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A DISCOURSE ON THE HISTORY AND IMPACTS OF THE OGBUNIGWE BOMB ON THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970.

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Cite this article:

Morgan Ogbonna (2025), A Discourse on the History and Impacts of the Ogbunigwe Bomb on the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970. African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions 8(1), 49-62. DOI: 10.52589/AJCHRT-3QG8KTOO

Manuscript History

Received: 2 Nov 2024 Accepted: 15 Dec 2024 Published: 31 Jan 2025

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ABSTRACT: The history of the Nigeria/Biafra war is berserk with many tantrums that spill from the imagination of the people who tell the story. The objectivity or subjectivity of the author's account spill from the side he has decided to domicile his thought and augments, but to any discerning mind, the war was one fought by the lgbos in present day Nigeria to survive as a people. Part of what makes modern warfare is the kind of ammunition used in the execution of the war. The Biafran soldiers were not privileged to acquire some of these modern ammunitions as they were denied by the western powers that supported the Nigeria government basically because of their economic interests. The Biafrans, in a bid to protect themselves and survive, formed a Research and Production unit (RAP). It was this unit, populated by young Biafran scientists that came up with the idea of the Ogbunigwe bomb. By the end of the war, this bomb had become a nightmare to Nigeria and their allies. This paper will explain the origin of the Ogbunigwe bomb, how it got its name, its impact in the war and how Nigeria failed to cash-in on this innovation after the war. This work intends to fill this gap in literature and add to the discourse in the historiography of Biafra wartime domestic weapon development. The findings show that the Ogbunigwe bomb was borne out of necessity for the Biafrans to defend themselves in the face of imminent extermination by the Nigeria government through the existing political class and the army. The methodology for this paper is purely qualitative and the sources are derived from primary and secondary materials.

KEYWORDS: Bomb, Secession, Guerilla, Nigerian Civil War, Conflict, Biafra.

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INTRODUCTION

In the unsettling reaction to the invasion of Eastern Nigeria on the twilight of Thursday 6th July 1967, Igbo scientists with little resources and time at hand, with inventive improvisation and innovation, kept pace with the challenge of the civil war better than the federal scientists who were not short of financial support and military hardware facilities (Alata & Omobowale, 2012, p.8). Consequently, the product of Nigerian scientists, i.e. the 'Ogbunigwe', was the hallmark of Igbo warfare and a shock to the Northern Nigeria soldiers. This war machine is said to be tailored to meet the demands of modern warfare, targeting enemy war tanks of oppressors. This paper, therefore evaluates the historical background, the types and varieties of Ogbunigwe bombs, and their impact on the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970).

Africa's dismal economic performance is directly attributable to its weakness in the production and use of modern technology. Even Nigeria, a country with immense human and material resources, coupled with significant scientific infrastructure, has not yet been able to manage the all-important technological leap forward. The situation was different in Biafra (1967–70), when indigenous scientists and engineers performed socially relevant science innovations without the preconditions conventionally perceived as necessary for technological development. Anchored on indigenous African technology, the sociology of scientific and technological practice in Biafra, outlines the achievements of Biafran scientists and engineers, and offers explanations of why the Biafran technological success has not been replicated in post-civil war Nigeria.

Ultimately, the Nigeria civil war came to an end in 1970 with the surrender of the Biafran forces. However, the legacy of the Ogbunigwe lives on as a symbol of resistance and innovation in the face of adversity (Isiama, 2013, p.212). The use of improvised explosive devices in conflicts around the world has only increased since then, further demonstrating the continued relevance and impact of these makeshift weapon in modern warfare.

This research was inspired by the recent realization that the effectiveness of the Ogbunigwe bomb, in terms of its destructive force relative to other contemporary bombs, was not documented in literature. Ogbunigwe bombs were locally produced explosives of different versions, which comprised relatively cheaper components but were still very potent in unleashing destruction on an unprecedented scale during the Nigerian civil war. The research aims to determine the effectiveness of Ogbunigwe bombs on specific targets vis-à-vis other contemporary armed forces.

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LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The Nigeria Civil War, also known as the Biafran War (1967–1970), was a significant conflict in West African history, involving complex political, ethnic, and socio-economic dynamics. One of the most notable technological innovations during this period was the development and deployment of the *Ogbunigwe* bomb, a locally made explosive device that significantly impacted the trajectory and tactics of the conflict.

