



THE COLLABORATIVE ROLES OF THE NIGERIAN ARMY AND THE POLICE FORCE DURING THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the joint efforts of the Nigerian Army and the Nigeria Police Force during the Nigerian civil war between July 6 1967 and January 1970. It depicts the evolvement of the Nigerian armed forces that was organized along environmental and functional lines for the defense of territorial integrity and protecting national interest. so also, the Nigerian police force is a security system of the Nigerian nation established to combat crimes at all level as well as to ensure the security of lives and property of the citizenry. It traces the emergence of the Nigerian Army and Police from June 1861 under the British Consul, John Beecroft. This paper note that the police sometimes handled simple and sometimes complicated criminal and civil cases between civilian returnees and soldiers and also between civilians versus civilians. This duty was by no means simple as the police was trying to enforce the civil rule of law without a machinery to carry it out. On humanitarian grounds, the police assisted in attending to the sick and treating the wounded. After the Gowon administration's effort to resolve the conflict amicably had failed, Gowon decided to institute a "police action to break the secession. The first exchange of fire between both sides was actually between a unit of the Nigeria Police Mobile Force and an Armed Biafra Unit somewhere in Idoma Division. the police were drawn into adopting the military psyche, rash and hasty in responding to civil strife Despite their flaws and weaknesses, accounts of the Nigeria police participation in the civil war depicts that the force immensely assisted in intelligence gathering and actual armed combat. The research relied on both primary and secondary sources of data with a thorough usage of analytical and descriptive methods of analyses. The paper conclude that both the Army and Police were rarely neutral, typically imbalanced in an ethnic conflict. The ethnic composition of the police may or may not try to be like that of the military; when they are essentially the same.*

KEYWORDS: Nigerian Army, Police Force, Civil war, Gowon administration, Biafra, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria evolved through the colonial subjugation of hundreds of societies in the territory between 1861 and 1914. By 1900, the British colonial government after series of amalgamation of hundreds of nationalities in the Southern and Northern territories further amalgamated these societies into the sub-political units: colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the



protectorate of Northern Nigeria. These blocks were amalgamated in 1914 as a single political entity.¹

The 1914 amalgamation ought to have brought the various ethnic groups together and provided a firm basis for the difficult and tiring task of closer cultural, religions, social, as well as linguistic ties which are very essential for true unity among the peoples of Nigeria. It was perhaps Nigeria's pride that she achieved her independence with a minimum of social unrest or strife, Nigeria stumbled from crisis to crisis and near disintegration, as the country witnesses a marked increase in the bitterness of politics, ethnic religious, economic as well as regional competition or rivalry.²

Nigeria became an independent country on 1st October, 1960.³ The impendence constitution of 1960 and the Republican Constitution of 1963 provided for local police force and the Nigeria police force. The military took over power on 15th January 1966, and again in July 1966. The laws of country remained unchanged in the main but certain aspect of the constitution were either suspended or modified by the constitution Decree No 8 of 196.⁴

The military government under Gown dissolved the local police forces sequel to the recommendation by the working party on police and prisons constituted by Major General J.T.U Aguyi-Ironsi military regime in 1966. However, at a later time, the struggle to combine and secure the legacy of political and military dominance of a section of Nigeria over the rest of the Federation began with increased intensity. Eventually, this attempt degenerated into the 15th January, 1966 coup, counter coup and a bloody civil strife or bitter disagreement.⁵

The Nigerian Army

The armed forces of most countries serve as veritable tools through which national power is projected. Normally, the armed forces are created and organized along environmental and functional lines for the defense of territorial integrity and protecting national interest. The historical origins of the Nigerian Army can be traced to the 19th century military establishment which was found in 1862/1863 by Captain John Glover of a small Hausa militia to defend the British colony of Lagos. It performed both police and military duties until 1895.⁶

It was observed that when an independent Hausa Force was separated from the constabulary and given solely military functions. The trends of recruitment base perpetuated the use of Hausa as the major language (Lingua Franca) of the command in Nigeria and Gold Coast (now Ghana). This continued until 1950s. This largely paved way for the etymological origin of the ethnic imbalances that enveloped the Nigerian Armed Forces till present.

¹E.O. Alamika Etanibi and C.I Chuwamla, Police Community Violence in Nigeria, Centre for Law Enforcement Education & National Human Report Commission 2000.

²Remi Anifowose, Violence and Politics in Nigeria: The Tiv and Yoruba Experience, Enugu NOK Publishers International, 1982, pg 31.

³E.O. Ojo, Aspect of Nigerian History, Ado/Lagos,2006, p.134

⁴C.F Livingstone Members: Standard Police Hiammai vol1, Enforcement, Port Harcourt. Membs Foundation Books, 2000, pg.31.

⁵E.O. Ojo, Aspect of Nigerian History, Ado/Lagos,2006, pp.155-156

⁶H.B. Momoh, Evolution of the Nigerian Armed Forces.



