

# Military Leadership in Nigeria

1966-1979

Major-General James J. Otuleye

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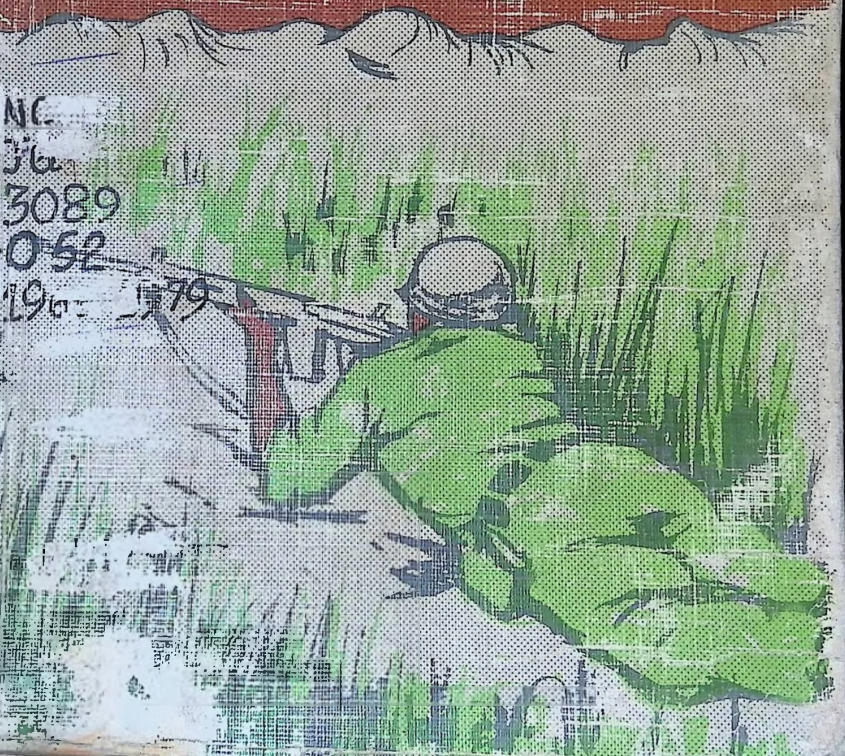
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**Major-General James J. Oluleye, p.sc., C.F.R.**

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**TO  
THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER**

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## Author's Foreword

As most of the contents of this book are based on my own personal knowledge of people and personal experiences, which thus imply responsibility for the accuracy of the contents, it is very difficult to commission a foreword from somebody else. Such commissioning would imply privity to the entire content which will amount to committing such a fellow beyond reasonable limits.

Nevertheless, there are people who can testify to the truthfulness of the content particularly on the Nigerian Civil War. And that person is no other than General Yakubu Gowon, who bore mentally the brunt of the war from his Dodan Barracks residence. When asked during his lightning visit to Nigeria by Pressmen on the spate of books being written by retired Army Officers, he was reported to have said that:

General James Oluleye who was General Staff Officer 1 at military headquarters, was in a position to speak more authoritatively.

Nothing more needs be said.

## Acknowledgements

The basic facts used for this book are culled from my jottings particularly during the Nigerian Civil War. These facts are in note form which are now amplified. In producing this book in this final form, I have been helped by many people.

From the military side, I was greatly helped by Major-General H.U. Katsina, psc, rcds, (rtd.) who recalled many events at the nightly meetings of the Strategic Committee, Brigadier B.A.M. Adekunle, psc, (rtd.), who gave information on his movements during the liberation of the Midwestern State (now Bendel State); Major-General A. Mohammed, psc, (rtd.), C.F.R., former GSO II (Intelligence) Nigerian Army and later Director-General, Nigerian Security Organisation, who encouraged me to do an incisive research into events prior to my assumption of office as GSO I (AHQ); and Lt-Col S.A. Afolalu and Major T.K. Sawyer both of the Nigerian Army Corps of Education who gave me a long list of books for suggested reading. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

I am also indebted to Lieutenant-General G.S. Jalo, fss., C.F.R. Chief of Defence Staff, who as an active participant in the Civil War helped in filling some information gaps and also to the Military Secretary's (Army) Office and Officers Documentation Office for assistance in respect of some deceased officers.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Peter Obe, Managing Director of Peter Obe Photo Agency by whose courtesy I got many of the photographs used in this book, Brigadier S.B. Akinola, psc, (rtd.) former Director, Nigerian Army Intelligence Corps who helped with further information about Dimka's coup and Dr O.Y. Balogun of the Department of Geography (Cartographic Division), University of Lagos who supervised the map work.

