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Quest for Internet

In the 96th 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.



General Odumegwu Ojukwu inspecting Biafran troops.

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



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

Dear Leo (I assume this is your name):

I write in reference to a response you gave to my opinion on the Civil War, which is pasted on Phillip Emeagwali's website. Although your response was written since 16 Nov 2001, I am only just coming across it. May I, therefore, respond to it?

I am particularly concerned about your statement, which reads:

"I wonder however if EffiongJr. 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 EffiongJr. that only true cowards make surrendering speeches. Ojukwu could not have chosen a better person. God bless."

Although not very clear, I tried to make sense of your statement. Be advised that my intention is to enter into open, rational, and objective conversation, and not to deteriorate into a petty exchange based on sentiments and, in your case, nothing more than ethnic bias. If you must respond to me, make some effort to rise above emotional leanings. This should help to develop your mind. Now, to respond to more directly to your attack (because that's what it was).



[MS]

Biafran soldiers at river bank.

First, I do not feel "unimportant" about anything, and my essay makes no such indication. I am not seeking cheap attention but merely to address the truth, and I will continue to do so, regardless of what people like you say or think! My claim to importance is based on the things I have achieved in my life (thank God) and not a War. If I have to list what those achievements are, ask me. I am not ashamed to share them. I do not seek importance by way of any war, and I would appreciate it if you do not make such baseless suggestions that lack any substance to them.

Second, you would do well to stop imagining things and then writing them down. My opinions are mine, and mine alone. Your claim that my father obviously shares them is unfounded, annoying, insulting, and absolutely false. Please don't accuse my father falsely. You don't know anything about him or his opinions.



Third, and this is the big one. You state, “only true cowards make surrendering speeches.” This is true on some levels, but at the same time this is where you most display your ignorance and small-mindedness. Surrendering can be an act of cowardice, but it can also be heroic based on context. Within the context of the Civil war, my father did what the people wanted him to do, simple! He didn’t act in isolation. At the time, the War was virtually over but simply needed an official stamp to confirm what was obvious. Have you ever done any research on the War? Have you read any book about it? If you haven’t, you need to. My dad did exactly what the people wanted and that is why in the past 33 years they (the Ibo people mainly) have honored and continue to honor him. Locally he has been honored and internationally he has been honored. How many cowards do you know that are honored so greatly and sincerely? I guess you expected my dad to single-handedly pick up a gun (which was virtually non-existent in Biafra at the time) and go on a worthless and eccentric battle against the Federal troops.

You indicate, rather boldly and sarcastically, that your tribal hero, Ojukwu, handpicked the best coward in my father. Wouldn’t it have been easier for this hero to stay back and perform the “cowardly” act rather than run off to the Ivory Coast? If the act was that cowardly and there was nothing to fear, why didn’t he stay back? If it wasn’t dangerous and no risks were involved, then why didn’t he perform the surrender himself? The fact is (and it doesn’t surprise me that you don’t know) that surrendering was not as simplistic, as easy, and as safe as you make it sound. Do you know that there were threats on the lives of some of those who went to Dodan Barracks for the signing? You probably don’t because your facts are not straight on this matter. Do you know that my father was thrown in detention after signing the surrender? Do you know that his passport was seized? Do you know that he has not had a job-military or civilian-since after the War? Are these situations that a coward puts himself in? If surrendering is as easy as you make it sound, then why didn’t Hitler surrender rather than take his own life? Surrendering, in other words does not always imply safety and freedom as you make it sound, and your hero, Ojukwu, knew this to be true, that is why he absconded to the Ivory Coast and abandoned people like you who know sing eulogies in honor of him. And yet, you dare to call my father a coward. I choose not to be shocked by your ingratitude.

Be aware, and this is for your own good, that my father, like some of his other contemporaries, had been honored before the War and beyond the context of the War. My father served in the UN Peace Keeping Force in the Congo well before the War, and was paid tribute for it. Before the War he served in Kaduna where attempts were made on his life during the second coup. Does his life as a professional soldier and the risks he faced suggest cowardice? Is this the type of life a coward chooses to live?

Wasn't your father alive during the War? Wasn't he a man? What role did he play, especially since it was his own people who were bearing the brunt of the Federal assault? Why didn't he fight? Why didn't he do the heroic things that you claim my father didn't do?

I don't blame you for insulting my father. It does say something about your upbringing. But, trust me, you really don't count. Yours is a lonesome, ill-informed, nutty voice in some obscure desert where brains haven't yet been invented. As I've stated, my father has been generously honored nationally and internationally, so you are really quite irrelevant and dispensable. Trust me. Nonetheless, can I request from you, whoever you are, not to insult my father again. He is almost 80 and need not be insulted by a bigot who hates to accept or deal with the truth. He has suffered enormously in his life-I know because I am his son-and so, if you have nothing good to say about him, as ungrateful as you are, then please don't say anything about him.

If you plan to engage in meaningful, fact-based, unbiased, unsentimental, and non-insulting conversation, by all means respond to me. If not, please don't respond to me. The last thing I want to do is sink down to your degenerate level of perception and thinking.

Enough said.

Philip U. Effiong (Abuja, Nigeria, April 8 2003, pueffiong@yahoo.com)

