



VILLAIN AND HERO OF THE WARS: BRIGADIER-GENERAL BENJAMIN ADEKUNLE AND THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970

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Abstract

The paper examines the role that Brigadier General Benjamin Adekunle, otherwise referred to as the Black Scorpion or Benjy played during the Nigerian Civil War. Brigadier-General Adekunle served as the Commander of Garrison, the 3rd Marine Commando Division of the Nigeria Army. The study is set to achieve two main objectives. The first is to put into historical perspective, Benjamin Adekunle's birth, childhood, and military career; the second is to analyze the two sides of Benjy during the civil war, and third, his portrayal as both a hero and villain during the civil war. The study relied on secondary sources of data from textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, internet documents, newspapers and individual commentaries on Benjamin Adekunle. The study reveals that Adekunle was described as a villain because he explored some unconventional and brutal war strategies against Biafrans, who were hitherto Nigerians and so by extension, his fellow countrymen. As a hero, he had an unrepentant strategy to rescue Nigeria from disintegration. The study recommends that while winning is the ultimate goal of any war, officers must be humane and reduce collateral damage in the course of duty.

Keywords: Adekunle Benjamin, Civil War Hero, Nigeria, Villain

Introduction

Interactions among individuals, societies and other interest groups have always been complex. Although the human desire for peace cannot be quantified, its pursuit and attainment often result in conflict. Consequently, conflicts have become intrinsic in interpersonal and social relationships. While conflict may manifest at different stages, its mismanagement could lead to war. Account of the Nigeria Civil War, that lasted for 30-months broke out between the then Eastern Region of Nigeria and the then Federal Government of Nigeria from July 1967 to January 1970. The conflict began when the Eastern region of Nigeria comprising of the ethnic groups that made up the then

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region attempted to secede by declaring the “Republic of Biafra”, this was after the failure of all the measures proposed by the then Federal Government failed, leaving the latter with no option, but to declare a Police Action, a development that later translated into a full-scale war between the two actors, as the then federal government was bent on protecting its territorial sovereignty (Okoro, 2020).

The then Head of State, General Gowon reorganised the Federal Military at the outbreak of the war under the slogan “*Keeping Nigeria one - is a job that must be done*” (Forsyth, 2001). The Federal military government had intended to shatter the idea of secession by embarking on war plans to crush Enugu, the capital city of the secessionist regime within a month and restore normalcy to the region (Abubakar, 1992). One of the plans was to seize the waterways to effectively prevent Biafra from obtaining logistics from abroad during the war. This singular plan brought the Third Marine Commando (3MCDO), led by Col. Adekunle into the limelight. The 3MCDO was tasked with capturing Bonny, Calabar, Opobo and Port Harcourt (Chukwuma & Lawrence, 2014).

There are a lot of works on the Nigerian civil war as well as interviews granted by some of the protagonists of the war. Some of these are (Amdai, 1973; Ike, 1976; Emecheta, 1981; Achebe, 2013; Obasanjo, 1980; and one of the most recent, Atidoga and Ishaq *Was Genocide Committed against the Igbo Nation of South Eastern Nigeria during the Civil War?* (2018) which argued that the nature of civil war hostilities may not constitute genocide in its strict legal sense, but that pockets of war crime and other crimes against humanity might have been committed by the Federal military troops against the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria during the Nigerian civil war. In spite of these numerous contributions to civil war in Nigeria, adequate attention has not been given to the 3MCDO under Benji and even Benji himself. This study therefore becomes imperative to put into historical perspective, Benjamin Adekunle’s youthful military career, as well as his roles

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both as a hero and a villain during the civil war. The study relied on secondary sources of data. The secondary data were gathered from peer-reviewed journal, textbooks, internet documents, newspapers and individual commentaries on Benjamin Adekunle, which are subjected to rigorous content analysis.