Between 1888 and 1891, the military capability was raised piously to protect British interest in Nigeria. Both the Hausa constabulary and Northern Nigerian Regiment of the oil Rivers irregulars were created for the same purposes which is economic interest.⁷ However, the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) under the auspices and command of Colonel Frederick Lugard was used to fight against French encroachment or the irredentist from the North. By 1901, WAFF became an inter-territorial force comprising of Nigeria and Gold Coast (Ghana) regiments, The Gambia company and the Sierra Leone Battalion. It was commanded by few British Army officers designated by the force with the authorization of the colonial office in London, while each of these regiments was commanded by an officer responsible directly to the local governor; they were integrated to form the Nigeria Regiment of WAFF when the Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated on the 1st January, 1914.⁸

Meanwhile, after the world war years, RWAFF continued its primary mission of internal security. Nigerian unit/regiment undertook police actions and severe expedition to break strikes, control local disturbances, enforce tax collection, to support police operations. They also mounted a major internal security operation in the Southern Cameroon Trust Territory to counter secessionist rebelling against French colonial authority.⁹

In 1956, The Nigerian regiment the Royal West African Frontier Force RWAFF, was renamed the Nigerian Military Forces (NMF) and in April, 1958, the colonial government of Nigeria took over the control of the Nigerian Military Forces (NMF) from the war office. By independence, there were eighty-two Nigerian officers, mostly Igbo from the Southeast. This ethnic imbalance within the officer corps contrasted with that in the rank and file, where northerners dominated.¹⁰

In 1960, when Nigeria became independent, the NMF became known as the Royal Nigerian Army (RNA) and was re-designated as the Nigerian Army on attainment of the status of a republic in 1963. The major tasks assigned the Nigerian Army at inception were to:

- i. defend the territorial integrity of Nigeria
- ii. deter attack by any nation and should deterrence fail, to bring any war to a rapid conclusion in favour of Nigeria.
- iii. aid sub-regional, regional, global peace initiatives and any other arrangements or agreements that may be entered into from time to time by the federal government of Nigeria.

Since then, the Nigerian Army has participated in various internal security operations some of which include: the TIV riot of 1964-1965, Western Region political crises in 1965 as well as the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.¹¹

⁷N.T.Tenekan, *The Civil War Years*, Vol.11, Nigeria, Hanemann Book Ltd, Pg168-169.

⁸See H.B. Momoh, p. 14.

⁹C.F. Livingstone *Members: Standard Police Hiammai* vol.1.

¹⁰ Abdul Raufu, M. *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Nigeria*, *Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE)*. Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, 2005, No. 18, 4-16.

¹¹ N. T. Tenekan, *The Civil War Years*, Panel on Nigeria Since Independence Historical Project, Zaria, 1994, P61.



The Police

As early as the 18th century, Native authority police services had existed in Nigeria. Mostly, they served as messengers to traditional rulers – Emirs, Obas, and chiefs in their various courts or localities. When the colonial masters came into Nigeria, they accorded some sort of recognition to these police forces which were being used by the Native Authorities to enforce their local laws and Native Courts' judgments. In the Yoruba setting/western Nigeria, police were known as *Akoda* and *Olopa*; *Dongari* or *Yan Gadi* in the Northern Nigeria¹². Igbo societies were quite different. The etymological source of Igbo people is a subject of controversy among scholars and historians because of hamitic hypothesis of the origin of Igbo people. Aniche described the traditional and political systems in Igbo land as acephalous, stateless, seminary, fragmented, decentralized, villagized/egalitarian, communalistic, gerontocratic, predominantly republican and directly democratic. This depict that the Igbo has no centralized political system¹³.

The functions of government performed by council of elders who shared powers with age grades, titled men ('ozo'), secret societies, oracular/ritual priests, women organization, etc. The age grade institutions were also charged with the responsibility of policing the communities in the Igbo traditional society¹⁴.

However, as mentioned earlier, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria took place in 1914 though there were two separate police forces for the North and South respectively. This system continued until April, 1930 when the two police forces were merged into what was known as the Nigeria Police Force under the Police Ordinance No.2 of 1930 with Headquarters situated in Lagos. It was headed by an Inspector-General and assisted by one Deputy Inspector General and two Assistant Inspector-Generals. One Assistant Inspector General was in-charge of the Northern provinces with Headquarters in Kaduna while the other Assistant Inspector General took charge of the Southern provinces with headquarters in Enugu.

The police headquarters in Lagos had a commissioner responsible to the Inspector General for such Specialist Branches as the Force CID which included special branch, immigrations and passport control, the central motor registry, Railway police and the Police College; force communications, police band and Lagos fire brigade. In 1955, for the first time, women were recruited in to the force¹⁵ and the first batch of twenty police women passed out from training in the early 1956¹⁶.

