

OGBOMOSO DEVELOPMENT FORUM (ODF)



**"OGBOMOSOLAND HEROES:
BRIG. GEN. BENJAMIN ADESANYA
MAJA ADEKUNLE(rtd), THE UNSUNG PATRIOT**

BY

ENGR. (DR) V.O.S. OLUNLOYO, OON
*FORMER EXECUTIVE GOVERNOR, OLD OYO STATE
ENGINEER, MATHEMATICIAN & POLITICIAN*

Held at
LAUTECH, OGBOMOSO,
NIGERIA



On
SATURDAY 11TH
APRIL, 2009

**AT THE GRAND RECEPTION ARRANGED UNDER THE AUSPICES
OF OGBOMOSO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (OCF)**

Introduction

OF

THE GUEST LECTURER

ENGR. (DR) V. O. S. OLUNLOYO, OON

Former Executive Governor Old, Oyo State of Nigeria.

By

COL. DANIELAKINTONDE (RTD)

Former Military Governor, Ogun State, Nigeria

Your Royal Majesty, Kabiyesi, Soun of Ogbomosoland,
Other Royal Majesties hereby present,
The Asiwaju of Ogbomosoland Chief Sunday Adebayo Adewusi GCFR,
Chairman, Ogbomoso Community Foundation,
Chairman, Ogbomoso Development Forum,
Chairman of today's occasion, General Oladayo Popoola,
Chairman, of other Ogbomoso Societies, in particular the umbrella body Ogbomoso
Parapo Worldwide, Ajilete etc and the other dignitaries on the high table,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the planning stage, we had a tough time deciding on the guest lecturer, my thinking was on the fact that how can Dr. Olunloyo agree to give this lecture celebrating a soldier, Dr. Ladipo immediately assured us that he believes in outstanding people what ever it may be their area of activity except corruption or in unfair trickery or mischief.

Today, we are celebrating a true son of the soil, a field tested soldier and a war genius. The Ogbomoso Development Forum has carefully developed this title around our celebrant Brigadier General Adekunle. The title of the Lecture is:

OGBOMOSOLAND HEROES:

BRIGADIER GENERAL BENJAMIN ADESANYA MAJA ADEKUNLE (Rtd)

The Unsung Patriot.

Like the subject of the title, Dr. Omololu Olunloyo is no doubt the fittest available to deal

with this title. This is so because, a subject like this, requires in depth research, and a critical review in the light of the circumstance of today's Nigeria. Dr. Omololu Olunloyo is no stranger to such an assignment. He falls in the class of Wole Soyinka, Professor Awojobi and their likes.

He is a genius who has shown his mettle in Mathematics, Engineering and Public Administration. If we go back to his days as a student in St Andrews University in Scotland, it will gladden our hearts to know that like the Nigeria Medical genius Dr. Akinola Maja, Dr. Olunloyo got an unarguable First Class in E":engineering and Obtained 5 gold medals in Mechanical Engineering and Engineering mathematics. For this, he was honoured by Her majesty the Queen of England Elizabeth II. He proceeded to his PHD and passed with distinction. He, in fact made the black race, Africa and Nigeria proud in Scotland. In 1962, after his return, he was made the Commissioner for Economic Planning and Community Development. Also in 1967 and 1971, he was reappointed commissioner for Education and later Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs. In 1983, he became the Executive Governor of Oyo State, a position he held before the military took over. If you, our late Alhaji Olatunji Mohammed was his deputy while Alhaji (Dr) Saka Balogun was his Commissioner for Finance. Today, he will deliver the first lecture in the series on **Ogbomoso heroes**, a series established by the Ogbomoso Development Forum (ODF). Up till today, we have seen outstanding delivery in all subjects he has ever handled. Without doubt, Kabiyesis, Distinguished guests, sit back and enjoy this lecture given by a genius, in honour of a genius in the like of Brigadier General Benjamin Adekunle (Rtd), the Ashipa of Ogbomosoland.

Thank you ...

ALL PROTOCOLS DEEMED DULY OBSERVED

My Lords Spiritual, my Lords Temporal, Your Royal Majesty, Soun of Ogbomosoland, Oba Alayeluwa, Oba (Dr.) Jimoh Oladunni Oyewumi, Ajagungbade III, heavyweights and juggernauts of Nigeria's past, present and future, distinguished ladies and gentlemen here present. You are all welcome to this unique celebration of a folk hero and a Nigerian icon. He is a famous person whom many people admire, respect and see as a symbol of excellence. Benjy, as he is often fondly called, has proved himself to be a soldiers' soldier to all and sundry in this country. Excellence can certainly be attained in any field of human endeavour. Adekunle has attained this in soldiering. In a way this is hardly surprising.

To appreciate his talents and success, you must have a close look at his background. His father is Yoruba, Ogbomoso. His mother is Bachama from the sugar growing Numan in Adamawa. The Bachamas are noted for their fighting abilities. Traditional Yoruba history has it that Ogbomoso has always 'produced an almost continuous stream of iconic leaders and natural high fliers in virtually every field of human enterprise. I have repeatedly pointed this out in the past.

Such people include Professor Oyerinde, Professor Ayandele, Premier S. L. Akintola and his children, Air Force Head Alao, Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Federal and State Legislators, the redoubtable former Inspector General of Police, Sunday Adewusi, Military Governors and MILADS like General Oladayo Popoola, Akintonde, Ibrahim Taiwo. So also are the old guards like Federal Minister Oladejo Adigun, N. A. Adibi, Victor Lajide, the first Asiwaju of Ogbomosoland. Along with all these comes a surprise, the incomparable Herbert Macaulay is also partly from Ogbomoso. Chief S. A. Ogundipe, Magistrate Adeniran Atiba of the Lagos judiciary, Alagba, Joseph Ladipo of Hadeija Road, Kaduna, who was for over 25 years the Baale of the Yorubas in Kaduna, Baba Olopa Emmanuel Lawuyi Ladipo, first Nigerian policeman in Ogbomoso and Inspector of Police, Reverend J. Adediran, Mr. Samuel Akinwale Oduntan, Ghana Police and later Nigeria Police, Chief E. L. Gbenro Laogun, as well as a colourful bevy of PLOs, Chief of Staff, Permanent Secretaries, SSGs, etc. Vice Admiral Akinwale Wey is also another Ogbomoso gem.

I have also had cause to point to the rise of a new constellation, including Christopher Adebayo Alao-Akala when he was Chairman, Ogbomoso North Local Government at the funeral of my late Deputy, Alhaji Olatunji Mohammed. As to the topmost warrior class in northern Yorubaland, Samuel Johnson's '**History of the Yoruba**' shows that the largest contingent of holders of the coveted and dreaded Aare Ona Kakanfo come from Ogbomoso. Here we remember the likes of Toyeye, Ojo Abunimaku and Ladoke Akintola, Ajala Agbe, omo Jalodo. Ogbomoso people litter West Africa being in large numbers in Jos, Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire.

To be sure, there are very many great and good features of our wonderful country christened 'NIGERIA' by Lady Lugard. We sometimes derisively call it 'NAIJA.' Good people. Great Nation. Dora Akunyili knows she cannot replace hard work, honesty and solid achievement with a BIG LIE in a Gobbelian style. Advertisement in most cultures deemed low-level economic activity. It does not produce. It publicizes what others produce. Propaganda is

about psychological warfare. No amount of re-branding would turn plonk into fine wine. A good wine needs no bush. A rose by any name will smell sweet. In most African and other economically less developed parts of the world, there is mutual distrust between the military and civilians. The military who incidentally are usually trained very carefully; often allude to us civilians as 'bloody civilians' who in turn tend to see military personnel as zombies.

Now, much or even all of this is derogatory and must be condemned in no uncertain terms. It happens that in the last six thousand five hundred (6500) years, there seem to have been only 292 devoid of war. Defense and protection is a very essential aspect of modern nation building. War is in man's blood. It almost always starts from the mind of men.

Was it not Karl von Clausewitz who made the famous statement that war is continuation of politics by other means? Plato, centuries earlier asserted that man is a political animal. War thus seems an essential feature of man in society. Both when we were young and later when we were no longer so young, as Professor Saburi Biobaku (121) would say, we came across a lot about wars that excited us. The war of Jen'in's ear, Battle of Zama (202 BC), Retreat and the nine days of Dunkirk, the Winston Churchill speeches of World War II, widespread Japanese at rockets in the far East, the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Korean war, Ticonderoga, Somme (1916), Nigerian, Hannibal crossing the Alps with elephants, the near tactical perfection in the battle of Cannae, the Trojan Horse episode, Napoleon in Jerusalem, Rommel and Monty in the Western desert, Adolf Hitler's exploits in Czechoslovakia, Poland, France and the low countries, Julius Caesar in Gaul and Britannia, Horatio Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar, the Spanish Armada, Pirates rogues and rascals like Hawkins raiding the Spanish Main for gold, silver, spices and whatever, Clive in India, Douglas MacArthur, D. D. Eisenhower, the ultimate and out of this world Japanese ambush of the Americans at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 under Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto of the Navy and Vice Admiral Chukichi Nagumo of the Air force, King Henry V at Agincourt, Battle of Hastings, Dardanelles, General Giap at Dien Bien Phu teaching the French at Indo-China and later the American in Vietnam (same place, same lesson), the essence of extended guerrilla warfare and Vietcong pedal bicycle tactics.

All these and more, excited, impressed and inspired us. How can one forget Stalingrad! One relishes till today Hitler's stupid repetition in 1941 of a major error made by Napoleon in 1812 crossing overland over to Russia in very cold winter. The Russian classical music genius, Tchaikovsky, wrote a beautiful piece "Overture 1812" on this military blunder. The everlasting joke in military circles is that both Napoleon and Hitler got easily defeated by a certain GENERAL WINTER!

So very interesting also were the basic principles and arrangements of warfare or land, sea and air into wars, battles, sieges and reconnaissance (REECE). The role of signals, mathematical cryptography, encoding and decoding, Turing and the Enigma machine at Bletchley Park excited us. The ARMY is ordinarily the backbone of a defence system although the Navy and Air force add to it~ flexibility power and range in combined operations. Some of the most exciting! scenarios involve amphibious operations. Along with all these is the basic role of efficient and intelligent division of labour. The basic ingredients of strategy (major and minor), TACTICS (major and minor) and LOGISTICS (provision of men, money and materials) pervade all areas of competition and conflict whether in Politics, War,

Commerce and Industry in the factory or Corporate Boardroom games. Hence, the relevance of writers like Sun Tzu till this very day.

Espionage, surveillance, counter-surveillance as practiced by the great services including our humble NSO, SSS, NIA, DMI are of worldwide interest. What with the MOSSAD, CIA, KGB of old, MIS, MI6, Deuxieme Bureau et al etc. Military training has one central subtle ingredient. It directs your mind to the acquisition of an endless array of information to ensure you stay ALIVE in combat. Of great interest is military history, the developments of weaponry, land, sea and air, from ancient to modern times. There is infinitely a part of man that is inherently devilish and destructive. Advances in weaponry go hand in hand with advances in science and technology and of course mathematics.

The development of mechanized motorized Panzer machines utilized even in deserts excite the mind. A flame-thrower in Archimedean times are as interesting as German VI or V2, the unmanned bombers of WWII or indeed America] drones seeking Taliban or Al Qaeda position and camps in Pakistan 0 Afghanistan. Physical, Chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction submarines, missiles, Nuclear warheads, missile shields, ICBM's deadly plane various types of helicopter gunships, etc continue to excite the imagination.

Military career can be the most exciting thing on earth. However, amoral, the famous prescriptions of Niccolo Machiavelli might appear, one thing is clear about them, they are effective advice as to how men actually do behave as distinct from how they should. We can go on almost endlessly to display the splendours of the content of military training. Let us pause at this stage and return to base after this brief reconnaissance.

Our own Benji proved his class and mettle during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. The most unfortunate kinds of wars are of course civil wars. Brothers kill brothers. Bitterness, hatred and rivalry become the order of the day and linger almost indefinitely. The pangs of transnational wars get more easily dissipated by time. Warfare is both an art and a science. So also is History. Often what is written down and passed on to future generations is almost always inherently biased being limited naturally by which side of the divide the written belongs. History as an academic subject has its many subtleties and is definitely both an art and a science. When one gives deep and coherent thought to the case of the Nigerian Civil War, one discovers there is no definitive reliable, accurate account yet of this deadly experience in the history of Nigeria. History is probably open ended for those who reject the thesis that history repeats itself. What can surely repeat itself numberless times are the lessons history ought to have afforded us and to afford us even more at the very present time.