Conceptual Clarifications: Genocide and War

Genocide is defined as any act committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups through killing members of the group or deliberately inflicting on the group life-threatening conditions (Atidoga&Ishaq, 2018). Gozalez (2012), on the other hand, believed that genocide occurs in the context of civil wars when there is an armed conflict between at least two organised parties, one of which is the government. These definitions have one thing in common: genocide occurs during hostilities when each party explores and maximises its advantages and possibilities to defeat the opposing party. As Valentino (2004) argued, when a government feels threatened by a group, genocide may be used to strengthen its position in power. As a result of these dynamics of ongoing hostilities in armed conflict, the defenceless civilian population becomes entangled in a web by being used by the warring parties to either gain territorial control or reduce loyalty to rival parties (Gozalez, 2012). These war antics and dynamics inevitably lead to varying degrees of human atrocities. Thus, during the Nigerian -civil war, the commander of the Federal Troops, Benjamin Adekunle was accused of genocide by the secessionists.

While Joy (2014) defines war as an action resulting from a perceived wrong, it is usually the inability of the parties involved to agree on terms that would benefit all parties. War is when conflict, disagreement, or argument degenerates, and can result in the loss of both lives by recording a causality of 1000, while others further postulated that at least 100 casualties must





come from each side. The war between Biafra and Nigeria caused the death of thousands of people from 1967 to 1970 (Oyekanmi, 2021).

Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle: Early Childhood and Military Career

Benjamin Adesanya Maja Adekunle was born in Kaduna, Nigeria, on June 26, 1936, into a devoted Christian family. His father Thomas Adekunle, was from Ogbomoso in present-day Oyo State, and his mother, Amina Theodora, was from the Bachama tribe in Adamawa State in Northern Nigeria (Adeyinka, 2014). Adekunle could communicate in the three major Nigerian languages: Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, which later became an asset to his operation during the civil war (Leadership, 2014). He attended Roman Catholic Primary School in Idah before moving on to Dekina School and then Benue on a scholarship in 1947. Adekunle also enrolled in Okene Middle School (now known as Abdul Aziz Atta Memorial College, Okene, Kogi State) for his secondary education in 1951 (Olunloyo, 2019). Olunloyo (2009) summed his academic pursuits thus:

He met Mr Bolujoko, the Okene Rock teacher we dubbed “the black horse”. Mr Bolujoko like my former master, was a near-fanatical disciplinarian who could bring out the best in anyone and inculcate their more admirable characteristics. Despite his despotism, he embodied for his students the modern, educated man. Mr. Bolujoko was particularly concerned with his students’ spiritual as well as academic development (Olunloyo, 2019, p.2).

Adekunle was recruited by the British colonial officials into the Nigerian Army at the age of 22 after passing his School Certificate Examinations in 1958 (Omonijo, et al, 2015). After he passed his first chosen career entrance examinations, he moved to Ghana’s Teshie Institute for pre-selection of prospective military officers. Between 1959 and 1960, Adekunle went to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom for a two-year training programme. He also attended the School of Infantry, Warminster and, later, the School of the Tactical Wing, United Kingdom. On December 15 1960, Benjamin Adekunle was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant and a Platoon Commander and assigned to the 1st Battalion, Queen’s Own Nigeria Regiment for his

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first United Nations Peace Keeping Mission in the Kasai Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Olunloyo, 2019).

In 1962, Adekunle was appointed the Aide-de-Camp to Sir Akanu Ibiam, Governor of the Eastern Region. In 1963, Adekunle was promoted to the rank of Captain and assigned as a Staff Captain (A) to the Nigerian Brigade Headquarters in Luluabourg under Brigadier B. Ogundipe. In 1964, Major Adekunle attended the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, India. After returning to Nigeria in May 1965, he was temporarily appointed Adjutant General at Army Headquarters, replacing Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon (Omonijo, et al, 2015). Adekunle later handed over the position to Lt. Col. James Pam and was posted to his old Battalion (1st Battalion) in Enugu as a Commander. He was there till the flare-up of the Nigerian Civil War, which began as a police action and quickly escalated into an undeniable military activity when the Biafrans attacked the Mid-West Region. As part of the war plans, commanders were appointed. In 1967, Adekunle took command of the Lagos Garrison as a Substantive Lieutenant Colonel (Omonijo, et al, 2015).