Historical Context and Development of the Ogbunigwe Bomb

The *Ogbunigwe* bomb, meaning "mass killer" in Igbo, was designed and produced by Biafran scientists and engineers, spearheaded by the Research and Production (RAP) Organization under the leadership of Dr. Felix Oragwu. This indigenous technological innovation emerged as a response to the severe military disadvantage faced by Biafra due to the federal blockade that cut off arms supplies. The *Ogbunigwe* was adapted into various forms, including mines, grenades, and air-dropped bombs, demonstrating a wide tactical application across different battlefields.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The literature on the *Ogbunigwe* and its impact can be analyzed through various theoretical lenses, including:

Technology and Warfare Theory: This theory posits that technological advancements significantly alter the conduct and outcome of wars. The *Ogbunigwe* bomb exemplifies how indigenous technological innovation can offset military asymmetry in conflict, allowing a disadvantaged faction to sustain prolonged resistance against a superior force. Scholars like Carl von Clausewitz in *On War* emphasize that war is both an art and a science, where technological ingenuity often becomes a decisive factor.

Asymmetric Warfare Theory: This theory explores how weaker forces utilize unconventional strategies and tactics to challenge stronger opponents. The *Ogbunigwe* allowed Biafran forces to engage in guerrilla tactics, disrupt federal military advances, and inflict heavy casualties, thereby prolonging the war despite significant resource limitations.

METHODOLOGY

This is the study for the History of the Ogbunigwe bomb and its impact on the Nigerian civil war, 1967-1970. This study adopted interdisciplinary approach having distilled enormous evidence from cognate social sciences as well as other disciplines because of their interconnectedness. Furthermore, it made use of written and unwritten sources for a balanced opinion on its subject matter. Both sources proved useful in augmenting the evidence generated from each other. Self-report technique or protocol and observation methods were also valuable in establishing a reliable position in the study. This effort is much more than mere chronicling the various incidents of unwholesome attacks on the Igbo and their business outfits as there are attempts to analyze, interrogate and re-interpret events and circumstances behind them. In other words, both descriptive and analytical approaches were put in place in order to present a fairly symmetrically elegant and accurate account of Igbo experiences in

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the geographical entity called Nigeria. However, in a study of this nature, it is a bit difficult to present quantitative figures of casualties in the attacks so as not to fan the embers of confusion and conflagration.

Based on the findings of the study, recommendations will be formulated for policy makers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders on how to enhance and maintain the technology that brought about that feat which will lead to development in Nigeria post civil war era.

Background and Overview of the Nigeria Civil War

General Overview of the Ogbunigwe Bomb

The Ogbunigwe bomb is a sophisticated weapon manufactured within a very short period of the civil war. The Nigeria-Biafra war, as one of the few all-Africa conflicts in the mid-Twentieth century, was characterized by a wide range of military tactics and strategies (Nwankwo, 1972, p.59-60). In some aspects, it was similar to both World Wars, while in other ways it was as if the nature of these wars could hardly have sufficed to lead to a major challenge at the time (Strembau, 1977, p.72). Evidence from the indigenously manufactured weapon (Ogbunigwe) used by the Biafran army is a welcome suggestion that Nigeria had hidden potentials there to support modern seismic imaging (Cervenka, 1973, p.124).

According to Ojukwu inter alia:

"I started off this struggle in July 1966 with 120 rifles to defend the entirety of the East. I took my stand...because I believe that this stand is vital to the survival of the South. I appealed for settlement quietly because I understood that this was a naked struggle for power and that the only time we can sit down and decide the future of Nigeria on the basis of equality, will be equality of arms. Quietly I built. If you do not know it, I am proud and my officers are proud that here in the East, we possess the biggest Army in Africa....It is not my intention to unleash the destruction which my Army can unleash. It is not my intention to fight unless I am attacked. If I am attacked, I will take good care of the aggressor" (Max Siollun, 2019, p.63).