Let us look first at the broad canvass of history as one of our founding father, Dr. Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe would say in one of his many felicitous oratorical quips. We find quickly that the Mother of Parliaments is only some six hundred years old. Prior to House of Commons, House of Deputies, House of Representatives, Diets and Knesset, etc etc, there was long and often interrupted by monarchs and soldiers. Read through Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus up to and including Barbara Tucuman's 'The March of Folly.' Try to go through military science and theory of warfare generally. There is much to learn from Sun

Tzu, Napoleon, Jo mini and of course Clausewitz.

The list of great and colourful generals is very long, Cyrus the Great, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Hannibal, Scipio Africanus, Adolf Hitler, Rommel, Genghis Khan, Douglas MacArthur, Chaka Zulu, Ulysses Grants, Horatio Nelson, 1.0. Eisenhower, V Nguyen Giap, Mustafa Kemal, Moshe Dayan, Saladin, George Washington, George Patton, Mao Zedong, Isoroku Yamamoto, Fidel Castro, Chiang Kai-shek, Charles de Gaulle, Nimitz, Duke of Marlborough, ,Bernard Montgomery, Garibaldi, etc, etc. It is to this list that we now seek to add our own Brigadier General B.A.M ADEKUNLE, the Black Scorpion. I would like to justify adding his name to this illustrious pageant of military geniuses. This justification will be seriously prosecuted in this lecture.

Adekunle is a Nigerian hero who happens to be an Ogbomoso-Yoruba-Bachama hero. At Sandhurst, they don't select you based on your father's business empire If any or the height of your mother. They use merit. One man's hero is another man's villain. In this lecture, we are not concerned with rivalry, ambition, intrigues, name-calling, sheer abuse or petty polemics. We pry into a critical part of the history of this pastiche of a country. Some of our best leaders have probably mistakenly referred to it as a mere geographical entity. Rumour has it that men of such stature as AWOLWO and GOWON were once overheard saying something like this. These two persons, however, came together in a dream-team 1966-1971 to stop its disintegration. Bill Clinton, ex-President of United States, gave two important pieces of advice to Nigerians, the other day. One, we must try to tackle our various differences. The other was about the Niger Delta which we milk and kill daily. If we had been able to face our national problems honestly and sincerely, all of us, none excepted, would probably not have had to go through the tragedy of a horrible civil war.

If you ask some students of what I call Linear History; they would tell you that our trouble in 1962, between two politicians, both Action Group, both Yorubas, both Christians, both Lawyers, led to the Wild Wild West and unacceptable election of 1965 which in turn led to the seemingly one-sided Military take-over of Jan 1966 which, along with the return match of July 1966, led to the Biafra secession which then culminated in the civil war. That indeed is the outline but rather overlinearised history, indeed history in one dimension. If such a simplistic picture is adopted as a tool for analysis and a guide to the understanding of certain troubling complexities which till today remain in Nigeria, one must raise one unavoidably, inevitable twin-question. Was it then actually worthwhile to keep Nigeria one? Is it still worthwhile to keep Nigeria one? We shall not drift. I am persuaded here and now of the firm opinion that NIGERIA should forever be kept one. The motto, at the time, was felicitously coined from the name of the then Head of State and Commander-in-Chief, G.O.W.O.N meant Go On With One Nigeria. All of us here today must pause for one split second to think of this slogan of the time, "To Keep Nigeria One, Is A Task That Must Be Done." If it was indeed not an objective worth pursuing, then there is no further need to carry this lecture beyond this point. We chose, a vast majority to keep Nigeria one.

The civil war began rather insidiously as Police action! When full scale war was decided upon, part of the preparation was to appoint commanders. That was how orthodox Shuwa, maverick Murtala and Benji, Shaka, Napoleon, Patton and MacArthur mixed into one small

compact lightweight lethal bomb came on the national scene.

The protagonist in our story of today, the hero and icon being celebrated at the grand reception staged by OCF and ODF under the able leadership of General Oladayo Popoola deserves a formal introduction. Who actually is this Brig-Gen Adekunle?

Sometimes around 1970, after the end of the civil war, one journalist described Brig-Gen. Adekunle thus:

Standing only 5ft 7in tall, weighing under 10 stone, he is a ruthless professional soldier, faultlessly dressed whether in uniform or in civvies. He eats little, is a chain-smoker, who drinks little and can get by with four hours' sleep a night. Explosive and impulsive, with a mercurial temperament, during the war he was nicknamed "the Black Scorpion". The wartime stories told about him are legion. Behind the showy extrovert lies a quick, agile mind of a man of action who can grasp essential problems and make immediate decisions.

With that little appetizer, we go in extension to define our hero of today in great details. However, before proceeding further, we must state our mission, purpose, objective, policy, modus operandi and indeed, modus Vivendi. It is simply that Brig-Gen B. A. M. Adekunle is not just a hero and icon. We wish to emphasize and delve deeply into the fact that he is an unsung patriot. Let us start from the thin end of the wedge, his material circumstances.

The dwelling circumstances of any national hero should never be as poor as this. Those who have worked very hard and selflessly for the safety continued unified existence of their country, putting their own very life on the line should be made ,somewhat very comfortable in their autumnal years. Benjy would be 73 in June. Benjy should not live in discomfort or from hand to mouth. We must remind ourselves of the way many top Nigerians who claim to serve GOD and COUNTRY lave done so well in this respect. Many of these have actually done better for themselves than for their country.



In a case such as this, honest reasoning reveals that the blame of the plight of this unsung hero falls on both the Military class and the civil society. We have a warped sense of values most of the time. A durable equitable SYSTEM OF REWARD has always collectively eluded us. What we call CORRUPTION is just another general lame or symptom of a disorderly system which encourages self evaluation and self reward. If the country would not remember to honour or reward you, do it yourself. Crown yourself, fill your pockets, fill your belly, suppress your conscience and make hay, public hay, for the rainy day.

The civil society appreciates Adekunle's role in the history of Nigeria. On the other hand, the military is supposed to pride itself in the existence

of a spirit of esprit-decorp. Alas, alas, BENJY is a hero whose praises Nigeria should sing heartily forever. He deserves special national decoration. His name should adorn some of our streets, institutions and public buildings therein. We should serve him adequate means of livelihood to ensure a befitting standard of living.

Today, we shall review the story of his life in more ways than one. We shall attack our problem using a carefully contrived assault plan! My choice of strategy is something like a slight variant of "ENVELOPMENT OF BOTH FLANKS"! This as many of you familiar with basic military science, history or practice know is a plan that can quite well lead to the total annihilation of a trapped opponent. What the enemy is or who the enemies are would be absolutely manifest as we go along. Dora says: "Good People, Great Nation," we shall see. DAILY SUN says: "Good People, yes; Great Nation, No."

I say here that some of Adekunle's problems come from a nation partly defective on its organisation and full of too many highly-placed small minded who would wittingly or otherwise breed or encourage what A WOLOWO used to call the 'deliberate enthronement of mediocrity.' These ideas, arrangements and people conjoined into one constitute the adversary, the opponent, the enemy who must be encircled, exposed and topologically squeezed into a vanished point. Our star, hero and patriot shall then shine, shine and shine forever illuminated by our love, admiration and appreciation, material and otherwise.

As Julius Caesar would say in his written preparations and reconnaissance for the Gallic Wars and his inimitable and frequent use of the ablative absolute: With all these things have been said and done, we must move to our campaign theatre! Here comes my special military plan for today's five part Benjy Rescue Assignment Plan.

- I. We hear Benjy introduce himself, directly and through his resourceful son.
- II. We hear of Benjy from the mouth of honest, objective and respectable peers in his military constituency.
- III. We hear of Benjy from the civil society.
- IV. We take on Benjy's critics, from whatever location, and examine their motivation and complexes.
- V. We evaluate both BIAFRAN and NIGERIAN sides to identify the true heroes and men of exceptional talent.

By the time all these have been done, we may move to a domain of feigned withdrawal. Perhaps we should mention the propaganda and real painful issues of the catch phrases of 'pogrom', 'genocide', 'starvation as weapon of war', 'banning of okrika/second hand clothing', 'Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction,' 'abandoned properties issues, Biafran currency and general marginalisation of the Ibo.

We shall have to visit "Prohibitions and Restraints in Wars," and "War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity." We shall finally move on to present our hero, icon and genius as a genuine citizen of a united Nigeria worthy of the encomiums, care, respect and honour we claim for him.

Forward we go! You people here today are lucky to be present at this bold, honest exercise in repositioning Brigadier General Benjamin Adesanya Maja ADEKUNLE to his rightful position in the historical firmament of Nigeria. I take this opportunity to inform this august

gathering that Benjy has arranged for publication a rich 300-page book titled "THE NIGERIA BIAFRA WAR LETTERS: A SOLDIERS STORY," VOL I, Edited by ABIODUN ADEKUNLE, Phoenix Publishing Group, Atlanta. GA. USA. 8725 Roswell Road, Suite 0 # 115, Atlanta GA 30350. ISBN 0-9740761-0-4. Library of Congress Number 2003094202. Contact 1-866-710-8180. E-mail: info@blackscorpion.org Website: www.blackscorpion.org

PART THE FIRST

A Soldier's Story

I was born in Kaduna on the 26th of June 1936, the fifth in a line of six children born by Amina Theodora to a polygamous husband, Thomas Adekunle. My father, a native of Ogbomoso, was domiciled in Kaduna as early as 1908. He had met my mother in her hometown Numan during one of his sojourns to the Adamawa Province and married her in 1919. She was a member of the Bachama Tribe, an ethnic group noted for their fighting abilities. As one of the earliest converts to Christianity in her area, my mother was a staunch Christian.

She succeeded in converting my father Thomas to Christianity in the course of their courtship and we were raised as Anglicans. According to the legend repeatedly narrated to me by elderly female relations during my childhood, the circumstances surrounding my early entry into the world were somewhat portentous. They say I overstayed my time in my mother's womb by two months. Moreover, I am reported to have vacated this comfortable abode only after a series of local birth attendants had exhausted their entire repertoire of childbirth skills. These tales meant little to me at the time, but their chief significance was the special attention it secured for me from my family, particularly from my mother.

Both my father and grandfather served in the colonial army.

My father later entered the carpentry trade where he made a sufficiently good living to fend for his large family of two wives (he later married a second wife, Christianity notwithstanding), a dozen children and numerous relatives. We all lived in the sprawling house that he built in the Kaduna township.

The outbreak of war in Europe in the 1930's precipitated dramatic changes into our small world. The war transformed quiet retiring Kaduna into a bustling military cantonment and gave me my first glimpse of military life. I was spellbound by the towering, khaki clad men who strode about and filled our small town; fascinated by their bizarre clothing gray puttees, wide brimmed jungle hats and frog nosed boots; in awe of their booming voices and intrigued by the long objects slung over their shoulders. Moreover, the superior status that those mysterious beings occupied above the residents (their every command drew instant and complete obedience from civilians of every rank), made a deep impression on my boyish mind.

I spend every possible moment huddled in one corner of the army barracks or the other, drinking in the shouting, the marching and the salutes. My siblings soon learned to be head straight for the barracks whenever I was found to be missing.

The outbreak of the war in Europe also brought changes at a more personal level: my father Thomas, my most senior brother, and my uncle were all enlisted in 1942. The loss of primary breadwinners of our family had obvious economic implications for our large family. I was sent to Idah to live with my senior brother in 1942. At the time, he was full corporal stationed at the army pay office. It was at the Roman Catholic School at Idah that I commenced my formal education. In late 1943, I was joined at my brother's home by two half-sisters and two half-brothers. My happiness at their arrival (calculating that the burdensome household chores would be lightened) soon evaporated. In retrospect, this is the period at which my childhood proper can be said to have ended. The conditions in my brother's home and my experiences at the Roman Catholic School, Idah, compelled me at a very early stage, to develop character traits which were beneficial to me in large stages of my life.

