

THE NIGERIA-BIAFRA WAR AND NKEREFI 1967-1970

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Abstract

The Nigeria–Biafra War, fought from 1967-1970, was a pivotal conflict in Nigerian history, sparked by the secession of the Republic of Biafra, led by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, from the Nigerian federation. The war was fueled by ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and political instability, culminating in the declaration of Biafra’s independence on May 30, 1967. The study found that the conflict was marked by brutal violence, widespread famine, and alleged genocide, particularly against the Igbo people, who constituted the majority of Biafra’s population. It further found that the Nigerian government, led by Yakubu Gowon, imposed a blockade on Biafra, which led to mass starvation and the deaths of an estimated 500,000 to 2 million people, mostly civilians. Using a qualitative research methodology involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with indigenes and other stakeholders in Nkerefi, the study revealed that Nkerefi, a town in Enugu State, played a significant role during the war as a key stronghold for Biafran forces. The study argues that Nkerefi’s role as an entrepôt during the Nigeria–Biafra War (1967–1970) was significant. Although specific details about this role may be limited, its potential importance can be inferred from the historical and geographical context of the war. The study concludes that the war ended on January 15, 1970, with Biafra’s surrender and reintegration into Nigeria. The conflict left deep scars, exacerbating regional and ethnic tensions and shaping Nigeria’s post-war politics and society.

Keywords: Nigeria, Biafra, Secession, Nkerefi, Entrepot.

Introduction

The dramatic role, which soldiers played in Nkerefi politics during the Nigeria-Biafra war has caught the imagination of Nkerefi historians who had regarded the phenomenon as something new in Nkerefi. They overlooked the fact that, in many parts of pre-colonial Igbo community, the military had always played vital role in the political evolution of the society.ⁱ For example, among the Ezza and Nkerefi in Igbo land, a military group or organisation not only guaranteed the security of the communities against external aggression, but were also the ultimate instruments for making inter-community relations and obligations possible. In pre-colonial Nkerefi, the possession of a strong army enhanced the prestige of the elders and the chief priests at home as well as beyond their domain. The army provided an instrument for the creation of development and expansion of the communities.ⁱⁱ

The paper is divided into six parts. The first part is introduction. This is followed by the brief history of Nkerefi, their geographical location and migration. The third discusses the causes of Nigeria/Biafra war 1967-1970. The fourth examines Nkerefi as an entrepot during the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970. This section highlights the role of Nkerefi during the war. The penultimate section is an analysis of the role of Nkerefi War and Peace Committee (NWAPC). The last part is the conclusion. The argument tends to suggest that the Nigeria/Biafra war and Nkerefi's role in it offer valuable insights into the complexities of Nigerian history, politics, and society. The work argues that the war's impact on Nigeria's development, politics, and social fabric is still felt today, with ongoing demands for justice and reconciliation. This paper exposes the underlying factors of the war that resulted in widespread famine, displacement, and estimated deaths of 500,000 to 2 million people, mostly civilians.

Brief History of Nkerefi

Nekerefi is a clan in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State in South Eastern Nigeria.ⁱⁱⁱ It comprises of four autonomous communities namely: Imeoha Nkerefi, Ohuani Amofu Nkerefi, Ishienu Amofu Nkerefi, and Enuogu Nkerefi.^{iv} The pre-colonial history of Nkerefi was essentially that of the migration and fusion of people and rise and full of kindred and villages.^v Various people and claims point to the fact that Nkerefi people are the descendants of Ezeokeuna – a cattle rearer from Edembarri.^{vi} According to archival reports, “the people of Nkerefi being descendant of Ezeokeuna of Ezza at one time used to make periodic sacrifice at their ancestor’s shrine at Ezza, but however, this custom has ceased for many years”.^{vii}

