight into events, which proved to be crucial. He went to the mess in the early hours of July 30 and found a group of northern officers (including Lts. Shehu Musa Yar-Adua, A. A. Abubakar, Sale Mamood, Daudu Suleiman, Captains Muhammadu Jega, Gibson S. Jalo and others) fully dressed in combat fatigues and apparently talked them out of taking precipitate action, tapping an incredible reserve of goodwill he had always had with the boys. Ogunewe's successful confrontation with the northern officers is all the more remarkable when it is realized that he was unarmed and had only been in command of that battalion for six months. It was truly a testimony to his man-management skills in crisis, well worth study for future reference. It turns out though, that these officers had already been having meetings behind Hotel Presidential in Enugu to discuss their own contributions to the "Aure" plot and the neutralization of Lt. Col. Ojukwu. However, they had decided after careful appreciation of the situation, surrounded by a hostile population, to restrict themselves to self defence to avoid reprisals against their families.

In an October 1979 interview with the FRCN, Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (rtd), now deceased, recalled his role as the Adjutant of the 1st Battalion in those dark days. According to him, there was no plan initially to kill anyone although he clearly intended to arrest Lt. Col. C. Ojukwu, then Military Governor. He corroborates other sources who have since said that the coup date had in fact been put off when informal word came late on Friday night, more likely early Saturday July 30, from Captain Remawa in Abeokuta, that violence had broken out. At first Yar'Adua did not know what to make of it since Remawa was not part of the original "Aure" plot. But then he got dressed and alerted other northern officers. By the time he returned to the office at about 4 am, as he put it: ".....my CO and all the Igbo officers had been there at three, because

somebody had also rang them from Abeokuta and told them what was happening. "This "somebody" was none other than Captain Ogbonna.

A joint guard, consisting of northern and southern soldiers was then posted to guard the armoury, choking off weapon flow. Ogunewe then notified Lt. Col Ojukwu and later ordered that all officers irrespective of regional origin should live together in the mess while all Other Ranks were to live on the parade ground. In this manner, no group could conspire or make a move without detection. The only officer authorized to be armed at this point was Ogunewe himself who sat with the other officers while everyone looked at everyone.

At 11am on July 30, Ojukwu called a meeting of the regional executive council at which they were briefed on events in other parts of the country. Before then Ojukwu had been on the telephone all morning contacting units and eastern officers all over the country to get a picture of events. He is quoted by NU Akpan, former Secretary to the Government of the Eastern region after one of his calls, as saying: "One thing is clear, however; these people are quite bent on annihilating the Ibos." Later that day, for reasons that have never been clarified, he slipped out of Enugu (leaving Ogunewe behind) and went to Onitsha from where he was making his calls to Ogundipe in Lagos encouraging him to stand firm. Much later that night, urged by Mr. P. Okeke who was then Commissioner of Police, he returned to Enugu, moving his office, home and relatives to the Police HQ, surrounded by a special guard of Mobile Policemen of Igbo origin. That same evening, eastern chiefs and traditional rulers arrived back from the Traditional Rulers meeting in Ibadan, bringing with them information about the kidnapping of Ironsi and Fajuyi.

By Sunday July 31<sup>st</sup>, when Ojukwu called the executive council again, he announced that Brigadier Ogundipe had since told him that the situation was out of control. Shortly thereafter, Ogundipe himself could not be contacted. It was not until Lt. Col. Gowon's broadcast on August 1<sup>st</sup> that a transient semblance of order became discernible. Ojukwu made a broadcast in response in which he said, inter-alia,

“In the course of this rebellion, I have had discussions with the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Brigadier Ogundipe, who as the next most senior officer in the absence of the Supreme Commander, should have assumed command of the Army.....”

”During those discussions, it was understood that the only condition on which the rebels would agree to cease fire were: that the Republic of Nigeria be split into its component parts; and that all southerners in the North be repatriated to the South and that Northerners resident in the South be repatriated to the North.....”

“.....the brutal, planned annihilation of officers of Eastern Nigerian origin in the last two days has again cast serious doubts as to whether the people of Nigeria, after these cruel and bloody atrocities, can ever sincerely live together as members of the same nation.....”

“...I have further conveyed to the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, my fellow military governors and the Chief of Staff, Army Headquarters, my understanding that the only intention of the announcement made by the Chief of Staff, Army Headquarters today is the restoration of peace in the country whilst immediate negotiations are begun to allow the people of Nigeria to determine the form of their future association. Good night and thank you.”

Ojukwu then spent the next one week insisting that northern soldiers in Enugu (who comprised no less than two thirds of the battalion) be removed from the city before he would consider leaving the safety of the Police HQ back to the State House.

Through all this, Ogunewe kept in touch with Gowon in Lagos and was crucial to arrangements that were subsequently made to successfully repatriate non-eastern soldiers and their families out of the region - a remarkable achievement for which he was rewarded by being fully reabsorbed into the Nigerian Army without loss of rank after the civil war. But even this was not so straightforward. For one, Ogunewe had to resist all kinds of entreaties to allow vengeful Igbo mobs gain entry into the barracks to liquidate the northern troops there. Secondly, according to then Major (later Brigadier) Benjamin

Adekunle, Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed had contacted Lt. Yar'Adua secretly and ordered him to break into the armoury to secure arms and ammunition for northern soldiers - to the exclusion of others. This led to a clash between them which almost cost Adekunle his life later on.

Just under two weeks after Gowon came to power, Major Adekunle was tasked to lead the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion detachment by train which was granted safe passage to transport non-eastern soldiers and their families to Kaduna enroute to Lagos in exchange for surviving eastern soldiers in other regions. The suspicion was so high that Adekunle gave orders that every individual soldier was to guard every other individual soldier. When Adekunle got to Kaduna, some Igbo officers released from Kaduna Prison were placed onboard the train (without his knowledge, he says, but with his knowledge others say) on their way to Lagos enroute to the eastern region. Some of the northern soldiers on the train did not like the arrangement seeing as they felt they had not yet contributed their quota to the mayhem going on elsewhere, so they mutinied, killing the Igbo officers. As Brigadier Adekunle (rtd) put it:

“Yar'Adua arranged for their heads to be cut and threw their bodies over the door, chained with other officers .....

Other sources say the bodies were thrown into a river near Minna. It turns out that there were a few pregnant women onboard the train who went into labor when they witnessed this spectacle. Therefore, Adekunle ordered the train stopped at Minna Station to take the women in labor to hospital. It was there that he says Lt. SM Yar'Adua attacked him with a bayonet.

According to Adekunle:

“I got to the railway station. Madness started. Alright put your hand inside my head and see wound, that is blade, that is Yar'Adua's work. Immediately I got down they wanted to kill Adekunle. You see this, it was for my stomach. Yar'Adua, see my hand, it was cut but they couldn't cut it, they cut and cut but the knife no go. You don forget say na Ogbomosho

na him I be. Then they put my head on railway line that when the train coming to Lagos moves it will cut my head.”

Adekunle, however, has never publicly explained how he survived but others say he was saved by then Captain GS Jalo, who shared the same Bachama ethnicity as Adekunle’s mother. In an interview, Lt. General GS Jalo (rtd), now deceased, also credited Alhaji Suleiman, then District Head in Minna and his former Principal in Yola, for saving then Major Adekunle’s life. Other sources allege that it was Yar’Adua himself who drove Adekunle to Hospital in Minna from where he was aero-evacuated to Kaduna and claim that Yar’Adua was neither the instigator of the Train mutiny nor Adekunle’s attacker.

In any case, when the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion detachment eventually arrived at Ikeja Barracks in Lagos, northern soldiers who left Enugu unmolested got themselves involved in molesting departing Igbo refugees and looting their property. According to General Jalo:

“The Igbo were going away and looting set in and some senior officers, I must confess, encouraged this to happen.”