By the provisions of the Nigeria Order-in-Council 1960, the Nigeria Police Force was established as Unified Federal Force exercising authority in every part of Nigeria. It was further

¹² Adebayo Cornelius, Evolution of the Military Coup in Nigeria, Journal of the students' Historical Society, university of Ilorin, vol.10, Pp 7-8.

¹³ E. T. Aniche, Community Policing in the Traditional Igbo Society: A Model for Preventing Crime in the Contemporary Nigerian Society, African Conference, university of Texas at Austin, 2016

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ O. M. Oluwafemi, Gender Inequality in Nigeria Police Force, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* |Volume III, Issue VIII, August 2019
www.rsisinternational.org Pp.431-437.

¹⁶ C.F. AlaboLivinstone-membare: Police and Law Enforcement; Standard police studies manual Vol.1 p.1.



reconstituted on 1st October 1963 under section 105 and 106 of Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution. The Nigeria Police, by these provisions, was charged with the responsibility of maintain Law and Order and the protection of life and property throughout the federation.

The 1963 Constitution set up two separate bodies. These were:

- i. The Police Council, which was vested with powers in respect of the policy, organization, finance, establishment and condition of service of members of the force.
- ii. The Police Service Commission vested with powers to deal with matters concerning promotions, appointments and discipline of officers of the force as set out under section 107 of the 1963 constitution and modified and re-enacted by the Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No.8 of 1967.

Although, in 1968, it was directed that both the local government police in the west and Native Authority (NA) police in the North should be integrated into the Nigerian police force. They were retrained and those funds fit and suitable were transferred to the Nigerian police force¹³. For the preservation of peace and good order in a civilized society, the abiding principle is that one does not take law into his hands. Consequently, police could not stand with folded arms to water vengeance wrenched on “innocent” souls. Police actually served the angels and the demons driving the military revolution or unrest in the history of law enforcement in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970.

Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon’s Led Administration

Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon joined the Nigerian Army in 1954, receiving a commission as a second lieutenant on 19 October 1955, his 21st birthday¹⁷. Gowon also attended both the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, United Kingdom (1955-56), Staff College Kimberley, United Kingdom, 1962 as well as the Joint Staff College, Latimer 1955. He saw action in the Congo, formerly Zaire, as part of the United Nations peacekeeping force both in 1960-61 and in 1963. He advanced to battalion commander rank by 1966, at which time he was still a Lieutenant Colonel¹⁸.

Up till 1966, Gowon remained strictly a career soldier with no involvement whatsoever in politics until the tumultuous events of the year suddenly thrust him into a leadership role, when his unusual background as a northerner who was neither of Hausa or Fulani ancestry nor of the Islamic faith made him a particular safe choice to lead a nation whose population were seething with ethnic tension¹⁹. In January 1966, Yakubu became Nigeria’s youngest military chief of staff at the age of 32 years, because a military coup d’etat by a group of junior officers under Major Chukuma Kaduna Nzcogwu led to the over throw of Nigeria’s civilian government.

On 1 August 1966, Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon became the Head of State after the coup. His first act was to reinstate the federal system, along with the regions and their allotted functions. But relations between the federal government and the eastern region, led by military governor colonel Chukwu Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, had become strained. In spite of the change of

¹⁷ Gowon Yakubu” See Encyclopedia 2013

¹⁸ Encyclopedia 2013, Ibid

¹⁹ Encyclopedia 2013, Ibid



guards, Gowon could not stop the killings of easterners²⁰. Obasanjo recalls that Gowon as the Head of State could not have a firm grip of the situation, in spite of the recommendations of the adhoc conference of the representative of regions on August 9, 1966 held in Lagos. These suggestions literally vested control of the situation, including arrangement for maintenance of peace and security in the supreme commander in conjuncture with the military governors²¹

However, that the police faced great constraints in such a horrible period is not in doubt, given this view as asserted in Jemibewon that “policing” is largely about conflict, so there is inevitably a multiplicity of viewpoints... deciding which account to believe is to take a partisan stance in a controversy”²² given the ethnic based politics that First Republic witnessed; the deterioration of law and order that pervaded the periods between the first coup and the counter-coup. The ad-hoc conference resolved partly that troops should be deployed to their areas of origin; this act was zealously implemented by Yakubu Gowon, but exerted great strain on the fragile cord that held the nation together. Bradley opined that “policing becomes most difficult when relationship between police populations and their governments are at their worst.” While the country boiled, it was most unlikely that the police could go very far in restoring public peace²³. Moreover, security apparatus had virtually been taken over by the Army.

