

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

26 May	sea. 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 3rd 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 the 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 the suffering and smiling would say. Who says BENJI is not the true hero of the Nigerian military? He is, let us come off it soonest.