On August 27, in another broadcast from Enugu, Ojukwu stated, among other things,

“I last spoke to you on August 1, following the unfortunate and tragic events of July 29. I am sure that you all have since followed through the Press and Radio the sad turn of events. One thing has come out very clearly from this, the preceding and subsequent events, that is, that there is in fact no genuine basis for true unity in the country.....”

Ojukwu unilaterally declared August 29 a day of mourning in the East, a move which was, however, viewed with suspicion as an act of defiance by hawks in the Gowon government. It proved to be one of many “Stations of the Cross” along the long windy road to the Nigerian Civil War, a road some say began in January 1914.

## ***BENIN, JULY 29 WEEKEND, 1966***

Benin-City was quiet during the weekend of July 29, 1966. It had hosted General Ironsi with fanfare on the 27<sup>th</sup>. School children lined the routes and there was pomp and pageantry. Underneath it all, however, fate beckoned. It was from Benin that Ironsi departed on his way to Ibadan where he met his death. In the atmosphere of myths that evolved in the years after 1966, there was even a story that "Operation Aure" was not launched in Benin because of the intercession of the Oba of Benin. That story is false, although it is true that the traditional institution offered prayers for the country's stability. A strong delegation of chiefs and traditional rulers from the Midwest region attended the conference in Ibadan.

During the weekend of the mutiny there were no rebellious activities within the small detachment of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion under S/Captain Adeniran stationed in Benin. However, the tour of duty in Benin made it possible for soldiers in that company to discover that some of those detained for their part in the January 15 mutiny were at the Benin Prison. This information was to take on greater significance, when on August 16<sup>th</sup>, there was a raid on the prison carried out by those elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion who had initially been redeployed back to Ibadan, but then made a special trip back to Benin just for the heist.

The immediate motive for the August 16 raid was to release their more unruly northern colleagues from the Battalion who had been detained there in early August for their part in the events at Ibadan on July 29 in which General Ironsi, Col. Fajuyi and some Midwestern officers and soldiers in the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion (like Lt. Jasper) lost their lives. One account claims the soldiers were from the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion at Enugu, detained by Ejoor, but I have a conflicting account on personal authority from a participant in the raid that they were not.

The rescuers did not stop at releasing their colleagues. They removed Igbo soldiers who had long been detained there for their part in the January mutiny, including Major Christian Anuforo who had personally executed Lt. Cols. Arthur Unegbe, Kur Mohammed and James Yakubu Pam, as well as Federal Finance Minister Chief Festus

Okotie-Eboh. All of these individuals - including Anuforo - were tortured and then shot after private trials conducted by northern NCOs along the Benin-Ore road, although S/Captain Adeniran himself, pro-Akintola as he was, and a lucky survivor of the January operations, may not have been a neutral observer. Indeed, one of the less well publicized activities of mutinous troops in the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion was the release of NNDP supporters who had been detained in Ibadan Prison by Lt. Col. Fajuyi back in January. It was a stroke of fortune for Major Adewale Ademoyega, another one of the January conspirators, who paired up with Anuforo for Okotie-Eboh's execution, that soldiers from the 4th battalion were unaware that he had been transferred to Warri Prison from the East. Needless to say, the Military Governor, Lt. Col. David Ejoor was very embarrassed and protested vehemently to Gowon.

### ***IBADAN, FRIDAY, JULY 29, 1966 ("Paiko's Wedding")***

The situation in Ibadan on July 28 was tense. Northern civil servants, chiefs and traditional rulers who had come for the Conference of Traditional rulers were eager to get out of the South, fearful that they would be targeted in the so called "Plan 15" Igbo Plot. Indeed there were false rumors that the conference Hall was slated to be blown up. At the regimental parade for General Ironsi a small controversy erupted in the Press about the observation that northern troops refused to (or could not) sing the National Anthem. Arguments went back and forth on TV about whether their lips were moving.

Nevertheless, there was a grand reception in the evening hosted by the Military Governor, Lt. Col. Francis Adekunle Fajuyi, which belied the tensions that were simmering underneath. Fate was beckoning. Both Ironsi and Fajuyi were distinguished veterans of the Congo peace-keeping operations (ONUC) from 1960-64. Then Brigadier J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi was the overall Force Commander for the last six months of the operation. Fajuyi was well known as the first Nigerian officer to be honoured with an international military citation. As a Major, he was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for personal action in leading C company of the 4QNR in combat on November 27, 1960 and subsequently extricating it from an ambush during operations on January 3, 1961.

However, following the call from Lt. Pam Mwadkon in Abeokuta, Lt. Garba Dada (Paiko) woke up other northern officers at the 4th Battalion, including Major TY Danjuma, a staff officer at AHQ who was temporarily staying at the Letmauk Barracks, having accompanied Major General JIU Aguiyi-Ironsi from Lagos. The Barracks is named after a town called Letmauk, site of a bitter campaign in April and May 1944 to retake AN from the Japanese in Burma, by the 1<sup>st</sup> Nigerian Brigade of the 82<sup>nd</sup> West African Division during World War II.

Dada told Danjuma: "Sir, we will have to do the same thing. The most important target is the Supreme Commander. For as long as he is there, everything we are doing here is nothing. We should go there."

After a brief meeting with Lts. Ibrahim Bako and Abdullahi Shelleng, a quick phone call was made to Lt. Col. Murtala Muhammed in Lagos, seeing as Muhammed had earlier contacted the boys to stand down from their group's pre-planned coup. But Muhammed initially urged restraint, seeing as he was unsure whether his earlier confrontation with Anwunah meant that Igbo officers and soldiers in Lagos were already armed and may well have the advantage - as Anwunah had threatened. However, concerned that exposed northern mutineers in Abeokuta would be isolated and thus likely arrested and charged if they delayed action, Danjuma, Dada, Bako, Shelleng, and the duty officer (James Onoja) decided to overrule Muhammed and proceed with operations in Ibadan. Because Danjuma did not go to Ibadan with combat dress, he borrowed one from Lt. James Onoja\* who had recently come back from a course in the US, and wore it right over his pyjamas. Then Danjuma armed himself with a hand grenade for suicide in the event of mission failure.

(\*Some accounts say it was Akahan's uniform, but the Onoja version is likely more correct, confirmed by Danjuma himself. In any case Akahan was out of the loop until daybreak).

Soldiers were then hurriedly selected from infantry companies at Mokola commanded by Onoja and Shelleng. While Shelleng took one group to man checkpoints along the Lagos and Abeokuta roads to protect the southern approaches to the city, 24 soldiers under Lt.

James Onoja, some say in two landrovers mustered by the MTO, Lt. Jerry Useni, accompanied Major Danjuma to the Government House in the early hours of July 29, 1966. The specific initial objective was to isolate the premises, disconnect the Supreme Commander from the chain of command and arrest him as a tool for negotiations regarding the boys who killed Okonweze and others at Abeokuta. The Government House was already guarded by elements of the National Guards company, led by Lt. William Walbe, who was in charge of a 106 mm recoilless rifle group, along with some soldiers on duty from the 4th battalion whose reporting relationship was to the adjutant of the battalion as well as the duty officer.

### ***THE TAKE-OVER OF THE GOVERNMENT HOUSE, IBADAN***

Upon arrival there, having established that the Supreme Commander was in, Major Danjuma was confronted by two command problems. Both arose from the fact that he neither belonged to the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion nor was he part of the National Guard, although he was senior to all the boys on the ground. First task, therefore, was to ensure the cooperation of those elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion who were on duty there. The second was to secure the cooperation of the National Guard Commander on the ground. In order to address the first problem he asked the adjutant (“Paiko”) to issue a “legitimate” order that all his soldiers on duty be disarmed by the duty officer (Onoja) who was there to conduct a “legitimate” inspection. After being disarmed by the Duty Sergeant, they were illegitimately screened and those who could be trusted (ie northerners), illegitimately rearmed. Then they were supplemented by the pre-selected group Danjuma brought along from the barracks with Onoja. To deal with the second problem he confronted Lt. William Walbe directly and secured his cooperation. This wasn’t too difficult. Although they were in different cells, Walbe himself had been attending separate meetings in Lagos with Joe Garba and others and was well aware of the outlines of a coup plot although he did not expect one that night.