In the words of Adewale Ademoyega:

It happened that on May 29, fire swept through many cities of Northern Nigeria, taking tolls on thousands of Nigerians citizens; the Hazzan government in the North did not act promptly to halt the riots. Instead, his government... tacitly supported them. This was made evident by Hassan’s refusal to use troops to prevent or suppress the rioters; and where a unit commander like Major Sluwa used his initiative to suppress the riots in Kano and prevent them in Katsina, he was roundly reprimanded by Hassan and made to withdraw his troops...²⁴

If this were so, then how could the police have been expected to effectively contain the turbulent situation? It, thus, may be safely said that where a government does not exercise its political will decisively to deal with disorder, the police can hardly do anything about the situation. This is particularly so, as under the military between 1966 and 1975, the Police Council was headed by Gowon as Head of the military government, while the Inspector General of Police and his deputy were among the members. It is better imagined how much influence the police chiefs could exert in a council crowded with military officers. Jemibewon opined that Kam Salem took active role in the negotiations between the Armed forces negotiators and dismissed ministers prior to Ironsi assumption of office, the force never had a hand in the events that led to the coup and its aftermath²⁵. However, the Nigeria Police Force

²⁰ D. M Jemibewon, p. 69.

²¹ O. Obasanjo, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*, (Lagos: Kachifo Limited, 2015), pp.10 – 12.

²² D.M Jemibewon, p. 69

²³ D. Bradley, W. Neil, and W. Roy, *Managing the Police Law, Organization and Democracy*, (Britain: wheatsheaf Book Limited, 1986), pp. 105 -138.

²⁴ A. Adewale, *Why We Struck: Story of the First Republic Coup*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981), pp. 60 - 65.

²⁵ D. M, Jemibewon, p.70



Headquarters on Moloney Street (later Kam Salem House) became the national headquarters of the country. Inyang noted that Gowon chose this location as the seat of the Federal Military Government because of the security, infrastructure and communication it offered. Also, on the increased performance and relevance of the police, Tamuno says, Edet, on retirement on September 1, 1966 lauded the police rank and files performance. In his words;

This year, particularly, we have witnessed an unusual and rather new, but very serious type of unrest, but you have, as usual, acquitted yourselves most creditably... Your steadfastness has been very largely instrumental in holding our country together when tension and uncertainly threatened to tear it asunder²⁶.

Similarly, Salem expressed his sentiments while assuming command:

The security of the country has never been as seriously threatened than the events of the past few months. I witnessed these events and watched the commendable murmur in which you displayed your usual restraint, unalloyed loyalty, steadfastness and devotion to duty during these extremely trying times. However, a group of intellectual met regularly at the University of Ibadan after May riots and drafted the Biafra's secession records. This led many officers to flee from the other regions of the country to the region²⁷.

By 1967, the secession threat took a very strong dimension that a meeting of the Supreme Military Council had been convened at Aburi under the auspices of the Ghanaian government and General Ankrah playing a mediating role to resolve certain constitutional issues. In the end the effort did not halt the slide into civil war that lasted for three years, beginning from 1967²⁸. However, the promulgation by Gowon of decree 8 on March 17, 1967, which gave the Supreme Military Council powers to declare a state of emergency in any part of the country and legislate for that section, was the last straw that broke the camel's back.

Ojukwu in his reaction perceived this as a direct threat to the Eastern plan to secede which in any case, he stated was a resolution agreed upon at Aburi meeting on the ground that the Supreme Military Council (SMC) conceded a con-federal status to the regions without any boundary adjustment²⁹. Ojukwu was urged on May 27, 1967 by Eastern Region Consultative Assembly and the Advisory Committee of chiefs and elders to declare the "Republic of Biafra". Gowon reacted by declaring emergency rule nationwide and promulgated decree 14, which divided the Nigeria into 12 states. Similarly, the military government of General Gowon used

²⁶ T. Tamino, as cited in Jemibewon, pp. 70 -71

²⁷T. Tamino, *The Police in Modern Nigeria: On Development of Police, 1861-1965*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970).

²⁸ T. Mohammadu and M. Haruna: "The Making of the 1979 Constitution" in Peter, P. Ekeh et al, *Nigeria Since Independence; The First 25years*, Vol. V.

²⁹ A., Adewale *why we struck: story of the first Nigeria coup*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981), p. 70



these 12 states as police commands. Each state was treated by a commissioner of police for the purpose of effective police administration.³⁰

In view of the above, Ojukwu declared the “Republic of Biafra” on May 30, 1967. The battle line was drawn. It is instructive to note that given the explosive nature of the country at that time, the police, except for the presence of the Inspector General of police and his deputy on the Supreme Military Council (SMC) were not allowed to press for the complete restoration of law and order and confidence building among the frightened peoples, especially of the west, the north west and east. Salem was a big figure to the Gowon administration; it would appear that his regimes on a less belligerent method to resolving matters were ignored. Instead, the police were gradually drawn into adopting the military psyche, rash and hasty in responding to civil strife. After the Gowon administration’s effort to resolve the conflict amicably had failed, Gowon decided to institute a “police action to break the secession. The first exchange of fire between both sides was actually between a unit of the Nigerian Police Mobile Force and an Armed Biafra Unit somewhere in Idoma Division. Other sources pinpoint Garkem in present Cross River State, around July 1967³¹.