Nkerefi traced her origin from Ezzakuna (Ezeoke-una) the founder of Ezza, whose father Una Okpoto Okumeze came from Afikpo group of the Igbo history.^{viii} These people have been organized into something like vassal state by their possession of a common dialect (language) and culture, but in reality, there is no Nkerefi state or race. The word Nkerefi refers more to the dialect and occupation than people.^{ix} One particular legend and oral school of thought state that when 'Ezeoke Una' the father of Nkerefi saw that his son – Ezeoke Una Junior (Ogbonna) has matured into manhood, he gave him few cows and some yams to start his own life and maintain his family.^x He received the paternal gifts and blessings from his father, and moved southwards in search of settlement and livelihood. He had acquired the art of cattle rearing and farming from his parents. As he moved, his cattle (Efi) multiplied and he started selling some through trade by barter (exchange of goods for goods), and people were happy with him for his clemency, industry and enterprise.^{xi} Whenever a visitor said that he was going to the home of Ezeoke Una, people were confused it was going to be the home of Ezeoke or his father, they called him Ezeoke Una – 'Nke-na-ere- efi' which means cattle seller or dealer. This was the genesis of the name Nkerefi.^{xii}

Further evidence to show Ezeokuna of Ezekoha Ezza in the farther of Nkerefi are: that at the burial of Ezeokona, Chukwuma Ighudu of Obuno was among the representatives from Nkerefi that participated and that Ezeokona was buried in a house with three doors each facing and directed to Ezza, Nkerefi and Onicha.^{xiii} The above three towns are brothers with Ezza as eldest and Onicha as the youngest. Nkerefi then spread and constituted segments of other communities such as Atani in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, some others in part of Ukwuani in present Delta State and Anambra State.^{xiv}

The Causes of Nigeria and Biafra War

We examine the causes of the Nigeria/Biafra of 1967-1970 War and subsequent causes of military interventions in Nigeria politics that placed Nkerefi in another political, economic and social stage. In Nigeria, the military intervened in politics, ostensibly in order to displace governments which were notorious for corruption and inefficiency.^{xv}

In his book, *Power and Class Struggle in Africa: Introduction to Change and Conflict in African Politics*, Irving Leonard Markovitz quoted Lt-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu as decrying the state of Nigeria's first republic – which was responsible for the fall of the republic. According to Ojukwu, the period of civilian administration in the first republic was wasted years of helplessness, incompetence, abuse of office and disregard for the interest of the common man.^{xvi}

The 1966 military *coup* in Nigeria was designed to arrest the drift for which the country was heading.^{xvii} In a radio broadcast in the afternoon of 15th January, 1966, the leader of the *coup*,^{xviii} Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, outlined the aims of the coup plotters. According to him:

Our enemies are political profiteers, swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten per cents, those that seek to keep the country permanently divided so that they remain in office as ministers and V. I. Ps of waste, the tribalists the nepolist, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles....Our purpose was to change our country and make it a place we could be proud to call our home, not to wage war.... Tribal considerations were completely out of our minds at this stage.^{xix}

The chance for the first *coup* in Nigeria came when the political leaders lost the confidence of the masses by their attempt to cling to power at all costs. The event, which brought matters to a climax, was the inflated census figure of 1963, the federal election of 1964 which was nearly deadlocked over allegations of irregularities and the rigged October 1965 election in the Western Region which led to a breakdown of law and order.^{xx}

One of the major ugly incidents of the period was the December, 1964 federal elections which had brought the Action Group (AG), the NCNC and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), into a coalition: the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA); while the Northern People Congress (NPC), Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP), the Mid-West Democratic Front (MDF) and the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA). The probable reason for the formation of the alliances was for each of them to fight the 1964 election with a united strength, moreso, when the handwriting had begun to crystallise that the election would not be an easy one to win for any one party.