The *Black Scorpion* and the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970

Venter (2015) argued that every war has euphoric moments for those who participate. The Nigeria-civil war was no exception. The Civil War lasted from July 1967 to January 15, 1970. Gowon's war strategy following the Biafra invasion of the Mid-West region was a shocking manoeuvre that the Nigerian-Federal troops had not projected. As part of his strategy to "crush the Biafrans", he assigned some of his top military men to three key roles. First, Mohammed Shuwa was the Federal Army's First Division Commander. His orders were to march his troops from Northern Nigeria into Biafran's major cities like Nsukka and Ogoja. Second, Colonel Murtala Muhammed, Commander of 2nd Division, was given direct orders to win back Benin and other parts of the Mid-West occupied by the Biafran Army, and then cross the River Niger into Onitsha and cities such as Nsukka and Ogoja (Obasanjo, 1980). Three, the Nigerian Army's Third Infantry Division

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later renamed 3rd Marine Commando Division (3MCDO) due to the unusual riverine and creek operations carried out in the Mid-Western, Rivers state and others similar ones in the South-Eastern states was led by Benjamin Adekunle.

Benjamin Adekunle known within the military circle as the *Black Scorpion* and Benji was a man of incredible intricacy. As a tactical planner, he represented a furious, brave, banter at both the national and international levels. Benjamin always stood out among his peers whenever he was confronted by the enemy, as evident during battles in Southern Nigeria's creeks and mangrove forests (Adeyinka, 2014). During the Nigerian Civil War, Benjamin Adekunle's role was described as a war criminal or villain by the Biafrans owing to the genocide committed against the people of the region; and also as a hero by the Nigerian federal government. Akinyosoye (2014) considers war a bloody affair and an arena where survival of the fittest prevails. Certain researchers have observed Black Scorpion's activities in the domain of ending the conflict and defending the Nigerian State which was on the verge of disintegrating (Omonijo, et al, 2015). But on other hand, the Biafra Secessionists saw Benjamin as a heartless "hunting dog of Nigeria Federal government" and a "Black scorpion, who was to be" blamed for the sustained destruction and killing of thousands of Igbos during the conflict (Falola, et al, 2018).

Benjamin as a Villain

Benjamin Adekunle was not only portrayed as a villain by the Biafra Secessionists but also accused of genocide during the civil war. (Moses, & Lasse, 2017). Korieh (2013) believed that systematic attempts were made to exterminate easterners, including women and children. The pogroms were said to have resulted in the killing of between 36,000 and 42,000 people. As a result of these pogroms during the war, over a million Igbo died. It is also alleged that the Nigerian troops led by Adekunle deliberately targeted Biafran civilians during the war. The





bombings of civilians and methods of operation, were planned and executed to annihilate the Igbos (Korieh, 2013).

As commander of the Federal troops, Adekunle advanced his men towards the Niger River, arriving in Asaba in early October 1967. There are several versions of what happened when the residents of the town learnt about the arrival of the federal troop. Up to a thousand Asaba residents were said to have died within few days as a result of the cruelty of the Federal troops led by Adekunle, with majority in a single and systematic pogrom of men and boys on October 7, 1967. (Bird & Ottaneli, 2011). It is also claimed that Asaba leaders ordered their people to offer the Federal troops a pledge of “one Nigeria”. To appease the federal troops, Asaba’s leaders requested from the people of the town to matche, singing, drumming and chanting “One Nigeria”. Despite this, the people of Asaba were disappointed when those on the match were immediately surrounded by Federal troops to prevent anyone from escaping.. According to eyewitness accounts, the federal troops selected males at random and executed them in full view of the people. According to the interview granted by Okonjo (2009):

The mothers who came with their sons were removing their skirts and gloves to disguise themselves so that their sons appeared to be women rather than men... So, when I saw this scenario unfolding, I knew there was something wrong. I asked myself what I should do if these women can disguise their children and my mother is not present....and I looked at the entire scene. There were no options for escape.

During the march, sounds of gun shots were heard after women had been allowed to leave the crowd. Ify described the parade as a disaster in relation to his father and three-year-old brother. Ify(2009) narrated his experience as follows:

Some people broke free and attempted to flee. My brother was holding my hand; he let go and pushed me deeper into the crowd... they shot my brother in the back, he fell, and I saw blood gushing from his body. Then the rest of us...just piled on top of each other. And they kept shooting... I'm not sure how long it took, I did not count the time they shot sporadically... There was silence after a while. I stood

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up... My entire body was covered in blood, but I knew I was safe. My father was lying nearby, his eyes open but he was dead.