Once the building was surrounded and the 106 mm gun positioned in support, Danjuma came under pressure from the boys on the ground to proceed with the operation. There were fears, based on myths acquired in the Congo, that General Ironsi was assisted by

“juju” and that he could disappear at anytime using his “crocodile”. Junior officers who had come to join the party urged immediate attack, some even suggesting a repeat performance of the Nzeogwu assault on the Nassarawa Lodge in Kaduna in January. They wanted the 106 mm weapon used to bring down the complex. Danjuma resisted the pressure.

Lt. Col. Hilary Njoku, Commander of the 2nd Brigade in Lagos, then emerged from the main building and was walking right past the soldiers on duty moving toward the gate. One account says he came up from Lagos with Ironsi, had been staying at the guest house next to the main lodge, but was at the main lodge where Ironsi was staying, socializing with both Ironsi and Fajuyi. Another account says he came up from Lagos that evening when rumors of a coup gained strong currency among senior Igbo officers in Lagos to brief the C-in-C. When he attempted to leave the premises, ostensibly to mobilize loyal units, he was shot at by soldiers who had been ordered not to let anyone out and he responded in kind. (Some say he shot first). Luckily he escaped with serious injuries, some say with no less than 8 pieces of shrapnel in his thigh. Njoku initially made his way to the University College Hospital but had to escape again when a “mop up” team came searching for him.

At this point, Lt. Onoja asked for permission to leave, saying he was going to get more ammunition from the barracks. However, he panicked and ran away in one of the landrovers, fearing that Njoku’s escape meant the coup would fail. He was later arrested at Jebba.

When it became apparent that Njoku had escaped, Danjuma, guarded by two soldiers, made rounds to check all guard positions around the lodge and was moving toward the guest house when he heard the phone there ringing. He asked one of his guards to break the window so he could reach in to answer the phone. According to General Danjuma (rtd), this is how the conversation went:

Danjuma: “Hello”

Gowon:“Hello. I want to speak to Brigade Commander. I want to speak to Colonel Njoku.

Danjuma:“May I know who is speaking?”

Gowon:My name is Gowon. Yakubu Gowon.”

Danjuma:“Ranka dede. This is Yakubu Danjuma.”

Gowon:“Yakubu, what are you doing there? Where are you?”

Danjuma:“I am in the State House here.”

Gowon:“Where is the Brigade Commander?”

Danjuma:“He is not around.”

Gowon:“Have you heard what has happened?”

Danjuma:“Yes, I heard and that is why I am here. We are about to arrest the Supreme Commander.The alternative is that the Igbo boys who carried out the January coup will be released tit for tat since we killed their own officers.”

Gowon:(after a period of silence)“Can you do it?”

Danjuma:“Yes, we have got the place surrounded.”

Gowon:“But for goodness sake we have had enough bloodshed. There must be no bloodshed.”

Danjuma:“No, We are only going to arrest him.”

At this point Danjuma replaced the phone as yet another command crisis with the soldiers on the grounds was brewing.It is not clear from available information what Gowon did with the explosive information he had just gained from Danjuma or how he and Ogundipe planned to deal with it.Danjuma does not say that Gowon or any other senior

officer explicitly ordered him to desist from his activities. To what extent, then, did knowledge that Ironsi was already surrounded by elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion affect efforts to send a Helicopter or the force structure of any potential rescue mission? It appears that, at least in dealings with Ibadan, a decision was made, by omission or commission, to adopt a negotiating rather than fighting attitude to the mutiny.

This is an area which will attract considerable attention of researchers in the future. Some have used it to implicate Gowon in the coup but depending on what other information he had at that point about availability of loyal fighting units, this may be too harsh a conclusion to draw without additional clarification from Gowon himself. He may well have been stalling to allow him time to make alternative plans. Certainly, neither the National Guard company, 2<sup>nd</sup> (in Lagos) nor 4<sup>th</sup> (in Ibadan) battalions nor the garrison at Abeokuta were usable at that point. Even if they were willing, battalions in Enugu, Kaduna and Kano were too far away to be useful, particularly considering the lack of emergency strategic airlift capability. In any case, any thinking along these lines was quickly neutralized by Murtala Muhammed's decision to seize Ikeja airport at dawn. Lastly, Gowon may have viewed Danjuma as the lesser of two evils - the other being an all out effort by mutinying junior officers to get their hands on the General (which is what eventually happened). In retrospect, at that point only a foreign power could have mustered the might to stage a complex night-time military rescue operation to save Ironsi. But there is no evidence that such an option was ever considered.

In any case, when Onoja ran away, TY Danjuma was isolated. With no duty officer on ground, and no other officer from the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion on the premises, the NCOs began to wonder if they should take strange orders from this Major they had never met, wearing a mis-sized American satin combat uniform on top of pyjamas and who wasn't even from their unit. They began to wonder if Danjuma might even be an Igbo officer based on his physique and bearing and perhaps even his reluctance to destroy the building. Fortunately for Danjuma, Lt. Abdullahi Shelleng returned briefly from his checkpoint on Abeokuta road to check on things and persuaded the NCOs to obey him, assuring them that he was a northerner.

Other officers also arrived back on premises as daybreak approached, including “Paiko” himself. Nervous soldiers then appealed directly to Garba Dada (Paiko) to blow up the house but he refused to do so unless Danjuma gave the okay. Danjuma chose to maintain the siege, waiting patiently for the occupants to emerge from the building. The opportunity would come at 8 am when the Governor and Head of State were scheduled to go for official engagements in town. The one curious oversight, though, was that no effort was made to cut off the phone lines at the lodge.

At 6:30 am General Ironsi’s Army ADC, Lt. Sani Bello emerged from the building to find out what was going on. After a brief confrontation with Danjuma and a group of hostile northern NCOs, he was arrested, told to remove his shoes and sit down on the ground. As members of the Head of State’s convoy and delegation began arriving from guest chalets they too were detained and asked to sit on the ground. They include many others like Colonel Olu Thomas, an army physician, and Chief C. O. Lawson, Secretary to the Government, arrested at about 7:30 am.

At this point, Lt. Col. Fajuyi personally emerged from the building. Some accounts claim that his ADC had absconded during the night and switched sides. Danjuma describes his conversation with Fajuyi as follows:

Fajuyi: “Danjuma come. What do you want?”

Danjuma: “I want the Supreme Commander”

Fajuyi: “Promise me that no harm will come to him”

Danjuma: words to the effect that no harm would come to Ironsi and that he was only being arrested.

Fajuyi: “I will go and call him.”

Chorus of northern NCOs: “No, Sir. Don’t allow him to go.”

Danjuma:(talking to Fajuyi who had briefly turned around)“Sir, you see what I have.This is grenade.If there is false move two of us will go.”

At this point Fajuyi led the way into the building with the grenade bearing Danjuma and five armed soldiers (including Lt. Walbe) right behind him, essentially using him as a cover as they climbed the staircase and went upstairs to meet General Ironsi.

Ironsi:“Young man”

Danjuma:“Sir, you are under arrest.”

Ironsi:“What is the matter?”

Danjuma:“The matter is you, Sir.You told us in January when we supported you to quell the mutiny that all the dissident elements that took part in the mutiny will be court-martialled.It is July now.You have done nothing.You kept these boys in prison and the rumours are now that they will be released because they are national heroes.”