In spite of the extended period of nurturance in my mother's womb, I was born small and retained this diminutive stature throughout my life. Away from the protective arms of my mother, my slight frame attracted bullies the way a beautiful damsel attracts suitors at school, in my new neighbourhood, everywhere I ventured, larger boys regarded me as easy prey. To survive, I learned to return three blows for each received without provocation. I also learnt the effectiveness of what in military language, is termed 'psychological warfare.' Make sufficient noise, look sufficiently threatening, and you will have your would-be killers running or at least disoriented in a fight. Over time, my willingness to engage all comers, earned me the nickname Maja ('don't fight') in the Yoruba language.

On the home front, with wartime shortages and disciplinarian guardians, I learned to vocally express my needs in the competition with my half-siblings for scarce resources. To supplement the inadequate quantities of food available to us at home, I took to selling water and chopped wood in the streets, rather than starve to complain. My small scale business, conducted after household chores, fostered a spirit of independence in me, youthful though I was and demonstrated to me in concrete terms, the benefits that could accrue from initiative, resourcefulness and hard work. I never forgot this lesson.

At the Roman Catholic School, it was more of the same the primary instrument of inculcating knowledge in pupils was the cane. On the slightest pretext, the schoolmasters liberally applied this on pupils. I received my fair share of the discipline and very soon, more than my fair share. Unlike some of my fellow pupils, my response to the excessive discipline was defiance: the more I was caned, the more I rebelled against what I then perceived as unjustified treatment. I recall on my an occasion, ruminating (while nursing a sore bottom), on the contrast between the love for humanity expressed to be the ideal of every Christian by my Masters and the violence and humiliation inflicted by the very same Masters before, during and after Mass. My experiences at this institution left me with a lasting mistrust of organized religion and the sincerity of its representatives. I have since seen little to change my mind.

By 1945, at the age of 9, I had enough of both school and my unsatisfactory home life. The death of my father in this year strengthened my resolve to take matters into my own hands. I resolved to leave home and look for someone to serve, in exchange for educational support. On the chosen night, I gathered my few belongings and ran away from brother's home. After several days on the streets, I found my way to one Reverend Ayiogu, whom I persuaded to employ me as a domestic servant at the rate of one shilling and six pence a month. With the assistance of the police, my elder brother soon traced me to my new living

quarters. However, all entreaties, commands, cajolery and threats directed at me by the police officers, relations and the Reverend to return with my brother fell on deaf ears, with the Reverend Ayiogu I would remain ... or vanish again.

From this period, the influences to which I was exposed were more stabilizing. The Reverend proved to be a decent man and I lived with him for two years. By 1947, I came under the protection of a new Master. Under his guidance, I earned a scholarship to Dekina School in Kwara State. My new Master was an extraordinary man though unimposing in appearance.

In all the years I spent in the home of Mr. Quinni, a native of Ugep and employee of the Igala Native Authority, he never once raised his voice in anger. He was scrupulously just in his dealings with all persons around him. He was gifted with a formidable intellect, which was brought to bear in every situation. I was fascinated by his ability to win any argument by rigorous analysis. By the time he reached his conclusion, the parties present had little option but to agree, regardless of their own initial positions or whether his conclusion conflicted with their own interests. It was for this reason that his polygamous home was calm, stable and peaceful. Mr. Quinni taught me the strength in meekness, the honour in humility and the dignity in labour. If I have not always succeeded in exhibiting these qualities, he blessed me with the ability to appreciate and esteem them in others.

Under his influence, I thrived at my new school (Dekma Primary School) to the extent that my progress caught the attention of the Headmaster Dokpong. Among the schoolmates at Dekina was one time Director of the Nigerian Twelve Corps Service, Colonel Ahmadu Ali, who is still a friend. I passed the entrance examination to Okene Middle School in 1951 and left Dekina with many happy memories.

After my primary education, my relatives in Idah attempted to reassert their claims over me. According to their plans, I was to stop schooling and be apprenticed in the family trade of carpentry. Needless to say I vehemently resisted this plan as my years with Mr. Quinni had the effect of dolling on me, a powerful thirst and respect for western education. My stubbornness on this point served to sever all pretense of supervision over my welfare by my guardians. It was not clear to all that I was on my own. I was given to understand that I should expect no support from them. I steeled my mind to fend for myself, to plough a lonely furrow and take life as it came. Fortunately, for me those were the days of free education.

To Okene Middle School I went. I met other interesting characters such as Mr. Bolujoko who we had nicknamed 'the black horse of Okene Rock.' Though an almost fanatical disciplinarian, Mr. Bolujoko, like my former Master, possessed the ability to inspire the best of anyone and nurture the one's more positive qualities. Despotical though he was, he personified to his students the modernised and educated man. In addition to academic development, Mr. Bolujoko took great interest in the spiritual development of his students. The principles he took great pains to inculcate in us is best summed up thus:

The chessboard is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, and the rules of the game are what I've call the Laws of Nature. The player on the side is hidden from lies. We know that his play is always fair, just and patient. But also we know to our cost, that he never overlooked a mistake or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance.

We were compelled to practice his precepts of Christianity to the letter. Unfortunately for me, he found many of my opinions on organized religion grossly unacceptable and never felt shy to express his displeasure with my unorthodox views through lashes. In those days, the Middle School era dovetailed into the Junior Secondary School stage. We were made to forgo two years of studies to benefit from the new surge of educational awareness in the then Northern Region. I gratefully seized the opportunity of free education. For Mr. Bolujoko, I have nothing but unreserved praise.

As the years rolled by, Mr. John Rimmer, the School Principal, introduced us to the countryside game of cricket; I was appointed fatigue master, then boxing captain, assistant prefect, then full prefect. All too soon, adulthood loomed, and the School Career Board called me up to discuss my future. Two options were open to me going to a university or joining the army. The School Board strongly recommended the former, I chose the latter.

My Military Career

I enlisted in the Nigerian Army in 1957 immediately after I finished my school certificate examination. The idea of beginning "life" at once, without the suspense and irritating interlude of university strongly appealed to me, a young man without the luxurious backdrop of a solicitous family. Large or small, I had already proved my physical mettle on a thousand occasions, why not, I reasoned, fight for a worthy cause in the service of my fatherland? With the images of the confident giants of 1945 in my head, I departed for Lagos after my final examination and found my way to the Apapa cantonment.

The first hurdle in my chosen career was stiff entrance examination. At the succeeding interview, numerous white headed expatriate military officers gave me the grilling of my life. The Nigerian Army was then in its infancy and placed every conceivable impediment to dissuade aspirants from making the army a career. I was not daunted by these obstacles. We were then to undergo physical exercises. I found these exercises hilarious. I was given size 12 boots (I take a size 6); and oversized clothing. For a joke, I put them on and appeared at the venue to the vast amusement of the other boys. Notwithstanding my deficiency in size, I was accepted by the Army.

Our first introduction to military language and bearing was at Major Bassey's command the Corp Commandant. The dialogue went something like this: "Gentlemen, today, you are starting off a bloody noble career," said Major Bassey. "You are lucky boys and by God, you will damn well make up your mind to do a good job." We all stood dumb and still. "Any questions?" he thundered, to which we answered in unison, "No Sir."

We were 'marched out' and received further instructions:

"Fall in you miserable lot. When I speak to you, you will answer 'Sir' and you have to do things in double-quick time. I can see already that most of you will not make the grade." Subdued and bewildered about what offense we had committed to provoke the Major's hostility so early in the game, we timidly 'fell in'."

Our baptism of fire came almost immediately in the form of one week of punishing physical training, after which we were hauled to the Regular Officer Training School, Teshie in Ghana.

Teshie

The Teshie Institute was a military training school that served as a pre-selection institute for prospective military officers. It was an offshoot of the former Royal West African Frontier Force and centralised initial training school for prospective officers from all over West Africa. Other officer cadets from Ghana and Sierra Leone later joined the Nigerian Cadets. This joint training forged a bond between the officer class of West Africa it was at Teshie that Afrifa met Nzeogwu, and Adekunle met Kaisamba of Sierra Leone, as well as Techie, Minfen, Dako, Kobori and former Ghanaian Head of State; Acheampong.

As I stepped over the portals of Teshie, I felt that my military career had truly begun. We spent six months at this institution and it was six months of pure unadulterated Hell. I, who had hitherto prided myself on my toughness, resilience and ability to manage any condition life cared to throw at me, found myself to be thoroughly challenged mentally and physically to maintain my chosen course. We were fed a daily and unrelenting diet of rigorous, dehumanizing, physical training, arbitrary punishment, sleep deprivation, psychological harassment and inducement of fear. While the academic aspect of our training did not find me wanting, the rapidity with which cadets were expected to execute physical and academic assignments soon took its toll on my health; the midnight oil had to be burned. Some of my classmates at this time included Sotomi and Adegoke.

However, some of our instructors injected some humour into the hellish situation particularly 'the bastard of Teshie,' the expatriate Sergeant-Major Cameron. Sergeant Cameron was a massive man who wore his regimental pick hat half over his eyes. He swore like the devil incarnate, drank like a fish. His vocabulary was somewhat limited and 'bloody, monkey brain, filthy pigs' (and more), was our daily lot. In contrast, our Commanding Officer, a six-footer who stood as erect as a palm tree, presented us with an alternative role model with his tightly controlled manner of speech (devoid of foulness), immaculate uniform and highly polished boots.

The objective of the Teshie training was to produce leaders. Leadership was conceived in two dimensions at Teshie: leadership as a personal quality, and leadership as an organisational function. Personal leadership was perceived as the ability to influence and guide other individuals, infuse confidence in other persons and to extract from them voluntary obedience. Effective leadership also denoted the ability to correctly interpret and judge current situations and accurately predict outcomes. The prevailing school of thought at Teshie was that leaders were born and not made. We were taught that the essential pillars of leadership were a sense of purpose, self confidence, power and vision. All other qualities were secondary and peripheral. Our instructors at Teshie preached these towering qualities and consciously strove to crush rugged individualist tendencies. What they sought to do what to break down, strip and dismantle the psychological make-up of the cadets and reassemble our personalities along the approved pattern.

At the end of our course, the major criterion for assessing the leadership qualities of

cadets, was their ability to diffuse, decentralise, and depersonalize authority. It is supremely ironic that several graduates of Teshie attained positions of political power in their respective countries and despite their training, avidly pursued the centralization and personalization of authority.

Reflecting on Africa's propensity for coups in the post independence era, I sometimes felt that it could be traced to some extent, to the feelings of indispensability that was nurtured in cadets at this stage of our training. Time without number, the importance of our roles in shaping the future of our nations was impressed on the minds of young military officers. This was not done with any sinister motive, but certainly, the orientation we were given was capable of sowing seeds of the 'messiah complex' in some of the cadets that passed through the institution. Also of some significance I believe, were subconscious feelings of competitiveness among the officers. If former course mates could successfully execute a coup in their countries who wanted to be caught lagging? On January 15, 1966, Nzeogwu implemented his coup, in my own opinion, there was a domino effect on the rest of Africa following the one in Nigeria.

The day of reckoning, which separated the boys from the men soon arrived. Though I had immersed myself in the world of institution and had given my all, I was as nervous as hell. I had never before failed any task I set out to achieve, but there was no telling what the results of this election board would be. The waiting period was a period of severe anxiety for me. To my profound relief, I passed this selection and the board recommended me for Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, England (RMAS). We (the successful cadets) went wild with joy. For the rest of our stay at Teshie, we conducted ourselves with licentiousness that would have been unthinkable only a few short weeks before.

Britain

Prior to Sandhurst, cadets were sent to Mons Officer Cadet School in the UK for a period of three months. The objective of the Mons training was to separate cadets for either a long or short training course. The older cadets were sent on short court, while the younger or more able cadets were sent to Sandhurst. The Mons training was to be my first experience outside my native country and nothing in my interactions with expatriates in Africa prepared me for the culture shock I experienced in those first few months in Britain.

The examination period arrived and again, I was filled with anxiety about my chances of success given the sour relationship between the instructors and myself. Other Nigerian officers who were contemporaries at Mons were Chukuka, Idiaja, Amadi, Obasanjo and Adegoke. Once again, my fears proved to be unfounded. I passed the Mons examination and was confirmed for Sandhurst in January of 1959.