Domestic Sourcing and Fabrication of Arms in Biafra

The Nigerian Civil War confronted Biafra with a host of military problems. To serve the ends of war and deal with the threat on Biafra's national security, the Science Group was formed. The Group comprised various people with scientific and technological background, formal and informal, who invested their devotion and patriotism to conduct research and fabricate essential material for the prosecution of the war (Ofodile, 2016, p.218-238). Made exclusively up of Nigerians, the Group was saddled with the task of technological innovation, copy technological creativity and improvisation under extreme privation. They were the Research and Production Unit of Biafra (RAP).

RAP came to be identified with the development of an arms industry, which though lacking in sophistication, assisted the Biafran war machine from crumbling too soon. Among the scientists were Gordian Ezekwem, Col. Ejike Ebenezer Aghanya, Willy Achukwu, Frank Ndili, Felix Oragwu, Ezekiel Izuogu, Sam Orji, Frank Mbanefo, Benjamin Nwosu and Roy Umenyi. They belonged to the Research And Production Unit [RAP].

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RESULT/FINDINGS

Impact of the Ogbunigwe Bomb on the Nigeria Civil War

A survey of the published works and declassified government documents depicts no particular attention to the Ogbunigwe in the Nigeria civil war, irrespective of the weapon's impact and strength (Eleanoru Vodrust, 2015, p.44). A brief look at the documents supports my contention of the non-use of the weapon for destructive and offensive purposes but for defense, even though there are ongoing reports and research by journalists/pseudo-analysts that has an act for not putting the records right especially in a historical a perspective. The Ogbunigwe made its mark in the 1967-70 Nigeria civil war, being synonymous with the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the weapons were respected (sometimes feared) from the break-away Province of Biafra of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Ikenna & Weaver, 2001, p.87). The weapons were indigenous 18-22 inch bamboo (or metal) tubes, with round over balata (or rubber) nose caps. They were locally packed with Royal Demolition Explosives (RDX) plastic explosive, railroad torpedoes, mercury pent-pressure activated bombs, knock out bombs - found in every market, for example, Chloro-dot which users scatter at riot events (Alonso, 2007, p.32). Some metals, parts, and accessories were either machined or imported. Their simple prime and time fuze also had a knowledge and chemicals made-on-hand presence. The usefulness of the mid-ranged area explosively dispersed weapon (AEDW) is evident in World War Two (WW2) where the axis force had used it extensively. The fear of the Biafrans somewhat came through as they became cautious and re-thought their earlier plans on the strategy to use against the Nigeria side especially in the use of explosive weapons to consolidate their defense against the enemy (Hardyman, 2003, p.90). The impact of the bomb was so significant that fifty years after the end of that war, the memories of the bomb cannot be forgotten due to its historical impact.

Deployment of the Bomb during the War

Professor Felix Oragwu, the weapon developer for Biafra in an interview after the war said "When the war started, there was not a single weapon....anywhere throughout Biafra. No guns, no bomb, no nothing" (Lindsday & Enterline, 2000, p.1820-1992). In addendum, he said "without us, the war would have lasted only thirty hours." The deployment of the Ogbuniigwe bomb automatically changed the trajectory of the war. The different types of Ogbunigwe bomb included the Beer Ogbunigwe (hand grenade), the Foot-Cutter Ogbunigwe (land mine), the Coffin Box Ogbunigwe (land mine), the Bucket Ogbunigwe, and the Flying Ogbunigwe - surface to air weapon (Ballentine & Sherman, 2003, p.65).

Strategic Significance of the Ogbunigwe Bomb

The Ogbunigwe bomb played a significant role in the Nigerian civil war and had strategic importance for the Republic of Biafra (Okocha, 1994, p.101). Some of strategic significance of the Ogbunigwe bomb are as follows:

Psychological Impact: The crude but powerful nature of the Ogbunigwe bomb struck fear in the Nigerian army and its allies. The indiscriminate nature of the weapon caused devastation and chaos among enemy troops, leading to demoralization and a loss of morale (Effiong, 2023, p.41).

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Defense Capability: The Ogbunigwe bomb allowed Biafran forces to defend their territory and repel Nigeria offensives (Okocha, 1994, p.98). The weapon was particularly effective in disrupting enemy advancements and providing deterrent against large-scale attacks.

Influence on the course of the war: The strategic use of the Ogbunigwe bomb by Biafran forces had an impact on the overall outcome of the conflict. While the final outcome of the war was influenced by various factors, the Ogbunigwe bomb contributed to the resilience and military capabilities of the Biafran forces throughout the war (BBC News, 1990, Interview by Oragwu, F.).