Ironsi:“Look, what do you mean? It is not true.”

At this point Ironsi and Danjuma began arguing, with Fajuyi getting in between them and reminding Danjuma again and again of his promise that no harm would come to Ironsi.

Danjuma:“Fajuyi get out of my way. You, just come down.”

Danjuma:(to Ironsi) “....You organized the killing of our brother officers in January and you have done nothing to bring the so called dissident elements to justice because you were part and parcel of the whole thing.”

Ironsi:“Who told you that?You know it is not true.”

Danjuma:“You are lying. You have been fooling us.I ran around risking my neck trying to calm the ranks, and in February you told us that they would be tried.This is July and nothing has been done.You will answer for your actions.”

At this point Danjuma and Lt. Andrew Nwankwo, Ironsi's AirForce ADC, had a fierce verbal exchange, with one holding a grenade with the pin pulled and the other holding a pistol. But with the fingers of five other soldiers on the triggers of automatic weapons, Nwankwo was outgunned.

### ***IRONSI AND FAJUJI ARE KIDNAPPED***

When the group got downstairs, Danjuma instructed the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion adjutant, Lt. Garba Dada ("Paiko"), to arrange for both Fajuyi and Ironsi to be taken to the guest house on the cattle ranch at Mokwa "pending date of full inquiry". Lt. "Paiko", however, informed Danjuma that he was not a party to the commitment he made to Fajuyi (or Gowon) about their safety and a fierce emotional argument erupted between Danjuma and the others. At this point a northern soldier tapped Danjuma on the shoulder with a loaded rifle and, speaking in Hausa, said:

"These foolish young boys. That is the kind of leadership you have given us and messing us up. They killed all your elders and you are still fooling around here. The man you are fooling around here with will disappear before you know it."

The other soldiers agreed with this soldier and pounced on both Ironsi and Fajuyi, wrestling them to restrain any movement. Danjuma, faced with one command crisis after another all night, had finally lost control.

Fajuyi turned to Danjuma and said: "You gave us the assurance."

Danjuma replied: "Yes, Sir. I am sure you will be all right."

He was wrong.

Two landrovers took the captives away while Danjuma hitch-hiked back to the barracks.

Both Ironsi and Fajuyi were squeezed into the front seat of one vehicle while Ironsi's ADCs, Lts. Bello and Nwankwo were behind. Two officers, Lts. Walbe and

Dada, accompanied the group with one joining the driver of the lead vehicle. The command vehicle led another vehicle full of armed troops. Among those soldiers said to have been present include the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion unit RSM Useni Fagge, Sergeant Tijjani (from Maiduguri), Warrant Officer Bako, and other soldiers including Dabang, Wali, and Rabo. Some of those involved were later to come to prominence during the unsuccessful Dimka coup of 1976. (Although Colonel Yohana Madaki (rtd) was at that time an NCO in the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion, there is no evidence that he accompanied the soldiers that took Ironsi away).

They drove to Mile 8 on Iwo road, where the group dismounted and went into the bush, crossing a small stream. Ironsi and Fajuyi were subjected to beatings and interrogation. General Ironsi acted a soldier as he was questioned, refused to be intimidated and remained silent, refusing to confess any role in the January 15 coup. Indeed, according to Elaigwu, “It was reliably learnt from an officer and a soldier on the spot that it was Ironsi’s muteness amidst a barrage of questions that led to his being shot by an angry Northern soldier.” Other sources suggest that the “angry northern soldier” may have been Sergeant Tijjani. Details are murky.

Fajuyi was also shot. Although the western region publication “Fajuyi the Great” published by the Ministry of Information in 1967 after his official burial said he had offered to die rather than “abandon his guest”, those involved in his arrest and assassination insist that he was an even more critical target than Ironsi and made no such offer to die with Ironsi. Lt. Col. William Walbe (rtd) said:

“.....We arrested him as we arrested Ironsi. We suspected him of being party to the January coup. You remember the Battle Group Course which was held at Abeokuta....Fajuyi was the Commander of the Battle Group Course...All those who took part in the January coup were those who had taken part in that course. It gave us the impression that the Battle Course was arranged for the January coup, so he had to suffer it too. I am sorry about that but that is the nature of the life of a military man.....”

General Danjuma confirms this opinion. He says that at another training camp in Kachia commanded by Lt. Col. Fajuyi, Major Nzeogwu rehearsed the assault on Sardauna's house in the presence of some northern mortar officers who did not appreciate the significance of the exercise until after the coup. In Danjuma's words, "The chaps could not stomach Fajuyi such that if there was anybody who should die first, as far as they were concerned, it was Fajuyi, not even Ironsi."

How true are these claims about Fajuyi's role in the January coup? I found an answer in the book "Why we Struck" by Major Adewale Ademoyega, one of the January mutineers and a Yoruba officer like Fajuyi. Ademoyega states that Fajuyi supported the first coup, knew of it and made suggestions to plotters on how it could be best carried out. According to Ademoyega, that he did not actively participate was only as a result of his posting at the time the coup was launched. However, Ademoyega eulogizes the late Colonel for opposing all efforts in the Supreme Military Council to bring the January 15 coupists to trial.

### ***IRONSI'S ADCs ESCAPE***

Major General Ironsi had two ADCs, Army Lt. Sani Bello and Air Force Lt. Andrew Nwankwo. Speaking Hausa, Bello, whose ethnic origin is Kontagora, appealed to 'Lt. Paiko', who was an acquaintance from the same Niger province in the North, to let him and his Igbo colleague off the hook since they were not the targets of the soldiers and were only performing official functions as ADCs.

According to Madiebo:

"While Ironsi was being shot, Nwankwo said he ran into the bush and escaped. He emphasized that his escape was not due to his cleverness, but because his colleague, the Hausa ADC who was also present, wanted him to escape. Nwankwo explained that during the month of June, 1966, he and his Northern colleague had discussed the possibility of another coup. The Northern officer was emphatic the Ibos were going to do it again, but Nwankwo swore it was going to be done by Northerners. According to

him, at the end of a long but heated argument, they came to an agreement that whichever side did it, the man on the winning side should save the other's life. Based on this agreement, the Northern ADC whispered to Nwankwo to escape while Ironsi was being shot, and also discouraged the soldiers from chasing after him. Nwankwo said he later made his way to Lagos and contacted this Northern officer again, who not only hid him for a couple of days, but eventually took him out of Lagos in the boot of a car."

### ***BACK AT THE 4<sup>th</sup> BATTALION***

Later that morning, on Friday July 29, back in the barracks, T/Lt. Col Joe Akahan, Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion, who had essentially been ignored all night by junior officers, tried to reassert control. He (or someone acting in his name) apparently called a meeting of all officers at 10am which Akahan did not attend. By this time, Lt. Pam Nwadkon's Ferret group had arrived from Abeokuta bringing more inciting news about how Igbo soldiers there had been hunted down and killed. At this meeting surviving Igbo soldiers were allegedly rounded up by NCOs and later killed, some say by being packed like sardines into a tailor's shop and then blown up with grenades. The intelligence officer of the battalion, Lt. Jasper, from the delta part of the Midwest, was killed based on an allegation that he had been an informant for senior Igbo officers in Lagos. NNDP detainees at the Ibadan prison were released.

Later in the afternoon around 4 pm, weary from negotiations with rebels at Ikeja, Gowon called from Lagos and spoke to Akahan, seeking to establish the status of the Supreme Commander. Akahan passed the question on to Danjuma who then informed Gowon that Ironsi had been snatched from him by officers of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion. When Danjuma confronted the Battalion adjutant with the same question, he says the adjutant "told me one story after the other. But I saw the officers in twos and threes whispering to each other and it was running to about 7pm."