Although there were no accurate and précised statistics of casualties in Asaba during the war, Bird and Otthanalli (2012) estimated that between 500 and 800 people died, in addition to the many who died the day before. The Asaba Development Council compiled a list of 373 confirmed dead people in 1981, but admitted that many more were not included (Atidoga&Ishaq, 2018, p. 223).

Following the massacre by the Federal troops, the majority of the soldiers remained in Asaba, waiting to cross the River Niger in Onitsha. Some of them resurfaced in the homes of families whose men had been executed. Ogunkeye described how soldiers kidnapped young women for a week before returning them to their parents. Ogunkeye recounted how after the incident, a man could not recognise his daughter any longer, his daughter was a different girl.... she couldnot talk to anyone, she was weeping,, and getting married was impossible because rapping is a taboo in our culture (Ogunkeye, 2009). Many people according to Bird and Otthanalli, spoke of rape, abduction and forced marriages by the Federal troops.

When the Federal troops took over Calabar in 1968, the 3MCDOed by Benjamin Adekunle, was accused of killing one to two thousand Igbos, majority of whom were civilians. It was also claimed that the Federal troops committed numerous atrocities in the Calabar region (Achebe, 2012, 48). According to the Times of London, “the Nigerian forces opened fire and murdered fourteen nurses and patients in the wards”. This incident occurred in Oji-River. Numerous lives were said to have been lost by Nigerian soldiers in Uyo and Okigwe (The Times of London, 1968). According to Achebe,(2012) ,Port-Harcourt fell to the Nigerian Federal troops on May 12, 1968, after several weeks of sustained air, land, and sea bombardment, a period reportedly characterized by military atrocities such as rape and looting.





There were numerous arguments advanced in support of the Nigerian military's genocide. Jacobs (1987) for instance, discovered a paragraph from a Washington Post editorial in his research. It states that "one word to describes the Nigerian military government's policy toward secessionist Biafra, and that word is 'genocide'". Nigeria's decision to prevent food supply to Biafra from such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and other relief organisations is a heinous one (Jacob, 1987). They used evidence from Adekunle's scandalous remarks to a Dutch journalist in 1968 to prove that he authorised indiscriminate killing and genocide. Emefiena's (2012, p.156) work captured Adekunle's comments as follows:

I would rather not see the Red Cross, no Caritas, no World Council of Churches, no Pope, no missionaries, or a United Nation representative. I need to forestall even Ibo having even one piece to eat before their capitulation. We take shots at all that moves and when our soldiers walk into the centre of the Ibo territory, we shot at all that in any event, even including non-moving objects.

The above statement by Adekunle was regarded as a war strategy to save Nigeria from disintegration at the height of the war (Omonijo et al., 2015), whereas it was regarded as a perpetuated war crime against the Biafran people. This evidence was presented to Stern Magazine during the interview. Randolph Baumann was invited to interview Adekunle. When asked if he sympathised with the Igbo, Adekunle told the German reporter, "The British have shown me another word: "sorry!" That is how I would like to respond to your question. I didn't need this war, but I want to win it. As a result, Ibos must be killed (Roy, 2011). The two Canadian diplomats were said to have reported genocide against the Igbo during the civil war. After visiting the war-torn Eastern region, it was stated that "Anyone who says there is no evidence of genocide is either in the pay of Britain, or a deliberate fool"(Atidoga & Ishaq, 2018). An American historian also described the Nigerian Civil War as genocide against the Igbo people. He stated:

The Biafran people's tragedy has now reached catastrophic proportions. An estimated 6,000 Igbo tribesmen have died of starvation, the majority of





whom are children. Hundreds of thousands died of hunger as a result of the Biafran people's inability to obtain adequate food (Schlesinger, 1983).

Many commentaries in both national and international media discussed Adekunle's handling of the war. His activities as the Commandant of 3MCDO epitomised the boundless conviction among those covering the conflict that the Divisional Commander used outright power and authority during the conflict, even to the dismay of his boss General Yakubu Gowon, who was forced to monitor him.