Sandhurst

I considered my selection for the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst to be an honour

and a privilege. To my mind, Sandhurst was the best military institution in the world. Not all the Mons graduates were so privileged for example, while Adegoke, Idiaja, Chukuka and I were selected, Obasanjo was not. He finished at Mons and returned home.

In later years, I attributed some of the actions of my former course mates in the national arena, especially with regard to their colleagues, to the need to assuage feelings of inferiority which may have sprung from having been publicly adjudged and labeled inadequate in the midst of their cohorts.

I was at Sandhurst for two years (1959 and 1960) and registered for the course with three hundred odd cadets. In addition to the physical training, officers were imbued with a thorough academic grounding in the art of warfare. The ultimate purpose of our training was to produce not the stereotype officer, but the dynamic officer. Character development was an integral part of the course and this was brought home to me in the first week.

By now, I was accustomed to killer exercise regimes that constituted the core of military training. At Sandhurst, however, physical exercise served the additional purpose of teaching us vital life lessons. One such exercise was the 'chopping parade', which was conducted by a squad of senior cadets. At the first chopping parade, a senior squad courteous I y ordered us thus:

"Listen attentively cadets! You are all required to change into the different forms of uniform handed to you within a specified period. You are all to be immaculately dressed in full accordance with the Sandhurst dress regulation that have already been explained to you. You will now begin by changing into your physical training outfits!"

Hundreds of cadets, anxious to complete the exercise within the specified period, charged towards the dormitory. Naturally, in the mad rush we obstructed one another, wasting precious time. Sanity prevailed and we proceeded in a more orderly fashion. We were compelled to repeat this exercise several times. The lesson sought to be instilled by these exercises was the old one: time waiteth for no man. Rather than stand still and be overtaken by time, we were to race ahead of time, in order to chasten time.

The last exercise required us to change from our pajamas into full ceremonial regalia. Thinking to outsmart my instructors and the cadets, I omitted to divest myself of my pajamas (as expected), but simply pulled out the ceremonial attire on top of the pajamas. Naturally, this attempt to cheat time did not deceive the hawk-eyed senior cadets. I was severely admonished and lectured for over thirty minutes on the virtues of honesty of purpose and related standards. I was overcome with a sense of deep remorse not just for getting caught but also for my choice of action. I rededicated myself to strictly adhere to the rules and regulations throughout my stay in Sandhurst.

As the days rolled by, we began to settle down into the complex Sandhurst routine. The only major examination in the first year was the 'Passing of the Square', which had to be achieved in order to enjoy certain privileges.

Though my responses to overt incidents of racism were more subdued at this institution than at Mons, I sometimes rose to the bait and expressed my objections with brutal

frankness to those cadets or instructors involved. This never failed to create tension and discomfort between my instructors, the white cadets and myself.

Subsequently, my first year's confidential report reflected the observation of my 'poor' command of English, due to this gambit of sometimes playing deaf and dumb. Nonetheless, my second year's studies proceeded in a more congenial environment, after the tempest of the first. I was now much better acclimatized and fell into the lifestyle typical of cadets.

My nemesis in this year was the Political Science course. As far as I could see, the entire exercise was a rather poorly veiled attempt to glorify Western civilization down our throats, western values, norms and political ideology. On the other hand, Africa, her peoples, her values were denigrated. Needless to say, this left me seething and struggling to keep my peace. All too often, (after an initial period of silent anguish), I would erupt and engage my instructor, in an animated and nasty verbal brawl.

These outbursts earned me an unprecedented total of sixty four days of restrictions with hard labour in my second year. I believe I still hold the punishment record for second year cadets. During my two-year span as a cadet at Sandhurst, I made only one close friend among the entire three hundred cadets I was instructed with an Irishman.

Before I left Sandhurst, our college Commander invited me for an interview. He examined me closely about my 'unorthodox' political positions, my views on his institution and my opinions of the training that I had just completed. In our final report, Sandhurst cadets were required to make a self-assessment of their officer qualities, which was then graded by their instructor. My final report and grade contained some of the now familiar complaints about my 'attitude.' Since the report had already been written (and passed me, notwithstanding), I felt at liberty to give the Commander an unedited piece of my mind on every subject he raised.

Far from being satisfied with my responses and desirous I think of modifying my views, he suggested an extension of the 'interview' over dinner. We talked far into the night, and I conveyed my amazement that any institution would teach a course which mutilated the pride and self-worth of some of the cadets and yet expect no reaction.

On the whole however, I enjoyed the period at Sandhurst. The skills I picked up, particularly on the 'Tactics' course, (my favourite), were to prove invaluable to me in later life.

Further Training

My encounter with British military institutions did not end there. Two further courses were arranged for me in accordance with my selection. The first was at the School of Infantry at Warminster and the second was at the School of the Tactical Wing. And so ended my military training in Britain.

So much for now of Benjy talking of Benjy. Please get the book soonest.

At this stage, a significant tactical matter must be raised. There should be a catalogue of

possible origins of anti-Benji forces. Some may be located quite naturally in the BIAFRA part of NIGERIA. Some may be in NIGERIA proper in military circles, political circles or civil society generally. Some may be of foreign origin. There were many foreign actors in and around the war including mercenaries, journalists, politicians, overseas governments, humanitarian agencies such as Red Cross, Caritas, as well as observer teams.

Some Nigerian anti-Benji forces may arise from deep-seated envy, jealousy, hatred, insecurity and fear in top brass of the military and civil politicians of the time. From the horses mouth, we have just heard that one particular top flight actor in Nigerian affairs fell short of Sandhurst. This is Obasanjo who replaced Benji at 3MCDO. We must all re-evaluate just exactly what fraction of the job Benji did and what fraction OBJ's rounding off represented. All those initially at the rear, with Gen. Gowon as head without exception appear vulnerable to a charge of fear and envy.

Popularity with media and suspected political ambition were some of the points canvassed even in the grapevine at the time. Each member of this audience must pose and answer the following sharp question. How much was Benji given and how much did he achieve with it? How much was OBJ given and how much did he achieve with it? Given the luxury of the benefit of hindsight, spanning 40 years, to wit 1969-2009, what political ambition or induced instability through coups did Benji or OBJ each display. Who of the duo developed and displayed a vividly discernible and almost insatiable appetite for political power and/or connection with coup making?

I hope General Gowon is listening as attentively as he might have been listening after Benji's reverse at Owerri. If Benji, whose military hero of choice is Napoleon and who displays a style like America's Gen. Patton or Shaka the Zulu, can we accept that one reverse, lull or alleged stalemate compel his rather rough removal from a stiff job he had done more than halfway. If the Douglas MacArthur in Benji panned out in a certain way, does that turn a hero automatically into a villain or a genius into a dunce? History and posterity must now begin to tell four decades after.

It took us some time to realise in Nigeria that there are military politicians as well as normal civilian ones who litter the place, two a kobo! IBB is the only honest Nigerian military politician. He came, he saw and he stepped aside. He crowned himself and performed more experiments, all very useful, with our collective political lives. Now OBJ is the most comprehensive and costly military politician Nigeria has so far ever encountered. Only goodness knows those who loaded Gowon's ears with tales about Benji. Only God knows how he came to choose and later change his three war commanders. Who pressed and prevailed on him? What he surely knows, however, are those who conspired against him in July 1975. We have to move forward. These issues will be treated swiftly soon.

PART THE SECOND

We now hear about Benji from the mouth of his peers in his military constituency. I start

with a mild caveat. Military people are also human with all the foibles, fancies and weaknesses that flesh is heir to. We promise to consult and display opinion of Benji from honest, respected, respectable and relatively objective peers. Just before we make our selection, we choose the speaker, quote him, verbally but deliberately start with a digression. We choose the voices of Major General David Medaiyese Jemibewon (rtd), Major General M. Chris Ali (rtd) and Major General J. J. Oluleye. In the book "The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army: The Siege of A Nation," Major General M. C. Ali, one of the most decorated Nigerian military officers, took the trouble on 1.10.2000 to write confidential reports on most of his seniors and other colleagues in the Army. He put his comments in the third chapter titled "Maturity after the War and Men of Honour," he offered us insight into the personalities of Major Isaac Adaka Boro, Brig. Gen. Alabi-Isama, Brig. Joseph Nanven Garba, Col. P. C. Tarfa, Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi, Gen. Murtala Muhammed, Gen. B. M. ADEKUNLE, Gen. Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo, Gen. Hassan Usman Katsina, Lt. Gen. Aliyu Gusau Mohammed, Gen. Theophilus Danjuma, Gen. Godwin Ally, Gen. Ike Nwachukwu, Gen. Isola Williams and finally, Col. Umar Abubakar Dangiwa, among others. For our own study here today, we choose OBJ's and Benji's assessment by Chris Ali.

Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo:

He is an able soldier statesman, intellectually capable and of the proponents of purposeful leadership. He received Biafran surrender by divine opportunity and went on, in years, as head of state, to be one single African leader to demonstrate that national interest could override personal ego and aggrandizement by willingly conducting a return to democracy, and handling political power to a civil government. An eminent global personage and a fitting window on Nigeria. Luck and opportunity have been, arguably, his greatest divine asset.

This assessment is very illuminating. In this particular case, we have to scan 'My Command' and 'Not My Will' for a long reply.

Major General M. C. Ali wrote on the same page 59 of Benji as follows:

General Benjamin Maja Adekunle

He remains one of the most indefatigable, physically and mentally versatile warrior the nation and the Army has produced. Nigeria's Napoleon or Shaka the Zulu **without a personal empire**. That may account for his **misplacement** in the nation's history. At critical times of national anxiety, during the civil war, he repeatedly gave the nation hope and certainty by his predictions and victories on the battle-front. He proved that the art of war is one of superior intellect, continuous and fluid motion, precision, physical and moral courage. Today, **the powers that be pretend** that the Black Scorpion can be denied his monumental contributions and place in history. However, the history of the civil war will be written, and by whosoever, Brigadier General Benjamin Maja Adekunle will live in the hearts of all Nigerians as the tiny

great soldier who, amongst others, won the war to keep Nigeria one. Generals like him, and they are very few, must be stunned by our lack of professionalism today. He concretely paved the way to Biafran subsequent surrender. He falls into the category of Nigerians who gave everything, but, denied their glory, are powerless to command justice and fair play. He remains the most revered and internationally acclaimed warrior-commander of the civil war, nothing can change that.

We now come to Maj. Gen. David Jemibewon's book, "A Combatant in Government." In his Chapter 3 titled "The Regime of Yakubu Gowon, July 1966 to July 1975 " he wrote inter-alia, first descending bravely but politely on Gowon thus:

And so for almost three years, the country grappled with the war of the survival of the whole nation. Those who were close to the corridors of power and those who had the opportunity of watching the administration of the war years saw only too clearly that all was not well with the leader of the nation. Day by day he revealed himself as a very weak man and a man of indecision. A few instances will suffice to demonstrate the weakness in the character of Gowon. During the war years, it was common knowledge in military circles that Gowon was completely unable to control the three divisional commanders responsible for the actual fighting in the field. There was no coordination among the three divisional commanders and each one acted entirely independently of the others. As a matter of fact, elements of rivalry and jealousy crept in among the three commanders and each one of them resorted to decisions and actions that would impair or jeopardize the progress and prospect of success of the others. Such reprehensible conduct was known and reported regularly to Gowon. But throughout he did nothing to coordinate the activities of the three commanders or call them to order. **Nigeria was only fortunate to have a few saving graces during those critical years. The first was that the three field commanders Shuwa, Muhammed and Adekunle** were all of them born soldiers of great merit whose efficiency and perseverance were unsurpassed. Had they been men of lesser caliber and had they been of lesser military genius, the nation would have lost the war for the survival of Nigeria as one political entity. The second saving grace was the invaluable contribution of Major-General Hassan, who was the army chief of staff at the time. Like his three commanders in the field, he too was a natural soldier and a born leader of men. He exerted such a tremendous influence on the prosecution of the war that history can never forget the part he played to ensure the victory of the federal military government and the continued unity of Nigeria. Perhaps it is no exaggeration to assert that our greatest problems and headaches during the years of civil war came not really from the side of 'Biafra' but from bad leadership at the very top.

