



Quest for Internet

In the 104th installment of our weekly series at emeagwali.com, we present letters pertaining to Philip Emeagwali's war memoir "THUNDER ROAD TO BIAFRA." One million people died during that 30-month Nigeria-Biafra Civil War during which Emeagwali lived from refugee camp in Awka-Etiti to an army barrack in Ndoni to the war front in Oguta.



Rejoinder to Philip Effiong, jr

Dear Philip Emeagwali,

I bumped into your web archive on the Biafran-Nigerian war today for the first time. It is quite interesting and provides a lot information. I could not but be caught by a sudden upsurge of emotions. The fact is that I was born during this war and seeing those pictures (especially that of an emaciated mother with her baby) gives me an idea of what I must have looked like during that sad period.

I also read with interest the observation sent in by Philip Effiong, Jr. I totally agree with him that Major Gen Philip Effiong deserves a place in the annals of Nigeria which is yet to be accorded to him. And not only that, he also deserves a huge apology and compensation from both the powers that be in Nigeria and the people of Nigeria in general, for having neglected him for too long.

I further read with a greater interest (and may be, some sense of amusement) the exchange between Effiong Jr and Leo. I think both of them got a little bit emotional in their exchange. But who will blame the younger Effiong for getting emotional, after such an unwarranted attack and provocation by Leo? I would like to remind Leo that the mark of an educated mind is the ability to face facts and data, and to rise above personal (or tribal - clanish) sentiments.



Biafran Soldier with Rifle

Original Caption: The gun the soldier is holding is described as as Communist AK-47 rifle. Sources at the US television network could offer no more information about the weapon. © Bettmann/CORBIS Date Photographed: June 4, 1969 Location Information Okwala Junction, Biafra

But at the same, I would like to make a final comment. This is with regard to a statement by Effiong Jr. In his observation he said: "At no point, after all, has a majority ethnic group accepted the leadership of of a minority man or woman, except toward the end of the War when General Ojukwu took his cowardly flight and left General Efiog to clean up his mess." Effiong Jr. got it wrong here, because from the very inception of the Biafran as independent nation the elder Effiong was the second in command, and that fact is not contested, it was actually accepted and accords with the principles that governed Ojukwu's administration of the Eastern Region, even before the declaration of Biafra, namely participation of every ethnic group within the region, in governance. Secondly, I would disagree with Effiong Jr that Ojukwu's flight into exile is to be termed "cowardly". I should think the flight a leader of warring people at time when their military strength has been completely weakened is necessary in order that a peaceful negotiation for surrender may take place, because as long he is there he remains a prime target for the enemy army, and his presence symbolizes the continued struggle. I should think the leaders and advisers on the Biafran part realized this when advised Ojukwu to leave and then asked his second in command to announce surrender. Gen Effiong was very brave indeed and couragiuos. He did not

fail his people. He rose up to what was expected of him as the second in command, in the absence of the Head of State, and he did it gallantly, just as he did had always gallantly served both before and during the war, in his other assignments. But Ojukwu was no less courageous. It requires a courageous leader to realise that the "game is over". Think of ojukwu's words on 11th Jan 1970 as he fled Biafra: "The task of leader of a people at war is to be responsive to the plight of his people and to determine what level of sacrifice can be accepted." Clearly it would appear that there is indication in this that he perceived his leaving as necessary in order to ensure the survival of the Biafrans as a people, even if not as an independent nation. It takes a courageous to swallow personal pride for the sake of your people, and move into exile.



I would once more want to thank you, Philip Effiong Jr, for raising these issues, and I think those issues should be brought to the attention of the wider Nigerian public. A true democracy cannot be said to exist in Nigeria yet, as long as such issues as these are still left unaddressed.

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Captured Biafran soldier being interrogated by Nigerian captors. The original copy of this photo is in the private archives of Philip Emeagwali.

Biafra, Republic of

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secessionist state of W Africa, in existence from May 30, 1967, to Jan. 15, 1970. At the outset Biafra comprised, roughly, the East-Central, South-Eastern, and Rivers states of the Federation of Nigeria, where the Igbo people predominated. The country, which took

its name from the Bight of Biafra (an arm of the Atlantic Ocean), was established by Igbos who felt they could not develop-or even survive-within Nigeria. In Sept., 1966, numerous Igbos had been killed in N Nigeria, where they had migrated in order to engage in commerce. The secessionist state was led by Lt. Col. Chukumeke Odumegwu Ojukwu and included some non-Igbo persons. Biafra's original capital was Enugu; Aba, Umuahia, and Owerri served successively as provisional capitals after Enugu was captured (Oct., 1967) by Nigerian forces. Seeking to maintain national unity, Nigeria imposed economic sanctions on Biafra from the start of the secession, and fighting between Nigeria and Biafra broke out in July, 1967. After initial Biafran advances, Nigeria attacked Biafra by air, land, and sea and gradually reduced the territory under its control. The breakaway state had insufficient resources at the start of the war-it was a net importer of food and had little industry-and depended heavily on its control of petroleum fields for funds to make purchases abroad. It lost the oil fields in the war, and more than one million of its civilian population are thought to have died as a result of severe malnutrition. At the time of its surrender on Jan. 15, 1970, Biafra was greatly reduced in size, its inhabitants were starving, and its leader, Ojukwu, had fled the country. During its existence Biafra was recognized by only five nations, although other countries gave moral or material support. Civilian groups were organized in a number of countries to publicize the case for Biafra and to raise funds for the secessionist state.

J. O. G. Achuzia, *Requiem Biafra* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1986)

A. A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafra War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1980).