At this point let me address a pertinent question. Is there any independent corroboration for Danjuma's story that he arrested Ironsi but did not order or partake in his torture and

execution? Yes, at least two. In the book “Power with Civility”, Rear Admiral Ndubuisi Kanu says: “In fairness to Danjuma, his mission was to arrest the Head of State in a bloodless coup, but having accomplished it successfully, he was shoved aside by a mob who had reserved a fatal fate for their captive.” General Gowon (rtd) also confirmed in an interview with Elaigwu that then Major Danjuma was very sad when he later learnt about the deaths of both Ironsi and Fajuyi, having given his word that no harm would come to them.

On Saturday, July 30, T/Lt. Col. Akahan finally came to grips with the situation, albeit temporarily, ordering all soldiers to be disarmed in response to direct orders from Lagos.

But the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion, incidentally the direct descendant of “Glover’s Hausas”, was not done yet. In time it would acquire a reputation as the most unruly battalion in Nigerian history. On August 16, a detachment of the unit staged a raid on the Benin Prison, followed by an all out battalion-wide riot in Ibadan. Later that month when a decision was made to transfer the battalion *en bloc*, now under Major Danjuma’s command, to Kaduna, NCOs and junior officers again went berserk. Using tactics reminiscent of the Japanese in Burma, they went to hospitals all over Kaduna to look for sick Igbo officers, one of whom was killed. Another officer, then Major Alabi (later renamed Alabi-Isama) of the NMTC, who had actually served with the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion before the January coup narrowly escaped back to the Midwest. He was smuggled out of Kaduna by a team of officers led by the Military Governor, Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina.

Detachments of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion deployed to other northern towns continued their acts of lawlessness everywhere they went. Soldiers in the infantry company deployed to Makurdi (under S/Captain Adeniran who replaced T/Major Daramola of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion) were instrumental to the outbreak of systematic killing in September of Igbos fleeing from other parts of the North. It is not for nothing that the vehicle and railway bridge over the River Benue at Makurdi was nick-named the “Red Bridge”. In a pattern established by the preceding unit, easterners (particularly those with low Military or Police style crew hair cut) were allegedly screened out at the Train station, or hunted down in joint Army-Police-Militia house to house searches, then taken to an open field in Makurdi North

where they were allegedly executed. All of these alleged activities could not have escaped the attention of the local Police Special Branch officer, then ASP Shettima, but it is unclear what steps were taken by authorities to bring the situation under control, assuming they were even aware of what was going on. Those easterners who escaped the Makurdi railway bottleneck had to contend with molestation and looting by rural opportunists along the Makurdi-Otukpo road, if they thought going by road was safer. If they escaped that, they had to survive a final checkpoint at Otukpo, allegedly manned by one Lt. Obeya.

In addition to hair style, all sorts of criteria were used to screen out those marked for execution. Soldiers or Policemen who were multilingual would speak English or vernacular to the “suspect” and then listen for tell-tale accents in the way certain words were pronounced. Another popular screening method was one’s tribal marks. Yorubas with large tribal marks would often be jokingly referred to as “Akintola” and let go. Not to have obvious identifiable tribal marks, however, was an invitation to trouble, which is how many got killed, whether they were Igbo or not – including some local Idoma and Tiv people, merely on account of their physical features. It used to be quite effective for some time for southerners without prominent tribal marks to escape by claiming they were from “Benin” in the Midwest, until the soldiers began demanding that the alleged “Benin people” speak or sing in the Edo language. But there were other ways one could get into difficulty. For example, not even the Benue Provincial Police Officer, Mr. Agbajor, an Itsekiri from the Midwest, was safe. He barely escaped ambush at the Makurdi club after attracting attention to himself by driving around in a car with license plate number EW 1, which stood for ‘East, Owerri, 1’. Agbajor was to come to public attention again, when, in August/September 1967 he agreed to serve the short-lived Biafran administration in the Midwest as Chief of Police. His career in the Nigerian Police ended shortly thereafter.

About 5 days after their deaths, the corpses of Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi and Lt. Col. Fajuyi were retrieved by the Police Special Branch (including CSP J. D. Gomwalk) from a makeshift grave near the town of Lalupon outside Ibadan and transferred to the Military cemetery where they were specially marked for future identification. It was not until after

the Aburi conference in January 1967 that their deaths were announced (by Lt. Col Ojukwu), following a pattern that had originally been established by General Ironsi. Ironsi refused to announce the deaths of or allow official funerals for most of the victims of the January coup (including his military colleagues) throughout his six month long regime.

After yet another exhumation, however, General Ironsi was finally reburied with full military honours at Umuahia on January 20, 1967 while a few days later Lt. Col Fajuyi was reburied at Ado-Ekiti.

### ***CASUALTIES OF JULY 29, 1966 REBELLION AND AFTERMATH***

According to an Eastern Regional Government publication titled "January 15: Before and After; No. WT/1003/3674/40,000, 1967", the casualty list of the counter-rebellion included 33 Eastern, 7 Midwestern, and 3 Western Officers and 153 Eastern, 14 Midwestern and 3 Western Other ranks. Of the 33 Eastern officer deaths, there was one Major General, one Lt. Col, nine Majors, eleven Captains, eight Lts. and three 2/Lts. The Midwest lost one Lt. Col, two Majors, two Lts, and two 2/Lts. The West lost one Lt. Col and two 2/Lts. Of the 153 Eastern other ranks who died, eleven were Warrant Officers, twelve Staff Sergeants, thirty Sergeants, twenty five Corporals, twenty-two Lance Corporals and fifty three Privates. The Midwest lost one Warrant Officer, six Staff Sergeants, four Sergeants, two Corporals, and one Lance Corporal. The West lost one Warrant Officer and two Staff Sergeants.

The grand military total, according that report, was 213 casualties. However, names of newly trained or single soldiers who were killed could not be ascertained, so the figures will always remain an estimate. In any case the Eastern list was contested by the Federal Government and to this day no-one has publicly confirmed the full reconciled list of all those who lost their lives. Most observers, though, feel the list provided by the Eastern regional Government was as close to the truth as any list will ever get. Pensions and gratuities have been paid over the years to many families. Indeed those spouses who did not remarry and maintained their dignity as widows continued to be supported for many years. In special cases children were awarded special scholarships up to University level.

Over the years, I have been able to gather a list of the officers who were confirmed killed. It includes two names (Musa and Drummond) missing from the Eastern list and excludes two names^ on the Eastern list (Ibik and Waribor):

1) Major Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi`

2) Lt. Col. F.A. Fajuyi`

3) Lt. Col. I.C. Okoro

4) T/Lt Col G. Okonweze

5) Major Christian Anuforo~

6) Major Donatus O. Okafor ~

7) Major T.E. Nzegwu(NAF) `

8) Major J.K. Obieniu`

9) Major Ibanga Ekanem

10) Major P.C. Obi(NAF)

11) T/Major C.C. Emelifonwu

12) T/Major B. Nnamani

13) T /Major J.O.C. Ihedigbo

14) T/Major O.U. Isong

15) T/Major A. Drummond

16) T/Major A.D. Ogunro

17) Capt. J.I. Chukwueke

- 18)Capt. H.A. Iloputaife
- 19)Capt. A.O. Akpet
- 20)Capt. S.E. Maduabum
- 21)Capt. G.N.E. Ugoala
- 22)T/CaptP.C. Okoye
- 23)T/Capt. I.U. Idika
- 24)T/Capt. L.C. Dilibe
- 25)T/Capt. J.U. Egere
- 26)T/Capt. T.O. Iweanaya+
- 27)T/Capt. H.A. Auna
- 28)T/Capt. R.I. Agbazue
- 29)Lt. G. Mbabie
- 30)Lt. S.E. Idowu
- 31)Lt. E.C.N. Achebe
- 32)Lt. S.A. Mbadiwe
- 33)Lt. F.P. Jasper+
- 34)Lt. P.D. Ekedingyo+
- 35)Lt. S.E. Onwuke+
- 36)Lt. J.D. Ovuezurie+

37)Lt. A.D.C. Egbuna

38)Lt. E.B. Orok

39)Lt. J.U. Ugbe

40)Lt. Francis Musa\*

41)2/LtA.O. Olaniyan

42)2/Lt. A.R.O. Kasaba

43)2/Lt. F.M. Agronaye+

44)2/Lt. P.K. Onyeneho+

#### NOTES:

\*Some of the names here (like Musa) appear northern in origin but are actually names of Igbo officers who had joined the Army using northern names.