During the 1964 general election, members of the Sarduana Brigade (a para-military organisation built up, trained and maintained by the then Premier of Northern Nigeria, the late Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sarduana of Sokoto as his private army) went round telling people that there would be trouble in the whole country if the NPC should lose the election. Many NEPU men and women were killed because they were imprisoned in the North. What

saved the situation and a mass killing of Igbo in 1964 was the boycott of the 1964 election by the U.P.G.A. Ben Obumsele opines,

In fact during one of the meetings of the U.P.G.A. for North Campaign, we had to wire Dr Okpara that the elections should be boycotted or postponed because of the threat given us by the Sarduana Brigada and some Northern parliamentarians at that time. Of course between 1962 and 1964 whenever there was any local election or general election, people were chased up and down especially people who were living in Sabon Gari. They had some trouble with the Igbo because of the alliance with the N.E.P.U.^{xxi}

The Western Nigeria elections of October 1965 brought the Federation to the brink of disintegration. The 1965 Western election were openly rigged. The blatant electoral irregularities plunged the region into serious violence as the citizens were driven to take the law into their own hands. During the campaign both the NNA and the U.P.G.A. used violence, murdering their opponents or destroying their property. The U.P.G.A. accused Akintola's Government of rigging the election, since many of his candidates were returned unopposed even though the UPGA had put forward its own candidates in the constituencies concerned. When Akintola and his party were declared to have won the election, lawlessness broke out all over the West. Whole sections of towns were burnt; including human beings.^{xxii} L. Okafor opines that the Federal Government which hastily declared a state of emergency in the region in 1962 during a mere fighting in the House of Assembly failed to take any action now that there was insecurity of lives and property throughout the region.^{xxiii} The government was busy organising a Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in Lagos meant to discuss the restoration of law and order in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).^{xxiv} The Commonwealth Conference in Lagos in January 1966 merely delayed the military stroke which came as soon as the Commonwealth prime ministers dispersed.^{xxv}

As a result of all these developments, on the 15 January, 1966, a group of majors staged a coup in which the Federal Prime Minister Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Primiers of the North Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and West Samuel Ladoke Akintola, the Federal Minister of Finance Festus Okotie-Eboh, and most of the senior army officers were killed. The coup plotters, led by Major Nzeogwu, did not succeed in taking over the Government, for they failed to kill the head of the army, Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi. He and other surviving officers were able to put down the coup and restore their control of the army. To them, the discredited and terrified politicians handed over power. In the words of Chinua Achebe, "Despite my fictional warning I never expected or wanted the form of violent intervention that became the military coup of January 15, 1966".^{xxvi}

According to some Nigerian historian, the 15th January, 1966 coup itself was partial as certain political leaders from the North, Mid-west and West in particular. Alhaji Sir Abubaka Tafawa Balewa (Prime Minister) and Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (Premier of Northern Region) were assassinated, whereas the Premiers of Eastern and Mid-western Regions were spared according to the northerners. It was hardly a coincidence that the two premiers who were not killed, Dr Michael. I. Okpara and Chief Dennis Osadebe were Igbo, the group to which Major C. K. Nzeogwu belonged. In the same way, is it right to say that Major Nzeogwu was betrayed by his military colleagues? The Northerners having lost many of their leaders during the coup saw the exercise as a plot against their interest, and the coup of 29th July, was therefore designed to adjust the balance.^{xxvii}

The Head of State, Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi's problem was how to reconcile his vision of one Nigeria with ethnic loyalties and rising tensions, particularly of the Hausa-Fulani in the north. According to T. Falola, A. Mahadi, M. Uhomoibhi and U. Anyanwu, Ironsi's apparent lenient treatment of the coup plotters of 15th January, 1966 was construed as coordination of coup and the murders of the country's leaders. His unity Decree number 34 further compounded the problem.^{xxviii} Thereafter, nearly every attempt he made for the reform of the administration was interpreted by the Northerners as a grand design for Igbo domination of the country. The killing of many Igbo in the northern Nigeria between July and October 1966 made the attempted secession by the Igbo and the subsequent civil war virtually inevitable.^{xxix}

The January 1966 coup plotters stood for one Nigeria, the participants in July coup asserted the danger to the nation of Igbo domination, and eventually the secession of the Biafrans was attempted on the grounds of escaping Northern domination too.^{xxx} Men, women and children arrived with arms and legs broken, hands hand cuffed, and mouth spilt open. Pregnant women were cut open and the born children killed. The total casualties are unknown.^{xxxi} Probably between three and four thousand were killed – though some estimates were higher. From all over Nigeria, thousands or more Nkeref people and their neighbouring communities poured back to their crowded homeland, abandoning jobs and property that they had taken them a lifetime of struggle to acquire.^{xxxii}