Police Involvement in the Nigerian Civil War

Accounts of police participation in the civil war depicts that the force immensely assisted in intelligence gathering and actual armed combat. Inyang opines that an attempt to bomb the Police Headquarters, which was the seat of the federal operations (Joint police and military unit), was repelled by vigilant mobile police on guard³². When police action could not achieve the desired outcome, Gowon, following the invasion of Midwest State on August 9, 1967 by the rebels decided to go into full blown war. By this time, many Igbo’s in the force had relocated from their postings outside the region back home. Inyang added that they left with arms and vehicles and the pullouts depleted substantially the strength and material resource of the Nigeria Police Force which had been over stretched in the recent past by series of political crisis³³.

Jemibewon estimated that 1,053 police (including 46 officers, 144 inspectors and 200 sergeants) of the Nigeria Police Force abandoned their stations “Without authority” for the East, while P. Okeke, NPF police boss for the region, however, listed 2,307 police men who returned to the region from their various postings³⁴. Jemibewon offers a plausible explanation on how the once cohesive force became divided:

...Fundamentally, police forces are created to defend the prevailing social structure... policing must inevitably neglect the political, social and economic divisions in society. To that extent, police forces are created by the rulers, police are deployed to protect the interest of the rulers, and to punish,

³⁰ T. Kupolati, *Remarking the Nigeria Police: A Kaleidoscopic Inquisition*, (Lagos: Renaissance Law Publishers Limited, 2007), p. 10

³¹ D. M, Jemibewon, *Nigeria Police: Issues, problems and prospects*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2001), pp. 72 -73.

³² D. M, Jemibewon, *Nigeria Police: Issues, problems and prospects*, p.73

³³ I. Etim, “The Nigeria Police Force: Peacekeeping of Nigeria” in *Nigeria since Independence: The First 25years, Government and Public Police*, (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989).

³⁴ See D.M Jemibewon, p. 73



harass and if need be liquidating the opponents of the rulers. This is essence of policing³⁵.

Besides, it is essential to note that the police officer is primarily a human being, who is affected by the day to day activities in his immediate environment. In this case, he cannot but sometimes response albeit systematically to certain tendencies around him.

Therefore, the Igbo's who fled other parts of the country including Lagos, with the unrestrained killings of their kinsmen, merely responded to natural human instincts. Furthermore, Igbo's only fled from the orgy of killing perpetrated by people with who they once share things in common; neighbours who later became predators. As it was for the Igbo civilians, so it was for the Igbo soldiers or policemen. Having fled back home, the easterners with some military or paramilitary background got involved in the "task that must be done", according to the command of the president Gowon. For the easterners the "task" was the preservation of "Biafra" while on the federal side, it was to also in Gowon's words "Keep Nigeria one"³⁶

However, at the sudden beginning of the civil rest, the Nigeria police was faced with the challenges of maintaining stability in Nigeria as well as performing its constitutional duty of providing security for the country and its prospective rulers as well as the ordinary citizens of the country under very rare condition and circumstances. The Nigeria police was able to display its traditional loyalty on the side of the federal government. Meanwhile, the Nigeria police was looked upon to maintain its steadiness in a confused situation when the Nigeria Army was separated; and to loyally stand by whoever was in charge of the administration³⁷.

It is worthy of note that when this crisis started, the force headquarters in Lagos became the rallying point for all the government negotiators. Several military officers were given refuge at several police stations and offices were also at the risk of being violently destroyed, in spite of insufficient fire power and man power at the disposal of the police. On the other hand, the civilian population looked heavily on the police for reassurance, safety of life and property and maintenance of law and order in the midst of military disorderly happening. On the eve of the outbreak of the civil strife, men of the police mobile force were stationed at the border between the former eastern region of Nigeria with the rest of the country to keep peace and resist any invasion by the rebellious soldiers in the former eastern region.

Meanwhile, the Biafran Army, at the beginning of the war was estimated at some twenty-five thousand troops quickly organized around the nucleus of the two thousand surviving eastern Nigeria officers and men. It was noted that training took place in a secret makeshift camp and the bulk of recruitment came initially from the abundant supply of angry refuge youths itching for the opportunity to fragment. The Biafran army was relatively lightly armed, relying on hidden shipment of weapons many of which came initially from Czechoslovakia. It had no artillery and very few anti-tank weapons. Nevertheless, Biafran morale, spurred by burning desire to avenge themselves for the civil strife or massacres, was very high³⁸.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ C.F Alabo, Livingstone – member...p. 31

³⁸ P. Uwechue, *Reflections on The Nigerian Civil War, Facing the Future*, (Abuja: Heritage Press Limited, 2004), pp. 7-8



Unfortunately for the two sides, there was no air force, the Federal Air Force only just created consisted of a bare dozen trainer aircrafts of the Dormier type. Biafra had two American built B.26 bombers purchased secretly in France. She also had a number of French built helicopters originally purchase as civilian machines by companies operating in the eastern region. The federal army opened its campaign by advancing from the north with a reported strength of eight battalions. The Biafrans had expected the advance from that direction and had taken positions weeks before that event. Biafran resistance was much stiffer than expected, although increased federal pressure led to the loss in the first weeks of fighting of important portions of Ogoja province, the Biafrans took a heavy toll of the federal army³⁹.

