

Quest for Internet

In the 95th 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 the 30-month Nigeria-Biafra Civil War.

Dear Philip Emeagwali:

I mistakenly came across your site that documents aspects of the Biafran War with the use of photographs.

First, I want to commend you for a job well done. I especially enjoyed going through your remarkable photos, in spite of the fact that some of them recapture a gory sadness that resulted from the War. However, and forgive me if I'm mistaken, but I also noticed that you provide no meaningful reference to a notable figure who stands as, perhaps, the hero, albeit unsung hero, of the War.



Lt. Gen. Philip Effiong, commander of Biafran Forces made a surrender broadcast from a mobile radio truck at Uga, Biafra

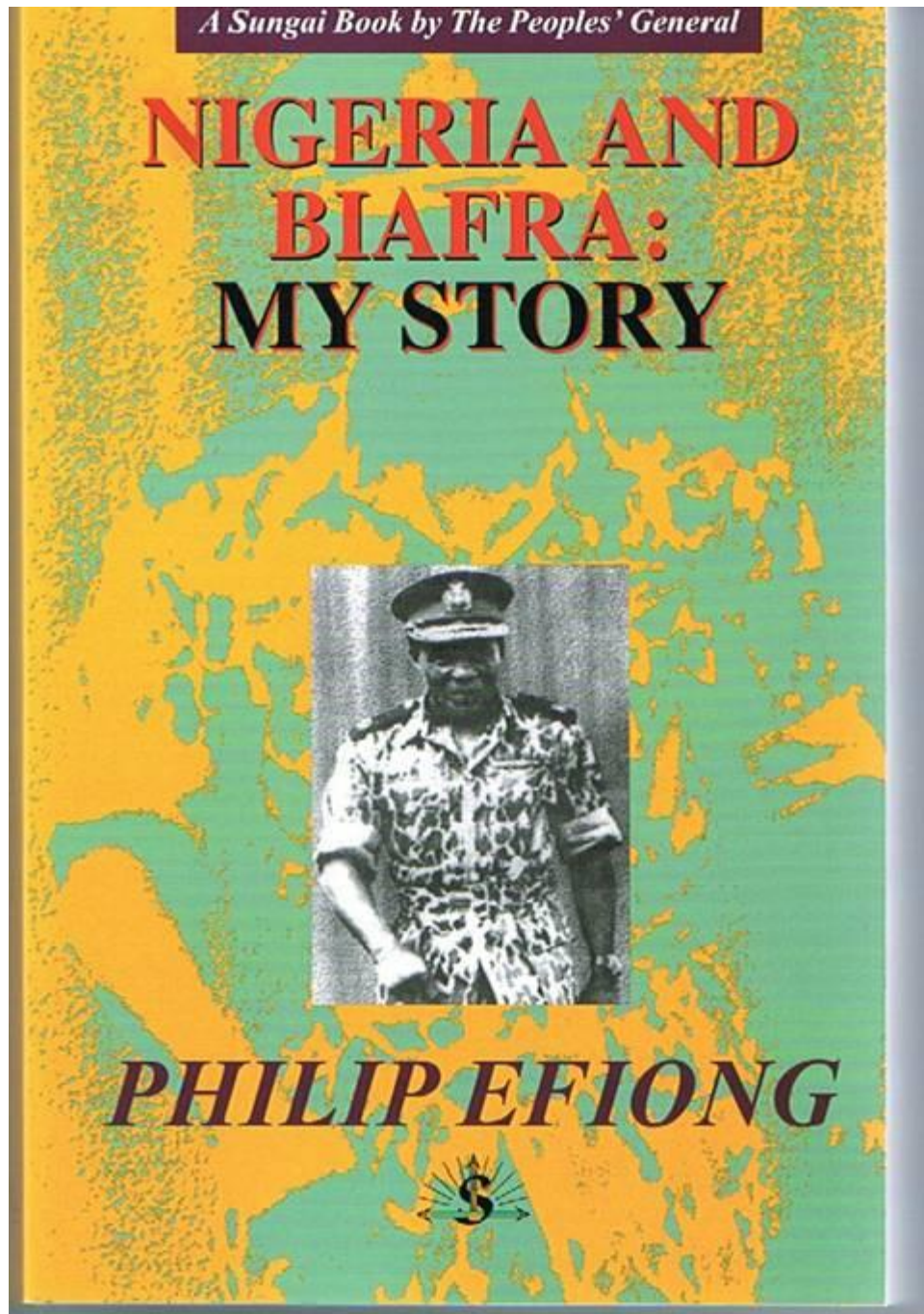
As of 1959 when Nigeria had only 30/31 military officers, Major-General Philip Effiong, then a captain, was higher in rank than the two central adversaries of the War--Generals Gowon and Ojukwu. In reality, and without the unfortunate political and social events that led to the War, at the onset of the War he was still technically higher than both men, at least militarily. Ultimately his role, and the one that stands out, was sacrificial, and saved the lives of hundreds, even thousands. It was a role that has caused him unimaginable suffering as well as thrust him into an unfair and marginalized position where he remains largely unacknowledged, even spurned. Major-General Effiong's role at the end of the War