Benjamin the Hero

Adekunle's actions during the Civil War were portrayed as heroic by the Nigerian government. To the Civil War Federalists, Benjamin was a hero who fought to keep Nigeria united (Moses, & Lasse, 2017). His elevated degree of individual drive and determination which were his central attributes, assumed played a significant role during the conflict. Benjamin successfully developed the division from the beginning effectively, including himself in the enlistment and to a great extent Yorubas, whom he got from the civilian population made up of: merchants, students, hooligans, fugitives, and surprisingly, prison detainees, whom he groomed into a formidable force. Alabi-Isama states thus:

.... Adekunle came up with the idea that we should take a chance of letting them go back to their home, but those who wanted to be recruited into 3MCDO, they should be allowed to do so. That was terrifying but it worked Adekunle address them on 'One Nigeria' Many opted to join the 3MCDO surprisingly, only 20 out of 400 opted to go back because of their aged parents. So, we sent them to the Sea Training School at Atimbo. (Alabi-Isama, 2013, p. 101).

The men and officials of the 3MCDO battled with more noteworthy energy and assurance because the fear of death by Colonel Adekunle was always in their minds.. (Alabi-Isama, 2013). His strategy during the war to prevent Nigeria from disintegration was the blockade he formed to also prevent Biafra having access to food and weapons. (Omonijo, et al, 2015).





However, Obasanjo (1980,p.2), stated that Adekunle had three regiments entrusted with the seaborne arriving in Bonny on July 26, 1967, an essential need in the general government objective of circling Biafra. He set up a good foundation for himself as a splendid and speedy thinking battle officer, equipped for consolidating creative preparation with daringness in execution (Adeyinka, 2014). His soldiers' prosperity at Bonny was rehashed on October 18, 1967, with the seizure of Calabar. By April 1968, the whole southeastern region had been freed. In addition to this, Benjamin Adekunle's soldiers drove north with about 40,000 soldiers under his command as a significant strategy intended to remove Biafra from the seacoast. They sent off a land, water and air attack strategy in Port Harcourt. With this wholistic strategy, Benjy guided the 15th Brigade to catch Onne with two forces, and Port Harcourt tumbled to the Nigerians on May 12, 1968. This activity's importance could not possibly be more significant. Oluleye (1973, p. 48) stated his opinion that:

Following Nsukka, the main outstanding progress of government troops on July 26 was the capture of the Bonny oil terminal in land and or water capable landing depicted as "splendidly arranged and executed" and the first of its sort at any point endeavoured by African soldiers. The fall of Bonny to Federal powers driven by Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Adekunle was critical. It did not just give the Federal Government control of the primary waterway leading to Port Harcourt, however, it likewise removed one of the radicals' principal negotiating advantages in any future discussions with oil organisations.

Since every division had its own international arms acquisition agent, Adekunle was undaunted in his quest for the best materials for his soldiers, carefully directing the securing and installing of arms and equipment to the last detail. His commitment to the prosperity of the men under his command helped in bringing out the best in them. He inspired both fear and respect in his soldiers (Adeyinka, 2014). According to Alabi-Isama:

Adekunle warned the troops against looting, stressing that 3MCDO was locked in, so whatever was looted could not be taken anywhere and that one might die the next day. He also warned about raping women. Adekunle emphatically told the





troops that ‘you may find yourself in the hands of those you caused pains. I would not describe Adekunle and officers and men of 3MCDO as angels, but they were not devils (Alabi-Isama, 2013, p. 125).

Adekunle seemed merciful and insightful while managing the majority of the vanquished domains and the treatment of Biafran detainees of war (Olunloyo, 2019). During that time, markets, hospitals, and schools were reopened, and orphans were cared for (Adeyinka, 2014). This can be corroborated by the account of Alabi-Isama. Alabi-Isama who was part of 3MCDO who asserted that ‘we looked after the civilians and the Biafrans alike. We fed the Biafrans, clothed them, recruited them, treated their wound at our hospitals and clinic, and those who wanted to go back to Biafra were allowed to go (Alabi-Isama, 2013). Adekunle was associated with the remarkable strong determination, he commanded an army that was largely made up of volunteers who had no prior military training and turned them to brave soldiers within some months. It is on this ground that Famoriyo (2014, p.2) described him as a good manager of men and resources.