The bad leadership sprang from an inherent weakness in Gowon. It was a serious flaw in his nature and it was such an overwhelming weakness of character that in the end it proved fatal. Otherwise how could anyone ever explain the fact that the man who could be said to rank next to Gowon, and who occupied the position of chief of staff, supreme headquarters, during the war years, never once visited the

front throughout the two and a half years of the civil war? Not only this, this same man was known to have occupied himself at the time with reading for a law degree on part-time basis in the University of Lagos. Gowon knew of this but he was too weak to call Major-General E. O. Ekpo to order.

David Jemibewon then went on later to make a very deep observation:

History often tends to focus attention on the central leading figure in the affairs of men. Other figures and personalities who played useful and noble roles are often glossed over or completely forgotten.

How very true! What great perspicacity! This is what the good boys of the bedchamber, what the establishment had done to Benjy. The history of the war must be written in a balanced truthful and responsible way restoring his name to where it truly belongs, the center-piece in gold!

We just must add a third mature Military voice and probably that would do. This is from the much-respected and disciplined Major-General J. J. Oluleye. His book "Military Leadership in Nigeria: 1966 1979" contains copious references to Adekunle's exploits, their consequences and how they came to be received in certain quarters. It also contains a hair-raising but ultimately humorous encounter with A WOLOWO involving Gen. Adebayo, Gen. Obasanjo in the background and some pro-Awo intellectuals like Prof. H. A. Oluwasanmi, who nearly destroyed the cohesion and internal structure of the Nigerian Army as an entity.

By mid-October 1968, Major-Gen Oluleye, G.S.O I, visited the three divisions in company of Lt. Col. F. A. Z. Shielu. He said he found Benjy overworked, exhausted, erratic, irascible, over-centralising his command. Oluleye, an ex-teacher at a famous Ibadan school, St. Peters' Aremo, was and still a very trusted man in whom there is no guile. He had visited Aba, Ahoada and Ebocha. He made a vital suggestion that Benjy be sent on leave for recuperation so that on resumption, he could take over his command or create 4th Marine Commando ... etc. Benjy had earlier dismissed a vital suggestion as a piece of nonsense. This was the need to protect Benjy's line of communication in the then East Central. Later facts confirmed Oluleye's fears. Benjy was human. He was not perfect. He made errors. The matter was brought in good faith to General Gowon's notice who smothered the attempt to dislodge or dislocate Benjy. This led to the Owerri setback and a chance for detractors.

The Black Scorpion (who had been summoned to Lagos) triumphantly returned to his Headquarters to continue his operations without a change of tactics in the hostile territory. This lack of change in tactics led to the encirclement of Owerri and its eventual loss. For almost six months after the first recommendation to the C-in-C, he did not agree but he gave no reasons. I later reasoned to find out that why the C-in-C refused and I arrived at the following points:

- (1) As a result of success after success, Benjy had become a political hero. His relief could spark off a political row in the West which could lead to major disturbances short of a *coup d'etat*.
- (2) Benjy had become politically conscious as it was alleged he told some foreign pressmen that he would become the Army Commander. How and when might have been one of General Gowon's problems. For a *coup d'etat* to occur during the war could be fatal as an idling Benjy in the rear could easily lead to one.
- (3) It was also a fact that the C-in-C always hated offending anybody. He could settle a misunderstanding satisfactorily to both sides without apportioning blame. Benjy from time occupied a place in his bosom as a brilliant and smart officer.
- (4) Relieving Benjy alone could be seen as an act of tribalism.
- (5) The C-in-C possibly held himself responsible for the disaster that followed an attempt to capture Umuahia for his political birthday because of his privity. Benjy was not to blame. Even when Benjy falsely told the world that he had killed some Chinese mercenaries fighting for the rebels, he was spared from blame. Benjy continued until his reputation was dented. Benjy realized his tactical error belatedly. When he did realize that he was seen as an intruder and not a liberator in the Iboland, he ordered his troops to 'shoot at anything that moves.'

David Jemibewon's trenchant criticism of Gowon is professionally valid and his anger at the Ekpo syndrome, very righteous indignation. Gowon, however, had a lot to learn hence he chose to go back to school after nine good years in power in a periodically chaotic country. Gowon ought to have read Machiavelli's 'PRINCE.' It was not enough to be loved, nor was it sufficient to be good and kind, it was definitely necessary to be feared. Gowon's weakness emanated from his overly good heart and solid Christian background.

I once dreamt of being Nigeria's Minister of Defence. Those at Abacha's Confab knew this. I was in the Defence and Security Committee. I once dreamt of joining the Nigerian Army. Obasanjo would remember this. We were to join the same time. I remember him telling me if I had joined, I might have become the Commander-in-Chief which he then was, for the first time. I was once billed to be the Academic Provost/Commandant of the Defence Academy. Maj. Gen. Omojokun, my first student in Mathematics at the University College, Ibadan, would remember this. I was top of the list of the candidates shortlisted. I have all my life been interested in Military matters, the science and technology aspects of the art, the literature and music connected with it, the development of weaponry over the ages, conventional and guerrilla warfare and the question of power in philosophy and social sciences till today.

Oluleye himself mentioned two qualitative decisions GOWON made. They looked like rebuffs but were not. Under the first pressure on Gowon to forcibly change either Adekunle's tactics or Adekunle himself, Gowon told Oluleye that the In on the ground knows best. That was excellent on Gowon's part. What he said the age-long, tried and

tested truth. When again the GHQ top team assembled in Ibadan Barracks to see Gowon, he dispersed them politely urging them to avoid bad blood amongst them, the top hierarchy. In these two ways, Gowon stood firm with Benjy.

I would wish here to hold brief for Benjy in two ways concerning the OLULEYE and the GHQ advice which Benjy rebuffed. First: General Oluleye in theory and practice could have been correct. Later events seem to have said so. Two heads are better than one and thus Benjy could have been wrong, or was wrong and J. J. correct. Next, the attacking mode suggests that all told, all said and done, Benjy might well have been right. A defence of his choices could go thus: in the general theory of games, and here I speak of non-trivial games of strategy (not dice mess), there are usually more than one way of solving an intricate problem. This even already true of the art of solving mathematical problems. In war games, there are rules, precedents and canonical styles. Benjy, an admirer of the little Corporal Napoleon, might have believed in an amalgam of mobility, concentrated force of firepower and the element of surprise which are some key ingredients in a blitzkrieg. In Clausewitz famous treatise of 1832, "On War" available to BENJY at Sandhurst and thereafter, BOOK III, Chapter IX was titled "THE SURPRISE." We need not repeat the great author here. Rather, I present you, my own cryptic summary of the chapter in the form of an equation $S = S_1 + S_2$ where S is surprise, S_1 Secrecy and S_2 Speed.

In other words, to spring a surprise, you must concoct a secret plan and execute it speedily. A Napoleonist Benjy will always relish Austerlitz and never dream of Waterloo. The suspiciously open corridor or space has lessons for everyone about traps. The Ashanti campaign, the strategic brilliance of Edo army at the so-called Benin massacre and the open road trick used by the Agbekoya when they slaughtered some sixty or more policemen in 1968 at Ibadan, all have something in common. The 1944 invasion of Germany by MONTY, Bradley and Eisenhower with Montgomery joined by Major Lewis Brereton could have been much in Benjy's mind. The Allied effort at Arnhem, Nijmegen and Eindhoven was heroic but Germans dealt adequately with them. Benjy must have remembered too that Biafra had a few Sandhurst and other bright boys. Monty and Bradley's conviction was that a single thrust, furnished with unlimited support, would end the war. Rivalry set in, as anywhere in the world. Benjy might just have finished off the war. He had done some seventy per cent of the essential work. A little rest as J. J. suggested, he could have, if returned, polished off the rest. There is an analogy from the game of cricket. When a speedster of an opening bowler is set against the opponents' batting innings, he knows implicitly that he has a series of mandates. I was at school, GCI in 1952 a very successful opener. He must break the defence of the usually cautious, calm, orthodox opening batsmen and the early order 1,2,3. He also must crack the backbone of the middle order 4,5,6,7 REST and return to wipe out the tail-enders 8,9,10,11: Benjy was not beside himself. JJ too knew and knows his onions. He was brought up early to plan carefully, write notes of lessons, keep diaries, registers, performance records for those beside him and under him. Such men have a lot to offer and to teach. Spontaneous geniuses like Benjy supply rare needs, irrespective of antics of rivals, denigrators and envious practitioner.

PART THE THIRD

We now come to view Benji from the standpoint of view of the civil society. Nigeria is a country which normally shows least gratitude to those who serve her most. I know that military service is very highly regarded in great nations. Soldiers defend the nation. The fate of the nation is often in the hands of its military commanders and leaders. It is ironic that the civil war was what gave Nigeria the chance to identify its military heroes and patriots. However, a situation had developed in Nigeria when a constellation of military people arose who had never been to war or seen battle even from a distance. The civil society thus began to lose respect for soldiers more versed in coup-plotting, political office holding in government than military professionalism. At one time, the air force had no planes to fly and the navy only refurbished frigates.

Concerning Benji, whose military exploits were in the Nigerian civil war and Congo, we shall refer here to publications of civilians on the civil war. We shall touch politicians, university egg-heads and later poets and essayists. One notable record can be found in "Nigerian Government & Politics Under Military Rule 66 -79" edited by Professor Oyeleye Oyediran (The Macmillan Press Ltd). We have in Chapter 2, The Civil War, an article by Turi Muhammadu and Mohammed Haruna, from which we extract some significant things: There is a very valuable line of the course of the war, including the major battles. These are presented here to refresh our individual and collective memories.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| 1967 | |
| 6 July | Fighting breaks out between the federal and Biafran troops. |
| 0 July | The first Division of the Nigerian Army under Colonel Mohammed Shuwa captures Ogoja. Biafran aircraft bombs Lagos. |
| 15 July | Shuwa captures Nsukka. |
| 25 July | Third Marine Commandos Division of the Nigerian Army under Colonel Benjamin <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Bonny. |
| 9 august | The rebels invade Mid-West and capture Benin. Later, in a hurried response, a Second Division of the Nigerian Army under Colonel Murtala Mohammed is formed. |
| 10 August | Gowon declares total war. Lagos bombed again. |
| 29 August | Murtala recaptures Ore and thus halts Biafran threat to Ibadan and Lagos. |
| 14 September | Murtala recaptures Benin |
| 4 October | Shuwa captures Enugu. |
| 9 October | Murtala captures Asaba. Subsequent attempts to cross the Niger and capture Onitsha proved abortive. |
| 18 October | <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Calabar. |
| 1968 | |
| January | After the abortive attempts to capture Onitsha from Asaba, MurtaJa moves up the Niger, crosses it at Idah and advances down to Awka and Onitsha. |
| 21 March | Murtala captures Onitsha. |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 5 April | Shuwa captures Abakaliki. |
| Late April | The entire South Eastern state liberated by <u>ADEKUNLE</u> . |
| 6 May | <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Bonny Oil field in Rivers State. |
| 19 May | <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Port Harcourt and thus completes the sealing off of Biafra from sea. |
| 26 May | Colonel I. B. M. Haruna replaces Murtala as G. O. C. Second Division. |
| 29 July | <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Ahoada, last major town in Rivers State. |
| 4 September | <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Aba. |
| 10-11 September | <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Oguta and advances on the Uli airstrip which was Biafra's major link with the outside world. |
| 15 September | Biafrans retake Oguta. |
| 16 September | <u>ADEKUNLE</u> captures Owerri. |
| 30 September | Shuwa captures Okigwe. |
| Nov – December | Nigerian air force begins air strikes on Biafran airstrips especially Uli but with little effect. |
| 21-24 December | Biafran offensive to recapture Owerri and Aba foiled. |
| 1969 | |
| 22 April | Biafra recaptures Owerri. |
| 12 May | Major Reshuffle of Nigeria's army commanders. Obasanjo takes over from <u>ADEKUNLE</u> , Jalo from Haruna and Bisalla from Shuwa. |
| 27 December | Third division links up with the first at Umuahia. |
| 1970 | |
| 7 January | Third Division recaptures Owerri. |
| 11 January | Ojukwu flees Biafra for Ivory Coast. |
| 12 January | Obasanjo recaptures Uli airstrip. Lieutenant-Colonel Philip Effiong who took over from Ojukwu broadcasts surrender over Radio Biafra. |
| 13 January | Gowon accepts Biafran surrender. |
| | |

The careful observer must not fail to note that the criticism of some GHQ men mentioned in detail by Gen. J.J. Oluleye was such as to show it was as equally strategic and tactical that the recapture of Owerri was not just by the same Third Div now under Obasanjo but via the linkup between the Third and First at Umuahia before the final thrust. Hence, the earlier mention of alternatives Benji could have used and Jemibewon's strong criticism of lack of coordination from GHQ.