Overall, the Ogbunigwe bomb can be seen as a symbol of Biafra's determination and resourcefulness in their struggle for survival and independence during the period of what even the international community referred as a pogrom and what later came to be accepted as a genocide by the people who live in the Southeastern part of Nigeria (Ike, 1976, 103).

Effectiveness of the Ogbunigwe Bomb

The effectiveness of the Ogbunigwe bomb during the Nigerian civil war varies from situation to situation and depending on how it was deployed (Ogbariyen, 2004, 48). Here are some points to consider when assessing the effectiveness of the Ogbunigwe bomb;

Destruction of enemy targets: The Ogbunigwe bomb was designed to target bunkers, vehicles and fortified positions. In instances where the bomb landed accurately and detonated successfully, it it was highly effective in destroying these targets. The bomb's explosive power could cause significant damage and casualties among enemy forces (Dacero, 2000, 88-105).

Psychological Impact: The Ogbunigwe psychological effect on enemy troops cannot be understated. The weapon's indiscriminate nature and destructive power struck fear in the hearts of Nigerian soldiers (Ihuesine, 2019, p.657-673). This fear could have a demoralizing effect and impact the overall conduct of the war.

Legacy of the Ogbunigwe Bomb

The Ogbunigwe missile, as produced by the Biafra during the Nigerian civil war, may be broadly classified into high technological and low-tech guerrilla types. Although this is an arbitrary classification, it can be useful as it also indicates the level at which bomb-making was preoccupying Biafran lives then (Ike, 1976, p.77). The bomb by inhibition was reputed to be a guided missile, which could have been fired from mortar barrels, longer tubes, or from big German grenade launching machine guns captured from the Nigerian side, which were normally used for the launching of grenades at personnel or tank targets in the defilade. The mortars could have been locally fabricated with suitably designed warheads and tail stabilizing devices (Collier, Hoeffler & Siderbom, 2004, 253).

When the Nigerian civil war started in 1967, the needs of the Biafran army in terms of weapons and other logistics were such that the Biafran scientists were compelled to develop their own guerrilla weapons. Bomb-making was part of this unsought role imposed on the Biafran scientists (Okocha, 1994, p. 88). The Biafran scientists engaged in intensive research and produced the Ogbunigwe bomb. The word Ogbunigwe in the local Igbo dialect may be translated into a "mean killer" or "ultimate executioner" (Collin & McGovern, 1997, p.142).

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Descriptions and pictures of the various types, including a real Ogbunigwe bomb, as displayed in the present museum at the National War Museum, Umuahia are very evident. The major conclusion is that, in spite of some shortcomings, there can be no doubt that the emerging Nigerian guerrillas are bound to get the help of scientists in the design and production of bombs (Amaechi, 2021, p. 84-110). Be that as it may, the Ogbunigwe legacy is still with us.

Controversies and Ethical Considerations of the Ogbunigwe Bomb

The Ogunigwe bomb while a significant weapon during the Nigerian civil war, also sparked controversies and raised ethical considerations regarding its production and use. Some of the controversies and ethical dilemmas associated with the Ogbunigwe bomb include;

Its indiscriminate Nature: The Ogbunigwe bomb, as an explosive weapon, had the potential to cause widespread destruction and loss of civilian lives. Its Indiscriminate nature meant that the bomb posed risks to non- combatants and civilian populations in te areas where it was deployed (Akinbode, 2021, p.89-121). The production of the Ogbunigwe bomb often involved crude manufacturing processes and locally sourced materials (Effiong, 2023, p. 225). This raised concerns about safety standards and ethical practices in weapons production, particularly due to the weapon's destructive capabilities.

Moreover, the legacy of the Ogbunigwe bomb extends beyond its military significance, influencing various aspects of Igbo culture and identity. Its historical and symbolic value continues to shape the collective memory and consciousness of the Igbo people, contributing to the preservation and promotion of their unique heritage (Daly, 2008, p.99-118). As Nigeria navigates the complexities of its political and social dynamics, the Ogbunigwe bomb serves as a touchstone for understanding the complexities of history, conflict, and resilience in Igbo culture and beyond. Ultimately, the modern perspectives on and legacy of the Ogbunigwe bomb reflect the enduring impact of this iconic weapon on the Igbo people and their broader sociopolitical landscape.