After securing the secessionist state’s southern and eastern borders in July, Adekunle was prepared to make his first move into Ibo-land and began to push towards Owerri. In September 1968, he developed and launched “Operation OAU”, which resulted in the simultaneous capture of Owerri, Aba, and Umuahia (Obasanjo, 1980). Adekunle had boasted widely about his intentions to quickly take over the rest of Biafra, somewhat intoxicated by his sense of importance and under serious illusions about his competence. Adekunle was particular about the importance of capturing Owerri by the Federal army. This was based on the belief that if the city was captured, it would help in the capture and arrest of General Ojukwu, the Biafran Head of State. (Chukwuma & Lawrence, 2014).

Adekunle and his colleagues (Lt.-Col. Godwin Alabi-Isama, Lt.-Col. Alani Akinrinade, Major Yemi Alabi and Major Alimi Ogunkanmi) fought bravely in the Midwest, capturing Escravos, Burutu, Urhonigbe, Owa and Aladima. Bomadi, Patani. Koko, Sapele, Ajagbodudu, Warri,

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Ughelli, Umutuand Itagba were also captured (Alabi-Isama, 2013). Adekunle employed a scorpion bite strategy to win the Nigerian civil war, and this was responsible for his being nicknamed, Black-scorpion. This type of military strategy according to Premium Times (2014), as controversial it may appear, did not only help in celebrating and mystifying the figure of Adekunle, but also laid the foundation for Nigeria's contemporary crisis, and threw a wedge into the national fabric. Olunloyo, (2019, p. 95) describes Benjamin Adekunle as follows:

The well-known Black Scorpion is a very capable officer. Because he is an all-rounder, he does not delegate authority to subordinates. He was fond of fabricating information, which his subordinates later perfected and used against him. He is fluent in the major Nigerian languages as well as many dialects, which all contributed to the success of his duty during the civil war. His greatest flaws are his lack of management and disregard for simple tactics for rear stability in hostile territory.

Nigeria's sense of morality suffered as a result of Adekunle's reputation for barbarism. Momoh claims that the simple sighting of Adekunle ingrained fear of death. According to the Guardian, Adekunle and the Nigerian government might not have had the intention of carrying out this decimation, yet, this was what it turned out to be. Adekunle's strategy almost annihilated the whole 3rd Division in October 1968 during its operations in Owerri, Aba and Umuahian (OAU).

Nonetheless, his undeniable inconsistent conduct incited a surge of grumblings and General Gowon was compelled to apologise on his behalf. His reckless comments and other ugly remarks helped in denting his reputation before the international community. Forsyth, 2001, p. 131). Alabi-Isama (2013) opined that Adekunle was replaced as a result of the series of crises that culminated in the failed ambush that affected the divisional commander. It is believed that Adekunle had become so popular with the entire people of Nigeria, that he had assumed the status of the hero of the civil war (Alabi-Isama, 2013, p.400). Adekunle had captured part of the Midwest including Warri and also Escravos, Bonny, Calabar, Odukpani, Ugep, Obubra, Ikom, Ekang, Oban, Oron, Uyo, Itu, in





short, the present Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and the River State of Nigeria. Be it as it may, Adekunle was replaced as a result of one crisis or the other during this period. Oluleye (1985, p.135) stated thus:

The panel recommended that all field commanders be relieved so that tribal meaning would not be read into the changes. The famous 3MCDO hand was crippled at the time, and it needed to be rebuilt with reinforcements of all kinds. The Black scorpion hand wears out completely. When he couldn't return to the front lines for fear of his life, he became unpopular among the ranks of his division.

Thus, the only way Gowon could solve the trouble he had in keeping Adekunle as the main Commander was to on May 12, 1969, relieve Adekunle and the two other commanders, Colonels Ibrahim Haruna and Mohammed Shuwaof their positions.