On 9th August 1967, Biafran forces in a lightning operation overran the Mid-West State and within the next few days advanced some thirty miles into the heart of Nigerian western region. This event and the shout it produced, perhaps more than any other factor, fundamentally altered the character of the war. Lagos came under very real threat and this fact induced a rapid re-thinking on the federal government side: “from now on”, General Gowon declared, “we shall wage a total war”⁴⁰. However, when armed confrontation was launched, the police units were withdrawn from the frontline to the rear, as support units. The prosecution of a war requires massive mobilization of officers and materials. To get enough men for the military operation, the police force was approached to provide the army with additional men. As part of its contributions to the war efforts, the police force, seconded a large number of its trained officers to the army, who after a short military training, went into the war front and fought alongside with federal military troops. Some of the police men seconded into the army opted to join the military police. Some of those policemen, however, later returned to the police force at the end of the war and they were immediately re-absorbed⁴¹.

Police and the Liberated Areas during the Civil War

Another role of the Nigerian police force was its actions in the liberated areas of the war zones. The combatants, by the nature of their profession and training are not orientated in the management of civilians efficiently and properly, as the police. As soon as an area was liberated, police units were sent in to restore law and order. Policemen combined several functions with their traditional roles. In most cases, police officers acted as judges, medical officers and welfare men⁴². The police officers were also primarily concerned with the containment of the wave of crimes in the liberated zones. In this regard, the police sometimes handled simple and sometimes complicated criminal and civil cases between civilian returnees and soldiers and also between civilians versus civilians. This duty was by no means simple as the police was trying to enforce the civil rule of law without a machinery to carry it out. On humanitarian grounds, the police assisted in attending to the sick and treating the wounded⁴³.

More so, the police in conjunction with the army maintained close watch over refugees’ camps and helped in distributing relief materials to the needy. In order to maintain law and order, the

³⁹Ibid,p. 8

⁴⁰ See P. Uwechue, p. 8

⁴¹ C.F Alabo, *Livingstone Member Police and Law Enforcement, Standard Police Manual ...* Vol.1, p.32

⁴² Interview with O. Augustina, (38), Police Inspector, Force, Head Quarters, Abuja, December 18, 2014, she was a member of Contingent to Peacekeeping in Somalia in 2011-2012. She shared her experience and the nature of Peace Keeping Operations.

⁴³ Interview with O. Augustina, Force, Head Quarters, Abuja, December 18, 2014



police usually carried out joint patrol operations with the army in all the conflicting and the liberated areas. It could also be said of the police that they tackled almost everything affecting the civilian population in the liberated areas which was not being handled properly by the army.

Throughout the period of the Nigerian Civil Strife, the police and the army worked assiduously to maintain the internal security of the nation. Road blocks were mounted at strategic locations of the country by both the police and the army to guard against saboteurs and infiltrations⁴⁴ vehicles and people were thoroughly searched at road blocks. The special branch of the police, later became National Security Organization⁴⁵, through its network of activities spread all over the country, they provided useful information on any move to sabotage the war efforts of the federal government.

Established Causes of Civil War

Scholars and literatures on the Civil war in Nigeria are growing almost by the day. Prominent among them is Osuntokun who listed about fifty-nine entries which provides answer to the question of what really caused the Nigerian civil war.⁴⁶ Fred Obyezir opined that there was no factor or even group of factors that made the civil war in Nigeria unavoidable. He further stated that there were factors which contributed to the war by increasing the probability of its occurrence. The most significant of these factors including the following:

- i. The sectional bias and structural imbalance of the pre-1966 Nigeria federation
- ii. The coups of January and July 1966
- iii. The massacre of May to October, 1966
- iv. Secession and the creation of states
- v. Failure of statesmanship
- vi. An economic after thought.

Onyeoziri concluded that by far the most significant factors that produced the civil war were the 29 July 1966 coup which needed the civil war to complete its success, and the civilian Igbo massacre which pushed Igbos to search for security outside the Nigeria state that had failed to give them security.⁴⁷

Dramatic Personnel in the Civil War

A number of individuals played key roles during the Nigerian civil war. The principal actors in the bloody war of 1967, were both Sandhurst-trained soldiers – Odumegwu Ojukwu, who was thirty-three, and Yakubu Gowon, who was thirty-two. Emeka Ojukwu attended England Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and returned shortly after to Nigeria, where he joined the

⁴⁴ C. F Alabo, p.33

⁴⁵ Interview with Mr. Adewale, Head, Finger Print Section, Force Headquarters, Annex, Ikoyi, Lagos.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ A. Osuntokun, "Review of Literature on the Civil War" cited in Tamuno and Ukpabi (eds) in Tamuno, *The Civil War Years: Nigeria Since Independence*, History Project, 1989.



other corps and rapidly rose through the military ranks. He was accorded a great deal of respect by his military colleagues, who admired his pedigree and education.