The summary time table of events shows clearly that working from scratch as pioneer GOC of Third Div, Benji had done at least 70 per cent of the necessary preparatory work.

We must now go into some details in order to put the whole civil war into a perspective, illuminating certain facts usually not clearly and accurately presented to the nation and the world at large. We present here, Abiodun Adekunle, Benji's son who summaries for us truthfully and smartly the great outlines of the tragic saga of the Nigerian Civil War

thus:

The Nigerian-Biafran War (1966-1970) was one of the most brutal conflicts of post-independence Africa. According to various independent estimates, the civil war resulted in the death of millions of Nigerians, with the Biafrans suffering the heaviest casualties.

The youthful General Yakubu Gowon commanded the federal army, while General Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu led the Biafran army.

The war was fought almost wholly in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, home not only to the dominant Ibo ethnic group but also to numerous 'minority' ethnic groups. Since the Biafran surrender in January 1970, the war has remained an open sore for Nigerians in general and for the Ibos in particular. Almost every family in Iboland was personally affected by the loss of an immediate or close family member.

The 3rd Marine Commando was one of the three Divisions of the Nigerian Army fighting to prevent the secession of the former Eastern region. The Division, whose troop strength was put at 35,000 men was headed by (then) Colonel Benjamin Adekunle and was responsible for the capture of 70% of Biafran territory. According to my father, the Division was created from scratch, from 'street thugs' outlaws and renegades mainly from the Yoruba ethnic group (Western Nigeria), which he then had to mold into a credible fighting unit.

The military campaigns of the Division commenced in the 'minority' areas of Biafra, and after their successes in these areas, they advanced into Biafran territory. Owerri was captured in September 1968, (leaving Umuahia as the only major town held by Biafra). The Biafrans mounted a counter-offensive on Owerri and not only re-entered Owerri, but in April 1969, threatened to advance to Port-Harcourt. This was the first major loss of territory for the Division since the beginning of the war in 1967. After the withdrawal of the 3^d Marines and their loss of Owerri, the Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, recalled my father to the Supreme Military Headquarters in Lagos.

However, by this stage of the civil war, the Biafran territory had been reduced to one tenth of its original size.

There was considerable interference by the global powers in Nigeria's internal affairs, notably by France, Britain, America and the Soviet Union, all of whom jostled either to increase their political influence in Nigeria or protect their enormous petroleum investments located in the South East, the Niger Delta and Bonny Island. Because the 3rd Marine Commando Division was at the frontlines of the conflict for much of the war, the Division featured in the controversy, which was generated by some of the strategies employed by federal troops during the war. Primary among these controversial subjects are; whether the federal army deliberately targeted civilians during the war; the morality of the federal blockade of Biafra between 1967 and 1970 and the legitimacy of employing starvation of the civilian populace as a weapon of war. The federal blockade and the starvation which the blockade precipitated within the Biafran Republic, was directly responsible for the high number of casualties, particularly of women and children in the latter part of the war.

Ironically, it was this attempt by the Federal Government to force a speedy conclusion to the conflict through these means that elevated the Nigerian civil war from a regional conflict to an international crisis of conscience. The haunting photographs of the sad-eyed starving children of Biafra placed the issue of starvation as a tool of war on the international agenda and the suffering etched on the distended bellies of the children, which appeared to lend credence, for the first time, to the Biafran charges of genocide. This issue of starvation as a legitimate tool of war, the Federal blockade of Biafra was truly a controversial one that gripped the hearts, mind and conscience of the world. The pictures of starving Biafran children afflicted with starvation's disease kwashiorkor caused the Biafran accusations of genocide to reverberate and resound throughout the world.

This inspired a global humanitarian relief effort led by international relief organisations. These groups were highly critical of the conduct of federal troops during the war. At that time, international relief groups were relatively inexperienced at dealing with disasters of the scale of the war; at the time, Second World War was the most recent comparable disaster.

The charges of genocide also brought the United Nations (UN) into the conflict and at the end of September 1968, the UN dispatched the International Military Observer Team in Nigeria (OTN) (on General Gowon's invitation) to investigate the veracity of these accusations.

General W. A. Milroy of Canada led the Team.

By the end of 1969, the Nigerian Military had a 250,000 standing army and were fighting on three fronts, in what the Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, called the 'Final Offensive.' The Third Division was handed over to the current Nigerian President on the 16th of May 1969. Olusegun Obasanjo, then a Colonel at Ibadan's Nigerian army engineering corps, was far removed from the front lines.

In October 1969, Ojukwu appealed to the United Nations (UN) to mediate a cease-fire between the warring sides as a prelude to peace negotiations. After 2 years, the Biafrans were battle fatigued, and the civilian population was choking under a federal blockade. However, General Gowon, who declared a fight to the finish, ignored this call.

In December 1969, Colonel Obasanjo led the 3^d Marine Division greatly replenished with new arms and ammunition together with the other army Divisions, in a four-pronged offensive involving 120,000 troops that sliced into half, what remained of Biafran territory. Following this offensive, Owerri changed hands for a third time, falling again on January 6, 1970. When the 3^d Marine Commando Division retook Owerri for the second time, Biafran resistance collapsed.

General Philip Effiong of the Biafran Army handed over the Biafran surrender to the newly appointed General Officer Commanding of the 3 Marine Commandos, the Biafran head of state, General Ojukwu, having fled to the Ivory Coast to, as he is

reported to have expressed it, 'search for peace.'

General Philip Effiong had called for an immediate, unconditional cease-fire on January 12 and submitted to the authority of the federal government at ceremonies in Lagos on January 15, 1970.

We proudly recall the voice of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the MOSOP Ogoni martyr. He left us number of books including "On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War," from which we pick a couple of remarks. In Chapter XIX, 'Under the Federals' on page 202 et seq, he wrote, inter alia:

And it was not only the leading personalities who were subjected to these indignities. The common people too, who were only too willing to do whatever the Federal troops required of them even including such menial jobs as bush-brushing ("combing") which they had done so often under the rebels. That same sadistic character who was in charge of the Military Police in Bonny and who had brutalized the citizens there was very much at work in Port Harcourt.

I raised the matter with Colonel Akinrinade whose headquarters had moved into Port Harcourt and, subsequently, with Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, the General Officer Commanding 3 Marine Commando Division.

It seems appropriate here to say a few words about this brilliant officer who scored such tremendous success in the civil war. Born in 1938 to a Yoruba father and a Bachama mother (a minority ethnic group in the present Gongola State), he trained at Sandhurst and came into prominence when he was entrusted with the command of the troops sent to Bonny. The rebel entry into the Mid-West means that he was diverted for a time from Bonny and the south-east end of the country to the south-west.

I met him for the first time in November 1967, after my appointment as Administrator, when I was introduced to him by Chief Harold Biriye, to whose sister he was married. Slight of frame, of medium height and by no means handsome, his exploits at Bonny and the Mid-West had already made him famous. I must confess that I had expected a different type of officer.

At that first meeting, he was gentle, solicitous and cheerful, although he appeared fairly worn-out, having just returned from a meeting. It is possible that being introduced by a famous and older brother-in-law, to whom he was just "Benjy", made a lot of difference. But in my interaction with him over the next year or two, I found him approachable, generous and open, with a great sense of humour. It is true that when he had to deal with his subordinates in the force, he was firm and even seemed to terrorize them. But I thought and still think that I detected there a posturing, a mask which he wore because he so perfectly understood the mentality of the Nigerian. For it must be remembered that he was not the commander of a highly-trained disciplined corps. The bulk of his men were illiterate, inexperienced and raw. Most of them had never heard the sound of gunfire. Some believed that charms could save them from bullets. Again, apart from the very top echelon, he could not attest to the quality of training of his officers. In short, it was an unusual corps in an unusual war. In such a situation, the African mentality fears the

masquerade. The man in the masquerade is vulnerable; but the masquerade is beyond reach, a myth. Adekunle tried to be that myth. And it worked.

He drove himself and his men hard. He built a creditable organization from nothing and the pressures on him as Commander were many, not least the way the men at the rear were often blissfully unaware of the tremendous pressures of the battle front. This is not necessarily a criticism of the headquarters staff of the Nigerian Army. They also had problems, but Adekunle's were a matter of life and death.

As I have pointed out, **he was not lacking in compassion. He took great care of Ibo lives and property, ensuring that "refuges" were well treated and cared for; he decreed harsh punishment for looters. I may be wrong, but I would certainly vote him one of the most Nigerian of the top military brass that I have met.**

If his career suffered a setback towards the end of the war, it was possibly because he did not know how to handle his great success, his stardom. But this is not unusual. Publicity, which he courted, is normally a double-edged sword. It can be easily turned against those for whom it roots. What Adekunle needed, above all else, was a competent public relations man.

He did not have that when I called on him at his residence that evening at the Shell B.P. residential area in Port Harcourt.

It was dusk. One of his senior officers, the late Major Hamman, was waiting to see him. Adekunle drove in with all the noise and pomp of a successful General. He saw me, ignored me. As soon as he set eyes on Hamman, he ordered him arrested, for what I do not know. There was a noise and a flurry, almost a stampede, by several pairs of well-polished boots; the unruffled Hamman was taken to I know not where, and then brought back after several minutes. Shortly after that, he was in discussion with Colonel Adekunle. He came very smiling. Those who had arrested him earlier saluted him smartly.

I sat down to dinner with Adekunle thereafter. I went to the point immediately while he was still in a mellow mood, drawing his attention to the difficulties of several communities in the liberated area. He had thought about it, of course, and proposed to get something going. He gave no details, and I did not press for them. The Colonel was a man of action. He did not earn the sobriquet "The Black Scorpion" for nothing.

The late Colonel Ayo Ariyo soon arrived. He was a very mature and sensible man and quickly relaxed tension among the civilian populace. Soon after that, a Military Administrator, the late Colonel Abubakar, was appointed. He had been in charge of the troops in Bonny when my wife and I passed through there in September. He was a jet-black, portly, gently-smiling, cigarette-smoking, beer-drinking officer. Perhaps not too bright or capable, but he was great public relations man, full of bonhomie, giving the impression that he could not hurt a fly. In appointing him, Adekunle had made a good choice. He had for assistance Captain Elechi Amadi who knew the area well and who had by now re-enlisted in the Nigerian Army.

Ken Saro-Wiwa went further down the line and wrote:

Of the difficulties and other matters related to the governance of Rivers State, I will not write further except in so far as these infringe on or are infringed upon by military affairs.

In the early days, as we struggled to establish bureaucracies and other arms of government with what little funds were available, we had the full support of Colonel Adekunle. He offered to provide funds from his sources for such things as furnishing and decoration of Commissioners' houses and rehabilitation.

For some reason, the Governor of the State spurned these offers, and it might all have to do as much with the fact that military men, given a command, do not like interference in their affairs by their colleagues, as with the personal differences between both men which I earlier outlined. All this was difficult for us civilians in government to understand.

We were worried enough to once invited Colonel Adekunle for a discussion, in the absence of the Governor. We asked him what could be done to encourage cordiality between the two of them. He attended the meeting, war really as his most amiable, and when I put a direct question to him, he kindly opined that I was so "thick-headed" I deserved "to be shot." I could sense a shiver run through my colleagues, but I knew that the Black Scorpion means no harm, and in any case, he did not draw the pistol he had in his pocket. The meeting did not achieve much, anyway.