~Active participant in January mutiny

˘ Major T.E. Nzegwu was the airforce officer allegedly approached to help organize a plane (along with Captain Udejaja) to fetch Chief Awolowo from Prison in the event that the January 15 coup should succeed. Major John Obienu is alleged by Major Ademoyega to have initially agreed to take part in the January coup but changed his mind at the last minute. Although there was a rumor that it was Obienu who tipped Ironsi off about the January plot, Ironsi himself said he found out about the mutiny from the wife of Lt. Col. James Pam (some say Pam himself) when he returned home between 2 and 3 am on January 15 from a second party following the earlier one at Brigadier Maimalari's house. Others claim it was either Lt. Col. Ojukwu (CO, 5<sup>th</sup> Bn) and/or Hilary Njoku (outgoing CO, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn) that tipped Ironsi off, having been directly contacted themselves by the conspirators. Lt. Col. Fajuyi is confirmed by one of the January 15 plotters (Ademoyega) to have provided ideas on how it should be carried out although he did not

take part directly. Ademoyega also confirms that both Ojukwu and Njoku had foreknowledge of the January plot, and says that all his efforts to be entrusted with the arrest and/or neutralization of General Ironsi were resisted by Major Ifeajuna, who opted instead to allot that sensitive task to Major Okafor. Captain Nwobosi says that there was poor operational security at Major Ifeajuna's house when Lagos plotters met for final orders before "H hour", opening up a window of opportunity for Ironsi and perhaps others to be alerted.

+2/Lt Agronaye is not reflected on the Eastern List. Instead a similar name, spelled differently as 2/Lt. Agbonaye is listed. T/Capt. T.O. Iweanaya is also spelled differently as Capt. T.O. Iweanya on some versions of the Eastern list. Lt. S.E. Onwuke is spelled Lt. S.E. Onwukwe on the Eastern list. Lt. F.P. Jasper is identified as 2/Lt. F. P. Jasper and said to be from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn in Kaduna on the Eastern list. However, federal sources place this officer in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Ibadan, as a full Lt.. In fact the eastern list does not identify any officer casualty whatsoever from within the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion, Ibadan which can't be true. Lt. P.D. Ekedingyo is spelled Lt. P.D. Ekediyon on the Eastern list. Lt. J. D. Ovuezurie is spelled Lt. J. D. Ovuezirion on the Eastern list.

^Lts. P. O. Ibik and K. D. Waribor are listed on the Eastern list of casualties of the July counter-rebellion, but not on my list because I have not been able to confirm the date and circumstances of their alleged deaths in the July counter-rebellion and after. However, according to the Special Branch report, 2/Lt. P. Ogoegbunam Ibik of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Squadron, Nigerian Army Engineers occupied the P & T Telephone Exchange under the supervision of Captain Ben Gbulie during Kaduna operations on the night of January 15, 1966. 2/Lt. K.D. Waribor of the "C" Coy, 3rd BN NA played a peripheral role securing the outer perimeter in the assault on the Nassarawa Lodge in Kaduna, as well as the attempt to arrest Alhaji Makaman Bida on the same night – during which Ahmadu Pategi, a Government driver was killed. They were, therefore, likely detained by General Ironsi unless they escaped (as Ifeajuna - initially - and Nwokedi did). Strangely, neither officer was *ever* listed on either the Federal or Eastern region lists of officers detained for alleged complicity in the January coup – supporting the "escape" theory, unless they were killed soon after that mutiny in circumstances similar to the

deaths of 2/Lt Odu and Major Adegoke. It is also possible that Ibik's case was handled like those of other 2 Field Engineer subalterns like 2/Lts. S.E. Omeruah, Ezedima, Ileabachi, Atom Kpera and Harrison Eghagha who all claimed they were merely obeying "internal security" operational orders, the illegal significance of which they were unaware. However, the Eastern region list of detainees was not complete because Major Ademoyega, for example, was never listed as a detainee when, in fact, he was. He had been transferred from an eastern prison to Warri in the Midwest. The dynamics of updating Prison lists as detainees were being moved around may have affected the accuracy of various lists. What is clear, however, is that if they were either at the Abeokuta or Benin Prisons in the weeks following the July 29 mutiny, they are very likely now dead. However, all said and done, the most accurate thing one can say about Lts. P. O. Ibik and K. D. Waribor is that they are unaccounted for.

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### ***POST-SCRIPT***

The officers (and civilians) who planned and carried out the January 15 and July 29 1966 military rebellions have never been tried or convicted before any military court-martial although there was an agreement at Aburi that this should occur. This, as we know, was overtaken by events leading up to and including the Nigerian Civil War.

The only exception made among the January 15 group was for those surviving officers who not only took part in the January 1966 coup but also participated in the Biafran invasion of the Midwestern region in August/September 1967. Most officers in this overlapping group were brought before a Military Board of Inquiry, jailed until October 1974, and all – except Lts. J.C. Ojukwu and Ijeweze (?Igweze) who were retired - eventually dismissed. They include Major A. Ademoyega, Captain Ben Gbulie, Capt. E. M. Udejaja, Lt. F.M. Okocha, Lt. B.A.O. Oyewole, Lt. N.S. Nwokocha, Lt. G.B. Ikejiofor, Lt. G. G. Onyefuru, Lt. A.R.O. Egbikor, Lt. A. N. Azubuogu, and 2/Lt. C.G. Ngwuluka. Interestingly, prominent surviving January 15 mutineers like Captain Emmanuel Nwobosi (rtd), who did not take part in the Midwest invasion, but played other roles in the civil war (as a Colonel in the Biafran Army, Field Commander and later

Chief of Staff in General Ojukwu's HQ) were spared in a general amnesty covering both the January and July 1966 rebellions.

What used to be known as Race Course in Lagos was renamed Tafawa Balewa Square after the late PM. A prominent street in Jos is also named after him. The street in Victoria Island, Lagos, straddling the Bar Beach, is named after the late Sir Ahmadu Bello. A prominent street in Kaduna is also named after him. Streets in Lagos (Ikeja) and Abuja are named after Samuel Ladoke Akintola, late Premier of the West.

When he came to power in 1975, late General Murtala Muhammed- coup leader of the July 1966 uprising - went to great lengths to look after the family of the late Major General Aguiyi Ironsi. In 1993, General Ibrahim Babangida - a participant in the July 1966 revolt - named an Army Barrack after the late General and post-humously awarded him the Great Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR). A street in Abuja was also named after him. A Barrack in Abuja is also named after Ironsi's successor, General Yakubu Gowon (rtd). The International Airport in Lagos is named after General Muhammed while the one in Abuja is named after former President Nnamdi Azikiwe, and the one in Kano after late Malam Aminu Kano.