The first gunshot was heard on 25th January, 1967 and the civil war officially broke out. The Nkerefi patriots, humanitarians, philanthropists and positive thinkers rallied and formed a constituted government to handle the affairs of the community during the civil war – Nkerefi War and Peace Committee (NWAPC), 1967 – 1970.^{xxxiii}

Following the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafra war in 1967, a civil strife, whose major theatre, was fought, principally, in Igbo land, many Igbo towns and villages were submerged by the invading Nigerian vandals. Nkerefi, our study area, was not spared of those ugly incidents associated with wars. However, the civilian leaders of the town were equal to the task of finding solutions to the challenges posed by the Biafran war situation. This is what we examine in this section of the research.

After the fall of Enugu and Awgu to the federal troops, Nkerefi became the military and administrative headquarters of Enugu zone, while Umuahia became the capital of Biafra.^{xxxiv} We shall, inter-alia, examine the military activities, soldiers' welfare, political, economic, social activities in Nkerefi during the war; also examined are the judiciary, the refugees, the stragglers, functions and achievements of the Nkerefi War and Peace committee.

The first military personnel, which arrived at Nkerefi, were the Rangers, while the second batch was a platoon headed by an Area Commander V. Okeke, who later commanded H. Company, formerly, the 14 Battalion of the Biafran Army at the Akpugo Sector. All the communities around Nkerefi were thus controlled by the soldiers except Nkerefi.^{xxxv}

The Biafran soldiers at Nkerefi military formation fought gallantly. They launched offensive ground attacks against the federal troops at the warring locations at Nenwe, Awgu, Ugbawka, Oduma and Agbani. Therefore, a proper re-enforcement came to the Biafran side. Later, another platoon streamed into Nkerefi with the Biafran Organisation of Freedom Fighters (BOFF). The man in command was Lt. Orjigbam, assisted by Lt. Nwobodo and A. C. Akirika. Nkerefi was adequately secured.^{xxxvi}

The history of Nigerian – Biafran war would be incomplete without the remarkable technical ingenuity of the Biafran Directorate of Research and Productivity (RAP). They worked under every difficult condition in a way that was similar to the termite. The unit produced effective military equipment and supply tanks, rockets mortars, anti-air craft, guns, the deadly 'Ogbunigwe' (landmines cased in milk churns and anti-tanks weapons); from material obtained purely from local sources. How it fabricated agricultural implements and tools, durable consumer goods, including spare and equipment, communication and telephone system (radio station on wheel), how it built the Uli Airport which, during the civil war period, was the busiest airport in black Africa.^{xxxvii} In Biafra and Nkerefi, rural areas became temporarily the base of military operations, and how it created petroleum refining capacity everywhere so that 'Biafra' had the most widely diffused petroleum refining capacity of the Biafrans was referred to as 'the do-it-yourself oil refineries'.^{xxxviii}

Some of the important, brave and courageous personalities who piloted the affairs of the Biafran including the following: General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, (Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Biafran Armed Forces); Maj. Gen. Philip Efiog (Chief of Defence Staff); Col. Bernard Odogwu (Director, Military Intelligence); Mr. Chukwumerije (Director of Information); Mr. David Osuagwu (Film Director Biafran Film Unit); Lt. Col. Douglas Ngwube (a staff of External Affairs); Col. Hillary Njoku (Head of Biafran War Cabinet); Mr. William Ugboaja O (DCP of CID); Major-General Alexander Madiebod (Commander of Biafra Army). Others were Mr. Lucius Ezenwugo, Luke Obi, Col. Ebong Oka, Samuel Nwachukwu and Col. Ben Gbulie.^{xxxix}

Nkerefi community did not receive any air assault from the enemies throughout the devastating civil war. This was because the town's largest market was tactically transferred to the forest, which made it impossible for the Nigerian air raid to dictate. However, the community got an offensive ground attack on 28th December, 1969, towards the dying minutes of the war. There was a complete bombardment and burning of Mgbanocha and Onuaegu Umunama Etiti villages. Many lives were lost and property destroyed by the federal troops.^{xl}