The Rivers State Government was possibly Colonel Adekunle's least problem at that time. He was under pressure in the battle field; he was in a tangle with the rear in Lagos, which had allowed an international observer team to monitor the conduct of Federal forces in their advance into the Ibo heartland an event which few field Commanders would welcome and 3 Marine Commando Division had begun to fall into some disarray with many of the "Black Scorpion's" trusted lieutenants falling out with their General Officer Commanding. The manner of it was not obvious to us, but Colonels Akinrinade, Alabi-Isama and Godwin Ally were absent from Port Harcourt for quite some time. The rebels, fortified by arms supplied by the French began to make inroads into areas earlier captured by the Federal troops.

It was during this period that Gowon paid his first visit to Port Harcourt, possibly in preparation for the expected visit of the British Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson. The visit kept us all, military and civilians, quite busy and when Gowon finally arrived, the citizenry erupted with joy. Gowon's high spirit was infectious. He spoke off the cuff cheerfully and eloquently to the leading citizens, and I noted in my diary later that day, "The idea of 'One Nigeria' is right in his marrows. One could not but be impressed.

Ken again wrote:

However, the war still raged and the Federal forces were suffering severe reverses in the Owerri sector. In April 1969, the rebels re-entered Owerri and the body of Major Hamman, second-in-command of 16 Brigade, was borne sorrowfully back with the retreating Federal troops. Hamman was a tall, elegant and handsome officer, well groomed and, as usual, well-turned out. I had spent many happy moments with him in Port Harcourt and knew his young wife (of Ibibio extraction) and children well. I was very affected by his death, which brought home to me the poignancy and waste of the war.

Ken later went on to say:

The fall of Owerri into rebel hands was to lead to the loss of Adekunle's Command. It had been on the books for quite some time, but Gowon was exercising his usual caution or, some would say, indecision. When it finally happened, it took a distinctly Nigerian hue. All three field Commanders were changed and replaced by officers from the same areas. Thus, Colonel Obasanjo, a Yoruba, replaced Colonel Adekunle (another Yoruba) and Colonels Bisalla and Jallo (from the 'North') took over from Haruna and Shuwa (both from the 'North') in Divisions 1 and 2, respectively.

The loss of his Command was very painful to Colonel Adekunle. The send-off party given him by his officers was a very emotional affair on the part of the "Black Scorpion." He wept openly. **He had built the Division from, scratch, had won significant military successes, had become a national hero and had obtained international attention.**

The reality that he was about to give up all, or most of that, did not sit well with him. He had had power which he enjoyed exercising and would definitely have loved to end the war and bathe in the admiration which would definitely flow therefrom. That was not to be. Man proposes and God disposes. There is an Ogoni proverb which, when translated, states that "He who roasts the yam does not eat it." Colonel Adekunle had roasted the yam; I should say he ate some of it; the honour of eating all of it fell to Colonel Obasanjo.

Colonel Adekunle's last days in Port Harcourt were marked by a debilitating loss of morale occasioned by **his first defeat** during the war: the loss of Owerri. Also, the Colonel's disputes with Army Headquarters were matched by his most able lieutenants, Lt. Colonels Akinrinade and Alabi-Isama. Even Colonel Ally, his suave, soft-spoken second-in-command, the ebullient and highly-intelligent Major Innih and other senior officers in the field had begun to feel disenchanted with the handling of the war by their G.O.C.; and most of the junior officers and men had almost forgotten about the war and were acting more like soldiers of fortune, looting the areas under their control and luxuriating in the spoils of war.

The civilian population bore the brunt of this disenchantment, and there was absolutely nothing the civilian authority could do about it. Colonel Adekunle's departure was therefore seen as something of a Godsend all around.

This is not to detract from his stupendous achievement. Colonel Adekunle was a

humane officer, a dedicated and brilliant soldier. He returned to a quiet, cool seat at Army Headquarters where he became Director of Training, a post in which he had virtually nothing to do. He returned to the limelight once again when, after the war, he was put in charge of the decongestion of Lagos port, a task which he accomplished in as colourful a manner as only he could do. In 1975, he was prematurely retired from the Army.

One of the most respected members of the civil society in academia who studied these matters rather critically and closely is the late Professor B. J. Dudley. He, along with Professor Essien-Udom built a respectable school of Political Science at the University of Ibadan with disciples like Dr. Ekpebu and Dr. Ukpabi Asika, etc. In his book "*Politics and Crisis in Nigeria*," B. J. Dudley wrote in Chapter 9, under the subtitle "The Course of the Civil War the First Phase"

After Nsukka, the only other notable success of the Federal troops in July was the capture, on the 26th, of the oil terminal in Bonny in an amphibious landing which was described as "brilliantly planned and executed" and the first of its kind ever to be attempted by African troops. The fall of Bonny to federal forces (commanded by Lt. Col. Now Brigadier, Benjamin Adekunle) was important. It not only gave the Federal Government control of the main river leading to Port Harcourt, but it also deprived the rebels as one of their principal counters in any bargaining with the oil companies that they might have envisaged. Not surprisingly, they made repeated attempts to regain Bonny and during the last of these December 24th to 31st 1967, - they almost succeeded in driving out the half-starved and badly supplied federal soldiers whom they had effectively checked from advancing beyond the town.

Dudley went further:

Pushing southwards, federal forces captured the rebel capital of Enugu on the 4th of October, a day before the fall of Asaba. In the South, Col. Adekunle's men landed successfully in Calabar, the capital of the South Eastern State, to begin a two-pronged movement: the first northwards towards Ikom in Ogoja province aimed at depriving the rebels of all access by land eastwards through the Cameroun Republic; and the second, westwards through Port Harcourt with the objective of depriving the rebels of access by sea and securing the oil refinery in that town.

Dudley, after treating the Abagana rebel triumph which we shall treat deservingly later, went on to say:

The movement of the 2nd Division coincided with similar movements from the 1st (under Col. Shuwa) and the 3^d Commando (under Col. Adekunle) Divisions. Moving south-eastwards, 1st Division troops successfully took Abakaliki on the 5th of April where they halted, expecting to link-up with the section of the 3rd Division moving north from Calabar and which, on the 30th of March, had reached the strategic town of Ikot Ekpene, a town that was to become a focal point of some of the heaviest fighting of the civil war. Moving through more difficult terrain, the segment of the 3^d Division heading for Port Harcourt made such slower progress than their counterparts heading north. However, by the 19th May, reaching the outskirts of their

primary objective, Port Harcourt, which they surrounded, leaving only a two-mile wide corridor to provide a means of exit for civilians wanting to move out of the town before the final assault began. Four days after being surrounded, Port Harcourt fell to the men of the 3^d Commando Division, and with its fall the way was opened for the second stage of the civil war, the march towards Aba and Ibo 'heartland' of the East Central State.

Much of the success of the 3^d Division was made possible by the active cooperation of the local population, the non-Ibo speaking peoples of the Rivers and the South-Eastern states. However, with the personal and reportedly arbitrary rule of the commander of the 3^d Division, and the tendency towards indiscipline among his men, it was not long before this cooperation was all but forfeited. By August 1968, the southern front had become the most fragile of the federal fronts, a situation which persisted till May 1969 when the divisional commanders were replaced. At the same time, for cooperating with the federal troops, these peoples paid a great price in punitive measures exacted by the rebels who destroyed whatever it was possible to destroy before retreating. Whole villages were destroyed before the advance of federal troops and where the fighting was at a comparable level, the towns suffered greater damage in comparison with those in the East-Central State. In a real sense then, they were the first 'hostages' in the civil war.

By the end of May 1969, a clear pattern had been established. The rebels had been completely encircled, deprived of access, either by land or sea to the external world. The only access left to them was by air and this was costly. Of the original area of the Eastern Region, they had lost Ogoja and Calabar provinces (the two provinces which became the South-Eastern State) about half of the area of the Rivers State and large tracts in the north of the East-Central State. These areas were not only the main food producing areas of the former Eastern Region, they also produced the principal export commodities, palm produce from the South-Eastern State and petroleum from the Rivers State. Though the Federal Government might not win the war, it seemed clear that the rebels had lost. Short of incalculable military blunders on the part of federal troops, or large-scale external intervention, it was highly improbable that the rebels would be able to regain the territories they had lost and they needed to regain these if ever secession was to be a viable proposition.

With the cause of a 'Biafra' whose boundaries were coterminous with the Eastern Region just about lost, the obvious and rational action to take would have been to seek a negotiated settlement. The alternative to continue with the war in the face of the odds, could only lead to the prolongation and intensification of the human suffering, which, by May, was already beginning to be apparent.

Dudley wrote inter-alia:

The federal side suffered from several deficiencies which its overall greater armour only barely compensated for. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, there was the lack of proper coordination of effort. There was, for example, no corps commander charged with the responsibility of synchronizing the movements of the three federal

divisions, a function which at best was only partially carried out by the army Chief of Staff. This, besides allowing the divisional commanders a free hand, also provided ample opportunities for the personality differences of these men to be expressed. Thus, where Col. Shuwa, the commander of the 1st Division, was cautious and prepared only to take calculated risks, the volatile Col Adekunle of the 3rd Division seemed more risk taking, an advantage when the opposing forces lacked counter-attacking capabilities, but otherwise, somewhat dangerous as Owerri clearly showed. These differences the rebels were in a position to exploit as their improved. Closely paralleling the lack of coordinating machinery was the absence of an effective operations unit, which played havoc with the logistics of supply in two different but related ways.

Finally, Dudley examined the loss of Owerri thus:

Two days after the fall of Umuahia to federal forces, Owerri, with over a thousand soldiers in it, was lost to the rebels. The loss of Owerri, though a blow to federal morale, was not a strategic loss. By the end of April, federal control over the South-Eastern and Rivers States had been firmly established and with the capture of Umuahia, only about a third of the area of the East Central State was left in rebel hands, some 3,000 square miles out of the total area of approximately 9,000. In other words, two years after secession, only one-tenth of the area initially proclaimed 'Biafra' was left before full federal control could be restored over the whole of the Federation.

Owerri federal loss was the reason or excuse for depriving the Black Scorpion of his command thereby robbing him of his due share of glory. After all when the final push got launched on 24th December, 1969 it was a coordinated joint effort directed by GHQ with about 100,000 to 120,000 men. The earlier absence of such coordination was not the fault or choice of Benji. On 9th January, Ojukwu fled. Effiong, a non-Ibo was left to carry the shit-pail as Fela would say. One sobering final comment of Dudley remains true till today. Though the end of the civil war may have ended the threat of disintegration and political chaos, the events leading to the war and the war itself have together created new problems while leaving others UNTOUCHED OR UNSOLVED. BENJI later was called upon to clear 11 madly congested ports. Have we cleared all our ugly problems swept under the carpet? Why is there any MASSOB today? Why is Paul Dike the first Ibo Defence Chief since 1970? When would there be an Ibo Head of State and C-in-C, on the merit or by the deft rotation, rotation and counter-rotation that left only two OLU Olu Obasanjo and Olu Falae, both Yoruba to a somewhat mock-contest for the presidential slot in 1999. The bulk of the Yoruba seemed to have voted for the loser. The winner lost every election from his ward, local government, senatorial district and his state. What a wonderful 'Army Arrangement' as Fela shuffling and smiling would say. Who says BENJI is not the true hero of the Nigerian military? He is, let us come off it soonest.

PART THE FOURTH

BENJI'S CRITICS TAKEN ON

We choose an oblique approach here in order to simply hasten matters. A definite *raison d'être* for the Adekunle joint father and son publication is the need to answer once and for all and at a very opportune time, the controversial claims in Gen. Obasanjo's book **"MY COMMAND"** published by Heinemann at Ibadan in 1980. I am sure many people here would remember the furore that this publication caused just as with "Not My Will." The former was subtitled 'An Account of the Nigeria Civil War 1967-1970.' He dedicated the book thus "To my children born before and during the war, to their mother, and to the memory of the unknown heroes on both sides of the Nigerian civil war." Now this is all quite interesting. Incidentally, the child-bearing mother is strictly referred to in the singular, but why, for goodness sake, must we encounter unknown heroes like the unknown soldier again? In the final analysis, the real heroes are probably not Gowon, who was so meek and harmless, not Ojukwu, who partly started what he could not actually complete and had to flee, perhaps also not an Obasanjo who merely polished up the gem of a series of victories all set-up before him. As for Obasanjo in particular, it must be stated clearly that his version of 3MCD and its theatre of action differ completely with BENJY's. Benjy for one thing, was a pioneer who raked up in an emergency at the utmost, a pastiche of some 35,000 men. The final push Obasanjo claims credit for involved over 100,000 men in JOINT assault with First Div for the crucial final thrust. We can leave Biafran Sandhurst, Col. Ude and Gen. A. A. Madiebo out conveniently. Many got done on the other side too ... Victor Banjo, Emmanuel Ifejuna, Alale, Sam AgbamAgbam!