Some streets in Lagos (Ikeja) and Ibadan are named after the late Lt. Col. F. Fajuyi. The Barracks where the Headquarters of the Nigerian Army Armored Corps and School is based in Bauchi is named after Major John Obienu. NAF Majors Nzegwu and Obi have names of streets within certain Air Force Bases named after them. In 2001, President Obasanjo, on the other hand, named certain streets and monuments in Abuja, Nigeria's new capital, after the military officers who were assassinated during mutiny-coup of January 15, 1966 - a long overdue gesture. In a separate essay, I shall preview the outcome of the lives of some of the key players in the January and July 1966 rebellions.

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PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Personal Communication: Dr. Humphrey Idemudia Idehen (former personal Physician to the President of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe).

Personal Communication: Antony Goldman (former Financial Times of London Correspondent) and biographer for Major General Shehu Yar'Adua (rtd).

Personal Communication: Brigadier S.O. Ogbemudia (rtd), former Brigade Major, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, Kaduna.

Personal Communication: Lt. Col. M.O. Nzefili (rtd), former Commander, 4<sup>th</sup> battalion, Ibadan.

Personal Communication: Lt. Col. A. Keshi (rtd), former Brigade Major, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, Kaduna

Personal Communication: Serving and retired military officers and Non-Commissioned Officers (Unnamed by request)

## ***APPENDIX I***

### **BROADCAST BY LT. COL. YAKUBU GOWON, AUGUST 1, 1966**

'No Trust or Confidence in a Unitary System of Government': Lt.-Col. Gowon's Broadcast on the Assumption of Office, 1 August 1966

This is Lt-Col. Y. Gowon, Army Chief of Staff, speaking to you.

My fellow countrymen, the year 1966 has certainly been a fateful year for our beloved country, Nigeria. I have been brought to the position today of having to shoulder the great responsibilities of this country and the armed forces with the consent of the majority of the members of the Supreme Military Council as a result of the unfortunate incident that occurred on the early morning of 29<sup>th</sup> July 1966.

However, before I dwell on the sad issue of 29<sup>th</sup> July 1966, I would like to recall to you the sad and unfortunate incidents of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966 which bear relevance. According

to certain well-known facts, which have so far not been disclosed to the nation and the world, the country was plunged into a national disaster by the grave and unfortunate action taken by a section of the Army against the public. By this I mean that a group of officers, in conjunction with certain civilians, decided to overthrow the legal government of the day; but their efforts were thwarted by the inscrutable discipline and loyalty of the great majority of the Army and the other members of the armed forces and the police. The Army was called upon to take up the reins of government until such time that law and order had been restored. The attempt to overthrow the government of the day was done by eliminating political leaders and high-ranking Army officers, a majority of whom came from a particular section of the country. The Prime Minister lost his life during this uprising. But for the outstanding discipline and loyalty of the members of the Army who were most affected, and the other members of the armed forces and the police, the situation probably could have degenerated into a civil war.

There followed a period of determined effort of reconstruction ably shouldered by Maj-Gen. J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi but, unfortunately, certain parties caused suspicion and grave doubts of the Government's sincerity in several quarters. Thus, coupled with the already unpleasant experience of the 15<sup>th</sup> January still fresh in the minds of the majority of the people, certain parts of the country decided to agitate against the military regime which had hitherto enjoyed country-wide support. It was, unfortunately, followed by serious rioting and bloodshed in many cities and towns in the north.

There followed a period of uneasy calm until the early hours of 29<sup>th</sup> July 1966, when the country was once again plunged into another very serious and grave situation, the second in seven months. The position on the early morning of 29<sup>th</sup> July was a report from Abeokuta garrison, that there was a mutiny and that two senior and one junior officers from a particular section of the country were killed. This soon spread to Ibadan and Ikeja. More casualties were reported in these places. The Supreme Commander was by this time at Ibadan attending the natural rulers' conference and was due to return on the afternoon of 29<sup>th</sup> July. The Government Lodge was reported attacked and the last report was that he and the West Military Governor were both kidnapped by some soldiers. Up till now, there is no confirmation of their whereabouts. The situation was soon brought under control in

these places. Very shortly afterward, at about the same time, there was a report that there were similar disturbances among the troops in the North, and that a section of the troops had taken control of all military stations in the North as well. The units of Enugu and the garrison at Benin were not involved. All is now quiet and I can assure the public that I shall do all in my power to stop any further bloodshed and to restore law, order and confidence in all parts of the country with your co-operation and goodwill.

I have now come to the most difficult part, or the most important part, of this statement. I am doing it, conscious of the great disappointment and heartbreak it will cause all true and sincere lovers of Nigeria and of Nigerian unity both at home and abroad, especially our brothers in the Commonwealth.

As a result of the recent events and the other previous similar ones, I have come to strongly believe that we cannot honestly and sincerely continue in this wise, as the basis of trust and confidence in our unitary system of government has not been able to stand the test of time. I have already remarked on the issues in question. Suffice to say that, putting all considerations to test-political, economic, as well as social-the base for unity is not there or is so badly rocked, not only once but several times. I therefore feel that we should review the issue of our national standing and see if we can help stop the country from drifting away into utter destruction. With the general consensus of opinion of all the Military Governors and other members of the Supreme and Executive Council, a decree will soon be issued to lay a firm foundation of this objective. Fellow countrymen, I sincerely hope we shall be able to resolve most of the problems that have disunited us in the past and really come to respect and trust one another in accordance with an all-round code of good conduct and etiquette.

All foreigners are assured of their personal safety and should have no fear of being molested.

I intend to continue the policy laid down in the statement by the Supreme Commander on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1966 published on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1966.

We shall also honour all international treaty obligations and commitments and all financial agreements and obligations entered into by the previous government. We are desirous of maintaining good diplomatic relationships with all countries. We therefore consider any foreign interference in any form will be regarded as an act of aggression.

All members of the armed forces are requested to keep within their barracks except on essential duties and when ordered from SHQ. Troops must not terrorise the public, as such action will discredit the new National Military Government. Any act of looting or sabotage will be dealt with severely. You are to remember that your task is to help restore law and order and confidence in the public in time of crisis.

I am convinced that with your co-operation and understanding, we shall be able to pull the country out of its present predicament. I promise you that I shall do all I can to return to civil rule as soon as it can be arranged. I also intend to pursue most vigorously the question of the release of political prisoners. Fellow countrymen, give me your support and I shall endeavour to live up to expectations. Thank you.

Source:A. H. M. Kirk-Greene.Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary SourceBook.(Volume I; Oxford University Press, 1971)

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## **APPENDIX II**

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### Explanation of Ranks

Ranks of officers changed over time.The format used was the *Nigerian* rank an officer or non-commissioned officer was wearing *at the time* a given event occurred.For example, Hassan Katsina and M.O. Nzefili were Majors in January 1966, and Lt. Cols. by July 1966.Hassan Katsina retired as a Major General in 1975.Yakubu Gowon was a Lt. Col in January and July 1966, a Major General by July 1967 and a General in 1975.Garba Duba was a Lt. in July 1966, a Colonel in 1979, and is now a retired Lt. Gen.Yohana Madaki

was an NCO in 1966 but is now a retired Colonel.Lt. W. Walbe was a Lt. in July 1966 but retired as a Lt. Col. in 1975.Murtala Muhammed was a T/Major in January 1966, a T/Lt. Col by July 1966 and a General in 1976.Martin Adamu was a Captain in July 1966 but retired in 1977 as a Major General.Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma was a T/Major in July 1966 but retired as a Lt. Gen in 1979.There are many other examples.

I did not use *Biafran* ranks.Note, however, that Lt. Col. H. Njoku (rtd) was a Brigadier and first Commander of the *Biafran* Army.An unconfirmed account says he was on the verge of being promoted to the rank of Brigadier in the *Nigerian* Army by General Ironsi when the July coup took place.Lt. Col. C. O. Ojukwu was a General in that army.However, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was dismissed from the *Nigerian* Army in June 1967, which is why he is addressed as “Chief” Odumegwu Ojukwu in the *Nigerian* Army Archives.Captain E.N. Nwobosi (rtd) was a Colonel in the *Biafran* Army.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

"Aure" - A Hausa word for "marriage"

AG- Action Group, led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo

ASP- Assistant Superintendent of Police

Bn – Battalion. Two or more companies. Cavalry and aviation refer to this as a "squadron".