Ultimately, the controversies and ethical considerations surrounding the Ogbunigwe bomb highlight the complex moral dilemma and human costsinvolved in armed conflicts (Madiebo, 1980, p. 85). As a weapon used in a conflict marked by violence and destruction, the ethical implications of its use continue to be debated and scrutinized in the context of broader discussions on war, peace and humanitarian principles (Nwankwo, 1972, p.104).

Ogbunigwe in Contemporary Igbo Society

In contemporary Igbo society, the Ogbunigwe bomb continues to play a significant role, both culturally and historically. While its traditional usage as a defensive weapon has diminished, the Ogbunigwe holds a symbolic and ceremonial value in Igbo culture (Nkpa, 1977, 332-46). It serves as a reminder of the resilience and ingenuity of the Igbo people during times of conflict and struggle. Furthermore, the Ogbunigwe bomb has sparked various controversies in contemporary society, with debates surrounding its historical significance and the ethical implications of its use (Oyewole, 1975, p..59-65). Some argue that the Ogbunigwe represents a crucial aspect of Igbo identity and should be preserved and celebrated, while others view it as a relic of a violent past that should be relegated to history. These debates reflect the complex and multi-faceted nature of the Ogbunigwe bomb and its role in contemporary Igbo society (Alonso, 2007, p.140). Ultimately, the Ogbunigwe bomb continues to be an important

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symbol in Igbo culture, shaping discussions about history, tradition, and ethical considerations in modern times.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The Ogbunigwe Bomb in the Nigeria Civil War (1967–1970)

The *Ogbunigwe* bomb's history and its impact on the Nigeria Civil War (1967–1970) offer significant implications for both academic research and practical military, technological, and socio-political practices. These implications extend beyond the immediate context of the war, influencing contemporary discussions on indigenous innovation, conflict resolution, military strategy, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Implications of Research:

Indigenous Technological Innovation

The *Ogbunigwe* underscores the capacity for technological innovation in resource-constrained environments. Scholars can further explore how indigenous knowledge systems contribute to technological self-sufficiency during conflicts. Comparative studies on local technological innovations in other conflicts (e.g., Vietnam War, Afghan resistance) can broaden understanding of how non-industrialized societies adapt to military challenges.

Asymmetric Warfare Studies

The use of the *Ogbunigwe* highlights how asymmetric tactics can alter the dynamics of war, offering a case study for analyzing the effectiveness of unconventional warfare in modern conflicts. Researchers can examine how similar tactics are being employed in contemporary conflicts involving non-state actors and insurgencies, offering insights into the evolution of asymmetric warfare.

Postcolonial Studies and National Identity

The *Ogbunigwe* serves as a symbol of resistance and technological defiance, enriching discussions in postcolonial studies about how technological innovation intersects with national identity and self-determination. Further studies could explore how indigenous technological achievements contribute to shaping national narratives and post-war reconciliation processes in postcolonial states especially in Africa.

Implications for Practice:

Military Strategy and Defense Policy

The *Ogbunigwe* demonstrates the importance of adapting military strategy to local contexts and utilizing available resources. Modern defense policies can integrate lessons from Biafra's ingenuity, particularly in developing self-reliant defense mechanisms. Military institutions in resource-limited countries can emphasize research and development (R&D) to foster indigenous defense technologies, reducing dependence on foreign arms suppliers.

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Education and Capacity Building

The Ogbunigwe experience highlights the value of investing in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education during crises. Encouraging local innovation during conflicts can have long-term benefits for national development. Governments and NGOs can establish programs to nurture technological skills in conflict-prone regions, fostering a culture of innovation that extends beyond military applications to civilian sectors.

Humanitarian and Psychological Considerations

The psychological impact of weapons like the *Ogbunigwe* underscores the need for post-conflict trauma management and rehabilitation. Civilians and soldiers affected by such innovations often require long-term psychological support. Mental health services and rehabilitation programs can be integrated into post-conflict recovery plans, addressing the psychological aftermath of innovative warfare tactics.