The group of soldiers, who caused commotion in Nkerefi, was the stragglers. They committed most of the crimes in the community. They threatened to beat Rev. Fr. Matthew Aluma (anointed), Hon. S. Y. Nnaji (a parliamentarian) and even conducted the assassination attempt of Chief P. A. Nweze the longest served chairman of Nkanu L.G.A.^{xli}

Nkerefi as an Entrepot during the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970

Nkerefi's role as an entrepot during the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) is significant, given its strategic location. Although, specific details about this role might be limited, we can infer its potential importance based on the context of the war and the region.

Nkerefi's Potential Role

Trade and Supply: As an entrepot, Nkerefi served as a crucial trade and supply hub, facilitating the movement of goods, services, and people between different regions. This role was particularly important during the war, when supply chains were disrupted, and access to essential goods was limited. The economic activities in Nkerefi during the era were grouped into commerce and agriculture. Business was carried on between Nkerefi and its neighbouring communities – Oduma, Uburu, Nara Unateze, Isu, Mburubu, Ugbawka, Agbani, Akpugo, Ugwogo Nike and Okposi. There were smugglers – *Ndi afia* attack as these traders were popularly called. They related with the traders from other parts of Igbo land and Nigeria.^{xlii} It would be compared to the present inter-regional trade. Variety of commodities were bought and sold e.g. hand milled rice from Nkerefi and salt from *mmahi* Uburu salt mine and baked salt *Agbiligba Unu*, kerosene, drugs, and disinfectants were produced and re-sold to the traders who had visited Nkerefi and Nwafor Anyim at Idembia in Abakaliki Division.^{xliii}

Other neighbouring communities smuggled themselves into Nkerefi to buy food items from the town. The intrepid youths smuggled items not in their towns. The items included dried fish, stock fish, crayfish, drugs, cloths and salt which were extremely scarce during the war.^{xliv}

Agriculture was the mainstay of Nkerefi. The town practised abundant agriculture, even the refugees bought food cheaply because there were no means of evacuation to other towns and villages. The agricultural activities were a result intensified in Nkerefi during the civil war. The people embraced agriculture in full scale. The Nkerefi people cultivated yams, rice, cassava, melon, cocoyams and palm produce in large quantities. This habitual agricultural eagerness led the people to sustenance of lives during this deplorable time. The people despite the war situation, fed well from their own products. The processing of rice and cassava was carried out by manual labour. Even though, it was vigorous task, people took pleasure in doing it.^{xlv}

According to Mr. C. O. C. Egbondu, the Chief of War and Peace Committee, the food of the war period in Nkerefi was not a balanced diet due to non-availability of proteinous substance. The only sources of proteins were the wild vegetables which included *Ukpaka*. The vegetables were locally called: *mpoto, opoto, onori, uchakulu, onu akpulu*, local green *aewa bekee*. The major soup and stew condiments were the devil grass fruit *okobo, akpo, achi, akpalata, ofo (acpiti aeka), egusi, ahu, ahikpa (enine)* melon family and mushroom (*ero*) and so forth.^{xlvi}

The soup was popularly called 'win-the-war'. Other sources of proteins were from the major meats of the era: rats, congo meat (*ejuna*), the fermented fish *okpa n'udo* or *oshigbulu ony kpe azu*, fermented crab- *nhuko okpe*; others were sea snail (*akpakolo* and *akilisa*), the bush snail *mgbugba* and rabbit which was medicinal to the sickness of malaria and marasmus caused by food deficiency.^{xlvii}

However, as the war progressed, opposition and disillusioned grew, too. The suffering and starvation in the secessionist's enclave, Biafra land, also increased. Thousands died of Marasmus and *Kwashiorkor* in Igbo land – two police names for starvation, a singular painful and lingering way to die. It has been said that it was only few citizens and refugees of abject poverty died of the two diseases, in Nkerefi, because Nkerefi produced food in abundance. The Igbo adage says *mako ojoo anyi ga-ebi* – meaning no matter the bad situation we must live.^{xlviii}