Some important wartime actors and observers, such as Sir David Hunt, the British ambassador to Nigeria during the conflict, and the eminent British journalist believed Ojukwu looked down on Gowon. Ojukwu also believed that as an oxford man, he was far better prepared for leadership. It was a personal war and collision of egos with Gowon.⁴⁸ More so, aside from General Odumegu Ojukwu; Major General Philip Effiong, Chief of General Staff; Brigadier Tony Eze; Brigadier Pat Amadi, Colonel Joe (Air Raid) Achuzie, Col. Nsabo, Colonel Iheanacho, Colonel Archibong, Brigadier Patrick Amadi, Biafran Army; Colonel Awunnah Patrick, Chief of Logistics and Principal Staff Officer to Ojukwu; Colonel David Ogunewe, Military adviser to Ojukwu; Patrick Okeke, Inspector General of Biafran Police; Sir Louis Mbanefo, Chief Justice of Biafra; and the young and talented Mathew Mbu, Biafran foreign minister.⁴⁹

Yakubu Gowon received military training from Ghana and Eaton Hall in England before proceeding to the legendary school in Sandhurst. He then attended young officers' College, He, the war minister in 1957, staff college, Camberley, England (1962), and joint services college, Latimer, England (1965). He returned to Nigeria soon thereafter and became a star officer; his ability to assimilate served him well as he advanced rapidly in the Nigeria army. Gowon elevation to head of state was a tactical compromise to assuage most ethnic groups that Nigeria was coming under an Islamic Hausa/Fulani leadership intent on Christian and southern domination. It did not help matters that many officers did not feel that Gowon was not the most qualified to be in the role of head of states.

On the Nigerian side apart from General Gowon Yakub, the Nigerian Head of State, there were Obafemi Awolowo, the deputy chairman, Supreme Military Council; Brigadier Emmanuel Ekpo, Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters; Brigadier Muritala R Muhammed, Brigadier Mobolaji Johnson; Lieutenant Colonel Shehu Musa Yar'Adua; Brigadier Hazzan Kastina, Chief of Staff; Nigerian Army; Brigadier Emmanuel Ekwe, Chief air staff Rear Adinral Joseph Way, Chief of Naval Staff; Dr. Tashim, Anthony General, H.E.A Ejueyitehie, Secretary to the Federal Military Government; Anthony Enahoro, Commissioner for Information, Olusegun Obasanjo; Colonel Benjamin Adekunle; Theophilus Y. Danjuma and twelve staff governors.

The internal rivalries that existed between Gowon and Ojukwu, and pathological interethnic dynamics that plagued the Nigerian military and war time government, contributed in no small measure to the scale of catastrophe that was the Nigerian Biafran war. The sentiments were borne particularly by the Easterners overlooked by the young general at the helm of affairs, with disastrous consequences.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Fred Onyeoziri, what caused the Nigerian Civil War in Eghosae, E. Osaghae, Eberé Onwudime and Rotimi Suberu T. Ibadan, 2002, Programme on Ethnic and Federal studies (PEFS) pp.91-99.

⁴⁹Chinua Achebe, there was a country: A personal History of Biafra, Penguin Group, Great Britain, 2012. Pp118-120.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.288



Outbreak of Civil War

At the emergence of civil disorder in Nigeria between 6 July 1967- 12 January 1970,⁵¹ the Nigerian police in conjunction with the Nigerian Army were faced with the task of maintaining stability in the country as well as performing their traditional duties of providing security for the country and its rulers, citizens as well as their properties.

Police headquarters was used or served as the centre for all the government personnel or negotiators. Many military or Army officers were given refuge at several police stations and these offices were also at the risk of being violently attacked. The civilian/masses also looked on the police for safety of their life and property, maintenance of law and order in the face of military unrest.⁵²

Attempt at Averting Civil War

Every move made by the federal government to avert the war, including the establishment of an adhoc constitutional conference in September 1966, was rendered ineffective by the military Governor of the eastern region, Lt. Colonel Ojukwu.⁵³

The Nigerian civil war took the form of personality crisis between Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon and Lt. Colonel Ojukwu. All attempts to bring these leaders together to iron out their differences were in vain. A meeting was held in Aburi, Ghana. Both Ojukwu and Yakubu Gowon were in attendance. The meeting ended in failure.

Military and Police Engagement

The most crucial factor in military organization is the term *spirit de corps*. Jonavits as cited in Williams opined that 'policemen are soldiers who act alone and soldiers are policemen who act in concert.'⁵⁴ However, *spirit de corps* operates better within a system within which there is interaction between personalities and skills.

This system may be authoritarian or total command in nature or may be non-authoritarian. What is common to both of them is that combat and logistic training is essential simultaneously with mental, physical, and psychological development need to react and perform in limited time and space under the worst environment with discipline and initiatives.