We wish to adorn this part of our lecture with excerpts from a review of the Adekunle book which Dr. Reuben Abati published on 15 July, 2004. Reuben wrote thus:

Benjamin Adekunle's civil war letters is from the outset, a response to General Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Command*. When this book appeared in 1980, Brig General Benjamin Adekunle had taken exceptions to it, and it is not difficult to see why. Obasanjo had taken over the Command of the Third Marine Commando from Adekunle in 1969. In *My Command*, he pays no tribute to Benjamin Adekunle's efforts as leader of the Third Division; instead he describes how he met a demoralised, disunited, quarrelsome troop, which he had to re-organise into an effective fighting machine which subsequently recaptured Owerri, and the Federal ~~order~~ Obasanjo's command went on to win the war. Obasanjo shines like gold in *My Command* as the war hero who brought the civil war to an end. And the book races towards this denouement after Obasanjo had done a good job of suggesting that all former commanders of the troops were either distracted, or incompetent.

Throughout the Adekunle publication, Obasanjo understandably receives hard knocks. Abiodun Adekunle, being his father's true son fires the first shot in his "Introduction" when he writes, tellingly as follows: "It is legitimate to ask what role may fairly be attributed to my father in bringing the war to its conclusion. Nigerians and more particularly the Yorubas have been fortunate that Obasanjo has always been available to fill the roles of other fallen comrades, such as my father after his loss of command, Murtala Mohammed after his assassination and again, MKO Abiola, after his premature death. Over the length of his career, from the very start until the present, General Obasanjo seems to have displayed an uncanny ability of

reaping where others have toiled". (pp. 20-21).

The father fires his own shot on page 42 when he gloats over Obasanjo's failure to make a good grade at the Mons Officer Cadet School in the UK, on account of which he could not go on to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He and Obasanjo were course mates. And now, The Black Scorpion writes: "In later years, I attributed some of the actions of my former course mates in the national arena, especially with regard to their colleagues to the need to assuage feelings of inferiority which may have sprung from having been publicly adjudged and labeled inadequate in the midst of their cohorts". The book is full of such other swipes at Obasanjo, particularly in subsequent sections where Ojukwu's comments on Obasanjo are used for illustration.

What follows this putting-Obasanjo-in-his-place is a fairly detailed documentation of Colonel Adekunle's leadership of the Third Marine Commando Division.

Written by Adekunle himself, this section of the book is a study in the art of war, with The Black Scorpion ' functioning as a strategist. He comes across as a professional soldier who was motivated by an overriding sense of patriotism. He takes us through the beginnings of the civil war, the issues at stake, and the strategies on both sides, and how from the first shot Biafra was bound to lose the war. But Adekunle is not necessarily a war-monger, he draws attention to the options which if they had been taken, would have set Nigeria on a different path. The narrative is spiced up with histrionic reports about Benjamin Adekunle in the foreign press, and his historical location as the soldier who built the Third Marine Commando Division into an effective team and as the mind that made the Federal victory of 1970 possible.

Thanks indeed to Reuben. For those amazed about Ojukwu still treating OBJ as a joke, see a recent repeat in Saturday Sun, March 21, 2009 front and pages 11-14.

Simply because of the international dimension accorded this tragic war, we end this part with a foreign commentator who covered the war extensively. Writing of divisional rivalries at the front lines, JOHN de St. Joree observed thus:

The capacity, character and style of the individual commanders at all levels, but especially at the top, were central to the conduct of the war. The three Federal Divisions varied enormously for a number of reasons but the imprint of their respective commanders' personalities gave them their distinctive characters. The III Division under Colonel Mohammed Shuwa was cautious and orthodox; the 3rd Marine Commando, led by Adekunle, aggressive and dynamic among its soldiers terror of the fiery and unpredictable 'Black Scorpion' often outweighed fear of the enemy and the 2nd Division changed from being rumbustious and chaotic under Murtala Mohammed to easy-going and plodding under the dilettante Haruna. It is probably no accident that the two most successful field commanders' (Adekunle in Nigeria and Achuzie in Biafra) thrown up by the war were similar in temperament, shared the same magnetism, employed identical fear-inculcating disciplinary

methods and rejoiced in crops or golf club handles (never seen in the more seasoned and orderly I Division) which were used liberally on the men for the small military misdemeanour and supplemented by loud shouting and incessant saluting, even in tricky places like the turrets of armoured cars. Achuzie, on the other side used to whip and beat his men into battle which, as with Adekunle, seemed to be acceptable partly because both commanders were known to be scornful of their own personal safety.

Adekunle is half Yoruba and half Bachama (one of Nigeria's most warlike minority tribes from the Middle Belt) and was trained at Sandhurst where he was regarded as something of a 'loner' and not above average ability. He served as a normal infantry officer and only came into prominence when he led the seaborne assaults on Bonny and the Mid-West early in the civil war. His Division was an amorphous mixture of old and new soldiers from practically every tribe in the Federation but with a large contingent of Yorubas. (Adekunle gradually came to regard himself as more Yoruba than Northerner as a result of his rivalry with Shuwa and Murtala Mohammed in the other divisions and because of Northern officers' alleged discrimination against him before the war.) His greatest achievement was to weld his Division into a recognisable though loose organisation shape and breathe something of his own sulphurous spirit into his men. The result was some spectacular successes (Calabar, Port Harcourt, Aba and Owerri) before over-reaching himself in a desperate attempt to 'beat' to the main prize of Umuahia and Uli. He came a cropper and lost Owerri which was one of the reasons - though probably not the main cause for his removal in the complete change-round of Divisional commanders in May 1969. But he had in the meantime become a Yoruba and, to a lesser extent, a national hero. In the West, he was seen in the tradition of the Yoruba warlords of the nineteenth century and as a potential military leader if the West should ever decide to go it alone. He was made a chief and was immensely popular with the man in the street. (The Yoruba called him, delightedly, 'na cinema' pidgin English for 'a great show.') He always denied political ambition (he told me once that he wanted to become a farmer when he retired from the army, but then most Nigerian officers tended to tell you that); however, it seems clear that his withdrawal to take over the directorate of training under the eye of Gowon in Lagos, was at least partly designed to head off any intentions he had in that direction and to curb his every-growing independence and unruliness in Port Harcourt. Rather like the allies' race with the Russians across Europe in the closing stages of the Second World War, the Federal Government did not want a victorious Adekunle in control of most of former Biafra. (After the war, however, Adekunle's remarkable talents for 'getting things done' were once again put to good use: this time in the more pacific area of relieving the appalling congestion in the Lagos docks, a task in which he was again immensely successful).

Colonel Joe 'Hanibal' Achuzie is a more mysterious figure since he had never served in the Nigerian Army. He claimed that he had fought in the British army in Korea and Suez

but his has never been confirmed. Before the war, he ran an electrical business in Port Harcourt and before that, he had lived in Britain where he married his English wife, Ethel. His nickname is also a mystery there is nothing remotely resembling either the Alps or elephants in Biafra but presumably it came as recognition of his general military prowess which was genuine enough. He was a rough and tough soldier who inspired the same fear and respect in his men as Adekunle did; he also had a good tactical sense and could move his troops around with more speed than most of the commanders on either side. He was responsible for the huge ambush at Abagana, and played a leading part in the recapture of Owerri. But, unfortunately for Biafra's military fortunes, Ojukwu pulled him back at about the same time that Adekunle lost his command and he was put in charge of petrol rationing, a waste of talent if there ever was one. He came into prominence at the end of the war when he was alleged to have declared that whatever happened, he would fight on. But, in fact, he supported Effiong in carrying out the surrender after **Ojukwu had flown away**

We must end this session with a bomb! I want to prick the conscience of some of my kinsmen. The fuse to my bomb is that despite the title supplied by the sponsors of this reception, if anything at all, the weight of evidence is that BENJY is inherently a hero, a national hero, a hero any day, anytime and a hero everywhere. He is not just an Ogbomoso hero or a Yoruba one. The Ogbomoso have chosen today to demonstrate their appreciation of his talents, skills and professional attainment. BUT WHAT ABOUT YORUBA AS YORUBA? At the time Benjy was enacting all the heroism that contributed promptly and stoutly to cementing and preventing further cracks in the body politics and territorial integrity of the country, Awolowo was in the Federal Government, he was given the 'Leader of Yoruba' title around this time; General Adebayo was Military Governor over the preponderantly Yoruba Western State; Wole Soyinka, the great writer was around along with younger ones like Kole Omotoso. All these persons wrote profusely and were written about concerning the civil war. NOT ONE OF THESE YORUBAMEN HAD A WORD OF APPRECIATION FOR BENJY.

Obasanjo, in '**NOT MY WILL**,' Awolowo in all his writings and the Oyelaran stint on him as well as General Adebayo's biography, '**Onward Soldier Marches On ..**' None had a word to spare!!! 'My Command' has already been treated. This eerie silence may be part of what Chris Ali calls a pretence, even official pretence. The silence I draw attention to here, speaks volumes about the Yoruba as a people. It is not about Benjy. I congratulate the OCF, ODF and all Ogbomoso for throwing this pathetic gauntlet to all Yoruba.

For some, this slogan of those days sounded more like: To Keep Nigeria Worn ... Thanks to people like Gowon, Benjy, Akinrinade, Adelanwa, Aduwo, Bajowa, etc for keeping the hope alive.

PART THE FIFTH

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE TRUE HEROES AND MEN OF EXCEPTIONAL TALENT ON BOTH SIDES

Those who deserve nomination for the highest decorations as true heroes and patriots must include both Benjamin Adekunle (Black Scorpion) from the Nigerian side and probably Col. Joe Achuzie (Hannibal) or (Air Raid) from the Biafran side. To these must be added a certain great Biafran leader of a band of inventive scientists and technological whiz-kids. Professor Gordian Obuneme Ezekwe (1929-1997). He led the teams variously called Research and Production Board, Science Group, PRODEV, PRODA etc. Prof. Ezekwe and his men wrought wonders even long after the war. Professor Ezekwe was very appropriately made Minister of Science and Technology by IBB, a post he adorned so well before he died. Those are the three colourful heroes of the war that we all hope was not fought in vain.

Prof. G. O. Ezekwe, along with his team armed with the Ibo spirit of inventiveness, never-say-die entrepreneurial spirit constructed mini refineries, supplied various daily needs of the civil population locally-made fabricated weapons, bombs, rockets, including the famous Ogbunigwes, landmines called foot cutters and things named 'Marshalls,' 'Genocide' and of course, shot-guns revolvers, hand grenades, ammunition and explosives of various descriptions. A good statue of him should be erected by the Federal Government possibly at Aba.

I knew Ezekwe very well, having interacted actually with him when I was Executive Secretary of the National Science and Technology Agency between 1978 and early 1980. I always made sure I supplied him with all the research funds he applied for, the very same day, without his having to defend his proposal. He was a wonderful man, ahead of us all at the Science Secretariat!

Five things stand out. For the most dramatic key battles, one on each side, I should choose Nigeria's strategic early victory at BONNY and of course, the brilliant Biafran cutting up of the Federal convoy at ABAGANA. No doubt Bonny and Abagana are the aces. As to logistical inventiveness, Biafra's Science Group under EZEKWE is the sole winner of gold in this category. Benjamin Adekunle and Joe Achuzie deserve their gold medals. Let us please listen to Major General Chris Ali for once and stop cheating and pretence about this dark period in our national history. BENJY, the hero of yester-years and icon oftoday, I pray and hope this is the begining of the flow of great and good things for you from your country and its authorities at all levels. Please let's all stand and give a round of applause for the man whose achievements we all converge here to celebrate.

I THANK YOU ALL, OCF, ODF and every individual here present.