Refugee and Support: Nkerefi's location made it a refugee camp for people fleeing the conflict, providing shelter, food, and other forms of support to those in need. This was especially critical during the war, when many people were displaced and were in dire need of assistance. The war which had begun with shooting, forced several Biafran cities one after the other to surrender to the military might of the well-equipped Nigerian troops. In the first few months of the war, Biafra had conceded Ogoja, Nsukka, Enugu and Bonny to Nigeria by the end of 1967.^{xlix} By the close of 1968, all minority areas of Biafra and one-third of Igbo land were already encircled by the Nigerian troops.¹ Amidst all these, Nkerefi accommodated, interacted and mixed freely with the refugees. They fled from different communities in Igbo land to Nkerefi land to avoid being killed and to save their lives. The refugees came from Nsukka, Enugu Ukwu, Udi, Amawbia, Awka and various parts of Nkanu, Aniri and Ohaozala.^{li}

It has also been remarked that part of the results of such refugee mix were inter-marriages among the refugees and the Nkerefi people. Although, the situations of the refugees were deplorable, only a few suffered marasmus and kwashiorkor – nutrition deficiency, because malnutrition was reduced to the barest minimum due to the high quality food production during the time.^{lii}

Social and Cultural Activities: The social and cultural activities of Nkerefi were revived during the war. Nkerefi community, in spite of the deadly conditions, ranged from marriage, title-taking, naming ceremony, feasts and moonlight play during the harvests to avoid unpleasant and criminal acts. Hence the town was always bustling with thickly teeming population and introduction of new tunes.^{liii}

Title-taking dominated the war period. Title-taking, which was not done with the actual requirements due to scarcity of money was called *Egbu Agba Mmee* – title-taking without killing animals such as goat, cow, horse and fowl. Title-taking featured prominently because there was nothing one could do with the devalued Biafran currency. Others diverted the worthless money to marriage which made the community polygamous. Some married as many as four to five wives. The youths enjoyed the moonlight games: *evu onwa* - merely on formulating new music or tunes – *mgbamgba evu* or embracement game between the males and the females known as *Mbiere oma* and other celebrities.^{liv}

Nkerefi War and Peace Committee (NWAPC)

Due to the state of lawlessness and chaos which the war had brought on the people, the leaders had to seek a way out. Thus, in order to maintain peace, enforce law and order among the soldiers and civilians in Nkerefi, a war council was formed. It was later changed to the Nkerefi War and Peace Committee by the soldiers on 24th April, 1967.^{lv} The following fearless, brave, bold heroes (intrepid) were the executive members of the committee:

- i. Mr. C. O. C. Egbondu (President)
- ii. Mr. P. N. Onu (Vice-President)
- iii. Mr. G. P. Egbonwonu (Secretary)
- iv. Mr. P. O. Chukwu (Financial Secretary)
- v. Rev. Fr. M. Aluma (anointed) Member
- vi. Hon. S. Y. Nnaji (a parliamentarian) Member
- vii. Chief P. A. Nweze (Acting traditional ruler)
- viii. Chief J. C. Uneke (Ex-traditional ruler)
- ix. Onyiba Johnson Njokuzor Nwogo (Colonial Councillor)
- x. Representatives from the twenty two villages^{lvi}

Upon its inauguration, the president of the committee, Mr Egbondu, promulgated a constitution or a bye-law known as “Egbondu Martial Constitution of 1967”, which, among other things, was targeted at the provision of adequate security of lives and property of the entire citizens, the soldiers and the refugees.^{lvii}

On 21st February, 1968, some lorries fully loaded with arms and ammunitions – both chemical and biological warheads – were landed at Nkerefi under the custody of Captain Francis Ujam – the commander in charge of the Enugu and Awgu military formations. The Nkerefi War and Peace Committee saw that the tune of the diabolic music and changed its tune, Nkerefi land was gradually smelling the odour of the calamity. The arms and ammunitions which came in bulk were handed over to the Biafran soldiers for use.^{lviii}