Security at the Border

The Nigerian police was changed with the responsibility of carrying out rescue mission arranged for the evacuation of displaced persons fleeing citizenry to their places of choice where they felt safe. It is importance to note that units of the police mobile force were established along the former eastern region of Nigeria and the rest of the country to keep peace and repel any attack or incursion by the Biafran troops. Police were used as supporting units.

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 122-126

⁵² T. Falola, M. Uhomobhi, A. Mahad and U. Anyanwu, history of Nigeria 3, Nigeria in the 19th Century, Lagos, Longman Plc, p.113.

⁵³ C.F. AlaboLivinstone-membere, p.101.

⁵⁴ T. Fotola et al. p.125.



Police force, as parts of its expert provided the Army with a large number of its trained personnel who after a short military training were into the war front and fought alongside with federal troops.⁵⁵

Maintenance of Law and Order

In its effort to maintain law and order during the civil war, the Nigerian police force participated actively in the liberation areas of the conflict prone areas or zones, While the Soldiers by the nature of their training and jobs were not orientated in the handling of civilian's efficiency and properly, as the Police. The police units were sent into the war zones as soon as the areas were liberated to restore normalcy, law and order.⁵⁶

As a matter of urgency, police force merged several duties with its traditional roles. Police force officers acted as medical officers, welfare personnel as well as judges. Also, they were concerned primarily with the contain timeout of the wave of crime in the liberated zones.⁵⁷The police officers sometimes served as mediators between civilian returnees, soldiers and civilians versus civilians in case of civil and complicates criminal cases.⁵⁸

Refugees and Displaced Persons

A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave his or her country, home etc for political or religious reasons, or because there is a war, shortage of food, etc; while the displaced persons are the persons removed from their houses to another place by force.⁵⁹Hence, the police and army on humanitarian reasons assisted in attending to the sick and treating the wounded. The duo (police and army) maintained a close motoring over refugee camps and assisted in the disbursement of relief materials to the needy. For the maintenance of law and order in live war zones, police officers usually carried out trial operations with the army officers, though, the police almost tackled virtually everything affecting the civilians in the country, especially liberated areas.⁶⁰

The Nigerian Army in Conjunction with the police force maintained the internal security of Nigeria, road blocks were mounted at strategic areas to guard against saboteurs and external enemies which includes stop and search. They also provided useful information on any move to sabotage the war effort of the Nigerian government.

Breach of the Law

There were series of breaches of the law which were committed by the police, and army personnel as well as the civilian population. Different terms were given to such crimes that were committed during the civil war in Nigeria. Stealing came to be known as 'looting',

⁵⁵Williams Ishola," The Nigerian Civil War: A lesson in Breakdown of Democratic Control of the Military Professionalism, pp100-108

⁵⁶see C.F. AlaboLivinstone-membere, Pg.101

⁵⁷Group conversation with some retired Military, Police and Para-Military Officers in Ado – Ekiti on different occasions, (Nov/Dec, 2013).

⁵⁸Op .Cit, P. 102

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid



abduction and kidnapping were called ‘hijacking’ and robbery known as ‘commandeering’. Young and old women were in some cases ‘hijacked for comfort.’⁶¹

Another problem was the fact that the average member of the Armed forces believed that any acts committed during a period of civil disorder was not subject to enquiry by police officers who were classed as civilians; such as Nigerian war between 1967-1970. So, it was difficult for the police to deal with the rank and file of the Armed forces who involved in crime, during the unrests. On this, the co-operation needed by the police was not forthcoming.

Another shortcoming was the absence of law court in the war zones which led to the breakdown of law and order and a state of anarchy. Members of the public even seized the opportunity of non-availability of court to commit crimes in which they could not be prosecuted in the law court. The leadership of the both Armed forces and the police intervened and rescued the situation.⁶² Thereafter, police was able to make arrest, detain and to bring a criminal charge against members of the public who commit crime, without any more interference of from the military personnel. Even, members of the police and Armed Forces who commit crimes became subject of arrest in the police in conjunction with the Armed Forces personnel who were attached to various formations of the police engaged in investigation and detention and prosecution of the offenders. This process, to an extent removed any difficulties or interference that posed a problem to the Nigeria Police Force in carrying out its statutory duty of law enforcement.

CONCLUSION

It need be emphasized that from the foregoing, the Nigeria Armed forces and the police were indeed the products of the society. They were rarely neutral, typically imbalanced in an ethnic conflict. The ethnic composition of the police may or may not try to be like that of the military; when they are essentially the same.

The consequences of this substitution of police for army were not uniform, but in each instance the method did alter the basic political and communal trends of the war. For instance, deployment of Armed Officers and the Police Units with particular ethnic colorations, i.e. Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba’s; From the North and West respectively over the Igbo in the East.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶²Alabo C.F Livingstone, p.33