Gowon replaced Benjamin Adekunle with another officer from Yorubaland, Colonel Olusegun Obasanjo (a former Military Head of State and Civilian President). Obasanjo's priority, then, was to restore the morale of his troops and return the men to a semblance of a fighting force that produced officers and men imbued with loyalty and harmony between the military and the civilian, contrary to Adekunle who created an image that Nigeria military was a bloodthirsty, genocidal army (Obasanjo, 1980). Obasanjo acknowledged the intention of surrendering to the Federal Government by Colonel Phillip Effiong, the soldier who succeeded Ojukwu as Biafra Head of State after Ojukwu's escape in January of 1970 (Adeyinka, 2014)

Akinyosoye (2014) believed that there must be casualties between the two sides in a war (Nigeria troops and Biafran). The statement underlined was made in the context of the war's victorious conclusion. This brings to light the main reason he risked his life to confront the secessionists. Adekunle was described by Alli thus:

He remained one of the most indefatigable, physically and mentally versatile warriors the nation and the Army have produced. Nigeria's Napoleon or Shaka the Zulu without a personal empire. At critical times of national anxiety, during





the civil war, he repeatedly gave Nigeria hope and certainty with his predictions and victories on the battle-front.....Today, the powers that be pretend that the Black Scorpion can be denied his monumental contributions and place in history. However, the history of the civil war will be written, and by whosoever, Brigadier General Benjamin Maja Adekunle will live in the hearts of all Nigerians as the tiny great soldier who, amongst others, won the war to keep Nigeria as one. Generals like him, and they are very few, must be stunned by our lack of professionalism today. He concretely paved the way for Biafran subsequent surrender. He remained the most revered and internationally acclaimed warrior-commander of the civil war, nothing can change that(Alli, 2001).

Adekunle was promoted to substantive Colonel and appointed Director of Training and Planning at the Sector Headquarters (SHQ), a position he held until the end of the civil war (Omoigui, 2015).

Benjamin Adekunle in the Post Nigeria-Civil War 1970-2014

Benjamin Adekunle was elevated to Brigadier-General in 1972. The tactical system effectively utilised his critical thinking capacities, which named him the regulatory emperor accountable for decongesting the Lagos port, which had a well-established issue with imported merchandise leeway (Adeyinka, 2014). John (1971), claimed that he was “immensely successful”. However, Adekunle began having problems with the soldiers after being obstructed. This alluded to a gathering of officials who laid the basis for the future strength of the Nigerian Army’s higher positions by those of the northern muslim exstration (Adeyinka, 2014). In the United Kingdom, they referenced Adekunle’s name in the trial of a Nigerian finance manager named Iyabo Olorunkoya for global hemp trafficking(Adeyinka, 2014). Subsequently, he was suspended before retiring. Adekunle claimed that he was set up and not given a fair hearing by military authorities, who influenced the “Adekunle should go”campaign orchestrated by his rivals in the Service. In a declassified US State Department dispatch from 1976, his propensity for stepping on toes had turned many individuals against him, ultimately prompting his compulsory retirement from the Nigerian armed forces on August 20, 1974(Omonijo, etal, 2015).





After his forceful retirement, he kept close to the military regime that succeeded Gowon. He influenced the supply of aircraft, military equipment, and massive food to the MPLA Group in Angola in February 1976 (Adeyinka, 2014). However, with the time, his contacts inside progressive civilian and military administration dwindled. Adekunle never campaigned any political position or was named to a public position. He resided discreetly in Surulere Area of Lagos district and his hometown of Ogbomosho (Adeyinka, 2014). Benjamin Adekunle died on September 13, 2014, at the age of 78. He was laid to rest at the Vaults and Gardens in Ikoyi, Lagos. He was married to Mrs. Comfort Folake Adekunle, with whom he had four children: Adelaja, Kola, Busola, and Omolara Adekunle.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to recreate the impression about Benjamin Adekunle's character and the Nigerian Civil War by bringing his early life, military career, and his role during the Nigerian Civil War into historical perspective. It is presumed that the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle's activities during the war have been defined within the framework of hero and villain, *because he explored some unconventional and brutal war strategies against Biafrans, who were hitherto Nigerians and by extension, his fellow countrymen. As a hero, he had an unrepentant strategy to rescue Nigeria from disintegration.*

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