The welfare of soldiers were considered and attended to by all. The community fed the soldier very well. Their sociogenic problems (clothing) were solved. The soldiers were also supplied with “Aliwa Khaki” textile materials for uniforms. Every village donated a bundle of ‘Aliwa’ and twenty two (22) bundles came from the twenty two villages of Nkerefi. Then cordiality existed between the soldiers and civilians. Nkerefians were thus free from molestations, insults and assaults from the soldiers except the Nkerefi stragglers – the run-away soldiers of Nkerefi origin.^{lix}

The soldiers and the committee had their meetings at *Aebor Achi Aevuna* – the forest where the Achi Aevuna shrine was situated, in Umunjokuochie, Ndiugbo, Ihukulu village, from time to time to discuss issues affecting the community, the welfare of the soldiers and the general war situation.^{lx}

It was said that the political system in Nkerefi during the war was so organised. The council of elders, the General Assembly (Ohaneze), the age grade, and the diviners were committed to their civic duties and obligations.^{lxi} Generally, members of these groups had a defined purpose aimed at peace and security of lives and properties in the town. Matters of trivial importance were settled within the families and villages, while cases of gross offences were referred to the Nkerefi War and Peace Committee: the highest ruling council during the war period. There was complete unity among the Nkerefi people and gerontocracy was well practised.^{lxii}

The first remarkable achievement of the Nkerefi War and Peace Committee was the shifting of the central market Eke Nkerefi to north eastern part of Ihukulu village near the Umuezeochie village in Amofu. It was called “Eke 77”, named after a popular man, Ogbu Cyril from Umuezeochie nicknamed ‘77’, whose compound was nearest

to the market. This was done to avoid the incessant harassment of the Nigerian air raid planes. As a result of this arrangement, there was an atmosphere of calm and tranquillity throughout the war period.^{lxiii}

Other areas the committee functioned included the following:^{lxiv}

- a. settlement of some disputes such as marriage, fighting, alleged thefts and land disputes;
- b. Guard against infiltration of the town by the federal troops through the activities of the saboteurs;
- c. dispensation of justice;
- d. maintenance of equity and fairplay between the Biafran soldiers and the civilian population and
- e. abrogation of unnecessary intimidation and threat to lives by civilian members of the town against one another.
- f. also, the committee ensured that wives did not elop from their matrimonial homes;
- g. curbed the ugly activities of the stragglers in the town;
- h. did not make room for bribery and corruption, prevented the federal troops from penetrating;
- i. stopped military harassment, intimidation, insult and assault of a “idle civilians”, and
- j. monitored the feeding and clothing of the soldiers among other things.

Conclusion

On January 15, 1970, the Nigeria-Biafra War officially ended, following Biafra's surrender to the Federal Government. General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu had earlier departed for Côte d'Ivoire, while a Biafran delegation led by Major General Philip Efiog formally handed over at Dodan Barracks in Lagos.^{lxv} Subsequently, federal troops visited Nkerefi on January 28, 1970, to collect abandoned arms and ammunition left by the defunct Biafran soldiers.^{lxvi} The end of the war marked not only a military victory but also the beginning of Nigeria's challenging journey toward national reconciliation and reconstruction. The events in Nkerefi illustrate how local communities experienced both the devastation and aftermath of the war, underscoring the need for continuous dialogue, healing, and historical preservation in Nigeria's post-war identity.

Endnotes

ⁱ Susanna Nwiya, 72 years, Interviewed at her house at Umuogbi, Nkerefi Nkanu East Local Government Area Enugu State, Nigeria, on 23rd March. 2022.

ⁱⁱ Raphael Ogbu, 53 years, interviewed at his residence in Nkerefi, Nkanu East Local Government Area, Enugu state, on 26th March, 2024

ⁱⁱⁱ J. C. Chukwu, “Gender-Based Violence in Nkerefi Nkanu East Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria, 1995 – 2014”, *Iconic Research and Engineering Journals*, 5(12) 2022, 134-135.

^{iv} Enugu State of Nigeria Official Gazette, no 2, Enugu – 5th September, 2002 Vol. 11, B. 20

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