Bde: Brigade. Two or more battalions. Usually commanded by a Brigadier or Senior Colonel.

Corps: Two or more divisions. Usually commanded by a Lt. Gen. (Note the use of the word "Corps" here is different from the ordinary usage in the Nigerian Army - which uses it to refer to professional groupings of specialized teeth, support and service arms e.g. Infantry, Artillery, Ordnance, Engineers, Signals, Medical, Finance, Supply and Transport etc...)

BYM - Borno Youth Movement

Div: Division. Two or more brigades. A division has between 12,500 and 25,000 troops. Usually commanded by a Maj. Gen.

DSP – Deputy Superintendent of Police

GOC – General Officer Commanding

IG – Inspector General

NCNC – National Council of Nigerian Citizens, led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe

NDC - Niger Delta Congress, led by Chief Dappa Diriye

NEPU – Northern Elements Progressive Union, led by Alhaji Aminu Kano

NNA – Nigerian National Alliance, including the NPC, NNDC, NDC and their surrogates

NNDP - Nigerian National Democratic Party, led by late Chief Akintola, a split off from the AG

NPC – Northern Peoples Congress, led by Sir Ahmadu Bello

PM – Prime Minister

UPGA – United Progressive Grand Alliance (an alliance of the AG, NCNC, UMBC, NEPU and BYM)

(rtd) – retired

UMBC – United Middle Belt Congress, led by Joseph Tarka

NAF – Nigerian Air Force

NN – Nigerian Navy

NA – Nigerian Army

QNR – Queens Nigeria Regiment

DAQMG - Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General

BM – Brigade Major

ADC – Aide-de-Camp

C-in-C – Commander-in-Chief

Officers Mess - A rest and recreation center for the exclusive use of

officers

NMTC – Nigerian Military Training College (the precursor to NDA)

Mutiny - Insurrection against constituted authority, particularly military or naval authority; concerted revolt against the rules of discipline or the lawful commands of a superior officer; hence, generally, forcible resistance to rightful authority; insubordination. [Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913)]

Coup - a sudden and decisive change of government illegally or by force [synonym: coup d'Etat, putsch, takeover] (<http://www.dict.org>) ALSO, a sudden, decisive exercise of power whereby the existing government is subverted without the consent of the people; an unexpected measure of state, more or less violent; a stroke of policy. [Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913)]

2ic – Second in Command

HQ – Headquarters

SHQ – Supreme Headquarters

AHQ – Army Headquarters

SMC – Supreme Military Council

COS – Chief of Staff

Chief of Staff (COS) - the senior officer of a service of the armed forces. In Nigeria of 1966 it meant the officer responsible for coordinating staff matters on behalf of the Supreme Commander for a given service like the Army. The title does not have the same degree of power and latitude as a Chief of Army Staff (COAS), which is why it was derisively regarded as the Supreme Commander's 'Chief Clerk'.

ONUC – United Nations Operation in the Congo

MTO – Motor Transport Officer

Acting Rank. Assumes the salary and benefits appropriate to the acting rank, but appropriate authorities may order the holder to revert to previous rank held. For example, Brigadier Ironsi was an *acting* Major General as Commander of ONUC from January to June 1964

Local Rank. Temporary unpaid rank, usually made for a specific operation in a specific area.

Substantive Rank.(S) Fully remunerated confirmed permanent rank. e.g.S/Major – Substantive Major

Temporary Rank. (T.) Rank granted for a short period, usually for a specific task or mission or to allow a junior officer assume higher command responsibilities.e.g. T/Major – Temporary Major.When Murtala Muhammed was promoted to T/Lt. Col. and Inspector of Signals in May 1966 he was actually an S/Captain.

CO:Commanding officer

Other ranks – Ranks other than Officer ranks. It includes NCOs , Lance Corporals and Privates.

NCO – Non-commissioned officer is a slang term for a Sergeant. However, it also refers to all ‘other ranks’ *above* Lance Corporal and below Lieutenant. It may also mean a subordinate officer not appointed by a commission from the chief executive or supreme authority of the State; but by the Secretary of War or by the commanding officer of the regiment. [Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913)]

RSM – Regimental Sergeant Major (the most senior NCO in a battalion or regiment)

Subaltern - A commissioned military officer below the rank of Captain [Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913)]

Company Grade Officer – A commissioned military officer holding the ranks of 2/ Lieutenant, Lieutenant, or Captain. (Note that in 1966, because of officer manpower imbalance at lower levels, Lieutenants, who ordinarily command platoons, used to command companies in some battalions)

Field-Grade Officer - An officer holding the rank of Major or Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel

General Officer – An officer holding the ranks of Brigadier (one star), Major General (two stars), Lieutenant General (three stars), General (four stars) or Field Marshal (five stars).

Int – Intelligence

GSO – General Staff Officer

Recce – Reconnaissance

Arty – Artillery

Squadron – can be either:

1: A cavalry (armored) unit consisting of two or more troops and headquarters and supporting arms

2: An air force unit larger than a flight and smaller than a group

3: A naval unit that is detached from the fleet for a particular task

Troop – means a group of soldiers, but is more often used to refer to a cavalry (armored) unit corresponding to an infantry company. It can consist of 3-4 armored vehicles.

Company – means a small infantry military unit; usually two or three Platoons, probably 100 men or less, commanded by a Major or senior Captain. Artillery refers to this as a "battery", while cavalry and aviation units call it a "troop".

Platoon - a military unit that is a subdivision of a company; usually has a headquarters and two or more squads (sections); usually commanded by a lieutenant. Typically 24-36 men.

PT - Physical Training.

Recoilless rifle – A recoilless weapon is designed to minimize recoil. The M40A1 106mm Recoilless Rifle Rocket Launcher was developed during the Korean War and used by U.S. Marines in Vietnam. US refusal in early 1967 to supply ammunition for the 106mm recoilless rifles they had earlier sold Nigeria badly affected US-Nigerian relations when the civil war broke out.

“Glover’s Hausas” – A nickname for the constabulary force formed in 1863 to police the colony, protect British traders, and handle some raids into the hinterland. This nickname originated from the fact that Lt. Glover of the Royal Navy whose exploration ship got wrecked near Jebba on the River Niger picked up a band of run away Hausa slaves and employed them as a security force as he made his way back to the coast over Yoruba land. This unit was the ancestor of what later became the 4th Battalion of the Nigerian Army at Letmauk Barracks, Ibadan during the first republic.

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## ***RANKS IN THE NIGERIAN ARMY (adapted from British Army)***

### Officers.

- Field Marshal (No Nigerian has ever attained this rank)
- General
- Lieutenant General
- Major General
- Brigadier
- Colonel
- Lieutenant Colonel
- Major
- Captain
- Lieutenant
- Second Lieutenant.

### Other Ranks

- Warrant Officer Class 1 (senior NCO)
- Warrant Officer Class 2 (senior NCO)
- Staff Sergeant (NCO)
- Sergeant (NCO)
- Corporal (junior NCO)
- Lance Corporal
- Private

### Miscellaneous Ranks

The following ranks or appointments have been used on and off in the Nigerian Army:

1. Brigadier General, is the US equivalent of a Brigadier
  2. Gunner, means a Private in the Artillery
  3. Bombardier, means a Corporal in the Artillery
  4. Lance Bombardier, means a Lance Corporal in the Artillery
5. Sergeant Major, can be a Warrant Officer Class 1 or Class 2