Global Security and Non-State Actors

The *Ogbunigwe* case illustrates how non-state actors or separatist movements can develop sophisticated weapons, influencing global security policies on arms control and conflict prevention. International organizations can strengthen arms control measures while supporting local peacebuilding initiatives that reduce the incentive for indigenous arms production in conflict zones.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Civil War induced scientific stimulation, promoted the acceleration of scientific discoveries, and technological innovation on the Biafran side. Between 1967 and 1970 a domestic arms industry, forced by pressing military demands, mushroomed in Biafra (Nzeagwu, 2015, p.38). A Science Group emerged which fused imagination with common purpose and necessity with courage to complement the dearth in arms needed to prosecute the war. This reinforced the link between war and technological stimulation (Nzeagwu, p.44).

In a speech titled "The Pride of the Black Race", the former Commander in Chief of the defunct Biafran federation stated at the Lagos Law School in relation to the ingenuity and technological breakthrough: "The war has come and gone but we remember with pride and hope, the three heady years of freedom. These were the three years when we had the opportunity to demonstrate what Nigeria would have been even before 1970. In the three years of war, necessity gave birth to invention. During those three years, we built bombs, we built rockets, and we designed and built our own delivery system. We guided our rockets; we guided them far and guided them accurately. For three years, blockaded without the hope of imports, we maintained engines, machines and technical equipments. The state extracted and refined petrol with our own indigenous technology called the 'The Biafran pot 'Individuals refined petrol in their backyards and gardens. We built and maintained airports and air strips. We maintained them under heavy bombardment. We spoke to the world through a telecommunication system engineered by local ingenuity. The world heard us and spoke back at us. We built armoured tanks and cars. We modified aircraft from trainers to fighters, from passenger aircraft to bombers. In three years of freedom, we became the most civilized, the

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most technologically advanced black people on earth" Now you wonder why I am deeply passionate about Biafra, the answer lies in the above speech. Biafra was able to achieve much in war time under the strictest condition what Nigeria has not been able to achieve in its long years of peace.... This is why we the freedom lovers are saying that enough is enough" (Okolo, 2010, p.67).

It is necessary to reconstruct the most controversial history of the weapon invention by the Biafra secessionist country called the Ogbunigwe that impacted on the Nigerian Civil War and the world at large. These attempts to bring out a well-documented record were based on oral history and library sources (Hardyman, 2003, p. 110). Since all the patents that are supposed to be existential evidence have been lost during the federal invasion, we may safely use the forensic path ie the oral history, and the secondary data, which is in harmony with the information used in this paper. To our elders, their reasoning is traditional, and that is what we have to maintain.

This study reveals that the Ogbunigwe bomb was the grace that the Biafrans needed for survival in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70) as the bomb, when dropped into strategic sectors opposite the Biafran territories, could wipe out the advancing Nigerian armored vehicles into Biafra territories (Elechi, 1975, p.54). Ojukwu, the then Military Head of State of Biafra, in a speech said, "When the Ogbonnigwe is deployed in the battlefield, it could make a little black rain fall and each drop had within it the concentration of one thousand Hiroshima bombs. As at Port Novo, Lome, and other places, I am yet to decide on the terms of ceasefire with Nigeria (Ojukwu, 1994, Speech in Nigeria Law School)." This bomb was a potential deterrent to all the moves of the Federal forces towards the territories of Biafra. An elder statesman and Minister in the first republic, Sir Jaja Wachukwu (OON), wrote, "That bomb made the Federal troops do a rethinking and strategizing for better warfare. Itbecame Nigeria's major problem" (Forsyth, 1982, p.1120). The Nigerian Army Civil War spokesperson said, "The Ojukwu Bomb is the killer of Nigerian Army."

Be that as it may, the development and deployment of the Ogbunigwe bomb highlighted the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Biafran people in the face of adversity. It showcased their ability to adapt to the challenges of war and develop innovative solutions to confront a more powerful adversary (Effiong, 2023, p.89). On the whole, the history of the Ogbunigwe bomb and its impact on the Nigerian Civil War underscored the importance of resourcefulness, innovation, and determination in conflict situations (Tamuno & Ukpabi, 1989, p.12). While the bomb itself may have been a relatively primitive weapon, its strategic significance and symbolic value in the context of the civil war cannot be underestimated (Nnamdi & Agbakoba, 2004, 89), as the bomb stands as a testament to the resilience and courage of the Biafran people during a tumultuous period in Nigerian history.

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