was not only life-threatening and, therefore, courageous, but was also phenomenal because it made history that has yet to be fully recognized. 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 Efiiong to clean up his mess. And this, at a time when the likes of the great Zik of Africa and other such Ibo heavyweights could not be looked up to by Ibos. They had only one person to look up to--Major-General Philip Efiiong--and he didn't let them down but put his life on the line for their sake.

I don't believe you deliberately excluded Major-General Efiiong from your site, but I hope you can understand why I had no choice but to notice the fact of his conspicuous absence.

Thank you for your time and I wish you the best in your present and future intellectual pursuits.

Philip Efiiong, Jr.
(son of General Philip Efiiong)



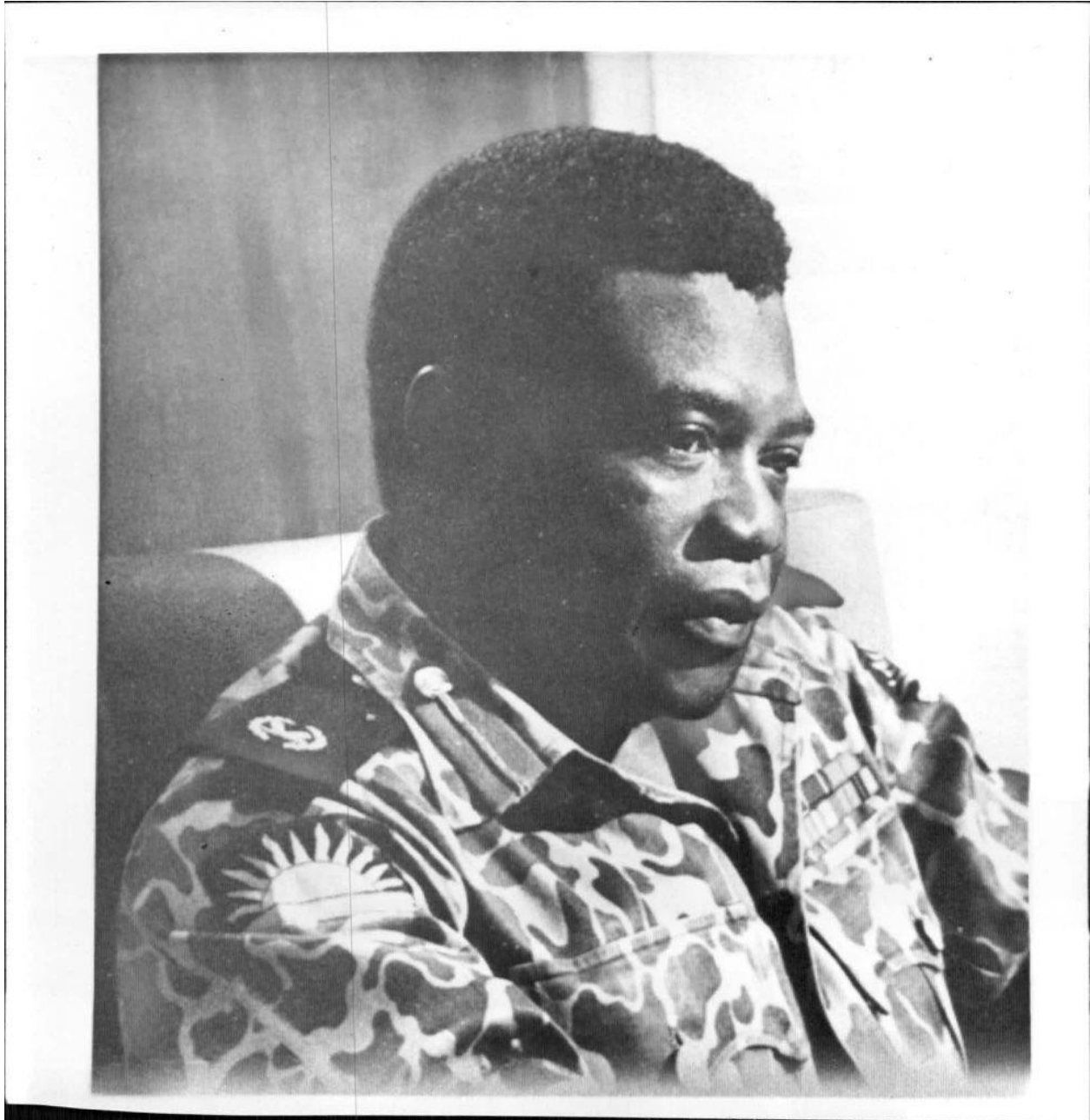
Dear Philip Effiong:

Within the circles I was in, Ndi Igbo praised General Effiong for the courage he displayed at the end of the civil war. The information posted on my Biafra home page is incomplete and unbalanced. With your permission, I will post your response on that page. I will present a more balanced info when I write my biography.

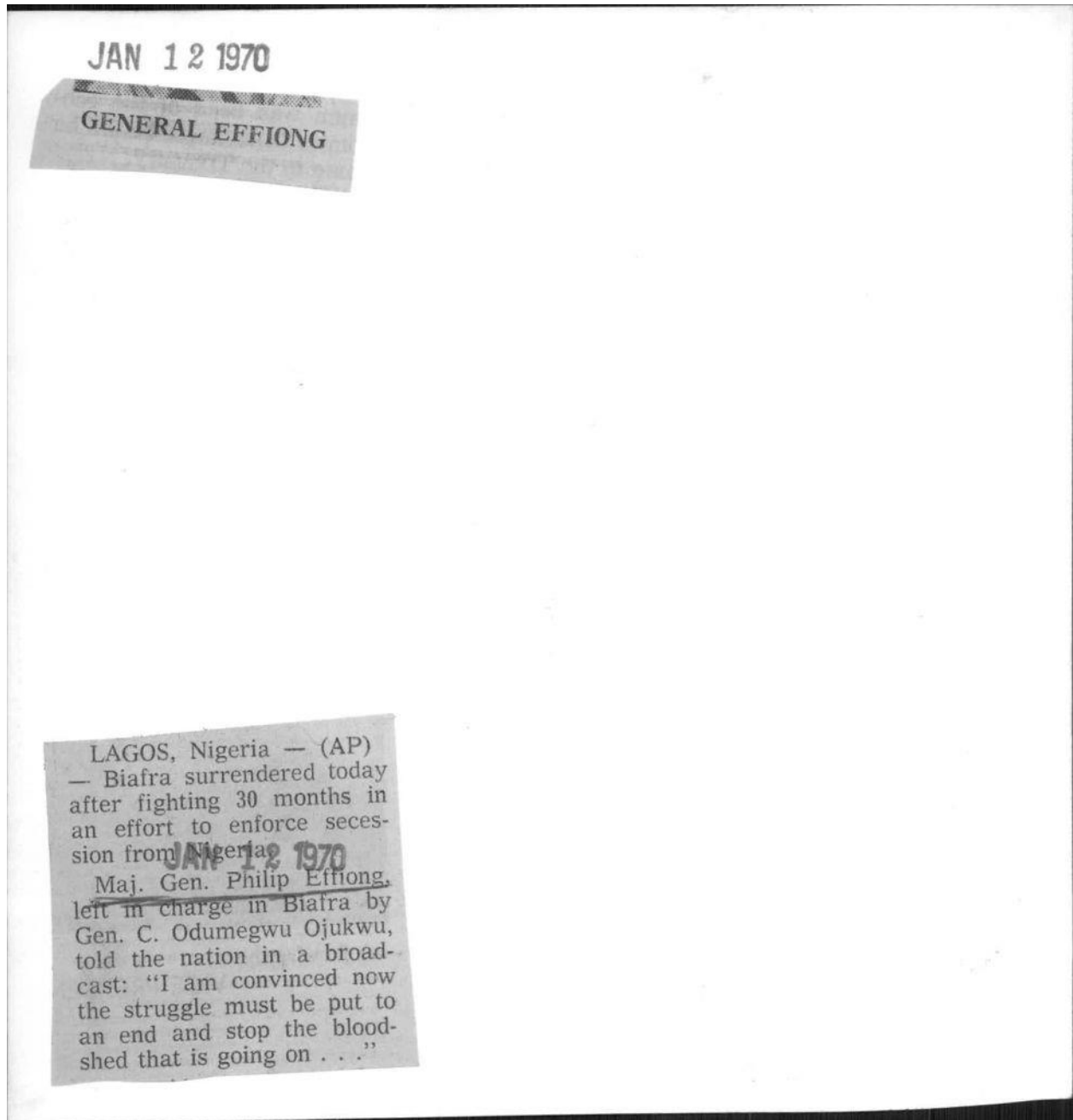
Please visit me again.

Regards,
Philip Emeagwali

BTW, what is the correct spelling "Effiong" or "Efiong?"



1970 Effiong Philip - Major General Of Biafra



original press photo from 1970 featuring JAN 12 1970 Biafra surrendered today after fighting 30 months in an effort to enforce secession from Nigeria. Maj. Gen. Philip Effiong, left in charge in Biafra by Gen. C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, told the nation in a broadcast: "I am convinced now the struggle must be put to an end and stop the bloodshed that is going on..."

Philip:

Thank you for your response to my mail and for your exceptional humility and sincerity. I am inclined to believe that you deserve the praises that have been bestowed on you. You have my permission to post my response on your page.

"Effiong" is actually an anglicized version of the name. My father still uses "Efiong." For the most part I use "Effiong" because most of my certificates have the name spelt that way. It is usually others--journalists, etc.--who spell the name with double "f." Members of the family generally spell the name with one "f." Since most writings, books, etc., have it spelt with double "f," you may actually stick to this spelling as people are more used to it. Thank you for your time and best wishes.

Philip, Jr.



Hello Phillips,

Going through your site and digesting all the information therein; your world had been obviously influenced by the events of "1968 Nigeria," I thought. I fought back emotion as reality permitted me to but, that is the strength of the collective unconscious we all share. I was only nine at the inception of hostilities. I wonder however if Effiong Jr. feels unimportant in the annals of history as written by events, not by you I might add. His Father obviously shared his opinion I hopelessly would think, for that would be most unfortunate. One ought to remind Effiong Jr. that only true cowards make surrendering speeches. Ojukwu could not have chosen a better person. God bless.

Leo @aol.com 16 Nov 2001





Philip Emeagwali at age 18 in Onitsha, Nigeria, 1973, three years after he retired as a Biafran soldier.