My indebtedness also goes to Dr. I. Babatunde Jose, O.F.R., former Chairman and Managing Director of the Daily Times Group of Newspapers who did the initial reading of the script and made many useful suggestions relating to facts, deductions and assessment of people and Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, B.A., M.A.,

M.A.L.D., D.Phil (Oxon), former Director-General, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs who after reading pointed out some historical inaccuracies and also advised deletions of certain aspects which can be inferred in other parts of the book.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my oldest member of staff, Mr. C.I. Ofonna, Clerk Typist, who typed from my difficult manuscript, Mrs. C.A. Ogunbiyi and Miss G.B. Alover my Secretaries who had to type many parts of the script over and over again and to my wife, Felicia Olajumoke, who vividly recollected many events which could have passed into oblivion.

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*Major-General J.J. Oluleye, psc, (rtd.), C.F.R.*

## The Author

The author, Major-General J.J. Oluleye was born at Efon-Alaaye in Ekiti Division on a date which was not recorded. The time of the birth was linked with the advent of the Christ Apostolic Church at Ilesa and Efon-Alaaye. Being an Arian the author adopted Sunday, 20 April, 1930. He was certainly born on a Sunday.

He had his primary school education in many towns such as Akure, Emure, Aisegba, Iyin, Efon-Alaaye and Ijero-Ekiti where he concluded his primary school education in 1946. He took to the traditional occupation of teaching and taught for two years at St. Michael's School, Ikoro-Ekiti, and for one year at the Anglican Primary School, Araromi Ago-Owu near Ikire in Oyo State.

He attended Ibadan Archdeaconry Teacher Training College (later known as Ibadan Diocesan Teacher Training College and finally St Luke's College), for Grades III and II Teacher's Certificates in 1950 and 51 and 1954 and 55 respectively. He taught at St Peter's Anglican School, Ife-Odan via Oyo in 1952 and 53, St Matthew's Anglican Modern School, Okuku via Osogbo in 1956 and headed St Peter's School I, Aremo, Ibadan from May 1957 to August 1959.

He enlisted in the Nigerian Army as NMF/1003 on 9th September, 1959. He had his basic military training at the Regular Officers Special Training School (RWAFF), Teshie, Accra, Ghana from September 1959 to March 1960. He underwent the commissioning course at Mons Officer Cadet Training School, Aldershot, Hants, England in the latter part of 1960 and gained a combatant commission in the Nigerian Army as N/132 on 6th January, 1961 in the rank of a Second-Lieutenant. He attended Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Southern India in 1967 and was awarded the symbol *p*sc.

Between 1961 and 1979 he served in the Nigerian Army in various capacities as Mortar Platoon Commander with 1st Battalion up to 1962 in Enugu, Chief Mortar Instructor to the Nigerian Army at the Nigerian Military Training College, Kaduna in 1963/64, Officer Commanding 'C' Company of 1st Battalion, Enugu from October

1964 to March 1966, Second-in-Command 5th Battalion, Kano, March to September 1966 and Acting Commandant, Nigerian Military Training College from October 1966 to March 1967. He was recalled from India during the Civil War and appointed GSO1 Army Headquarters, Lagos from November 1967 to May 1970. He commanded 2nd Infantry Division of the Nigerian Army first in Benin City and later Ibadan from 1 June, 1970 to 31 July, 1975.

He served with 1st Battalion in UN operations in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) from November 1961 to May 1962 and also with the UN Peace Keeping Force supervising the cease-fire agreement between India and Pakistan from September 1965 to March 1966.

Following the overthrow of the Gowon regime he was appointed Federal Commissioner for Establishment and Service Matters from August 1975 to mid-March 1977 after which he was moved to the Federal Ministry of Finance as Commissioner, an appointment he held till 30 September, 1979. From August 1975 till the handover of government to the civilians, he continuously remained a member of the Federal Executive Council and the Supreme Military Council.

He was honoured with C.F.R and also officer status of the Republics of Mauritania and Senegal. He retired from the Nigerian Army on 2 October, 1979 in the rank of Major-General.

## Introduction

*Military Leadership in Nigeria 1966-1979* will necessarily force an excursion into the unresolved subject of the definition of 'Leaders and Leadership'. In the olden days, various acknowledged leaders had attempted a comprehensive definition of the concepts but such definitions became inadequate because of factors such as time, space and environment and perhaps least of all fate or luck. The elusiveness of the definition becomes more obvious when people who are pronounced *Messaiah* today are sentenced to crucifixion tomorrow. What further complicates the subject definition can therefore be attributed to the people sitting in judgment over those we call leaders or those assuming the role of leadership. In short, after much research the elusiveness of the definition of the subject remains.

Who then is responsible for the shifts in the evaluation of *Leaders and Leadership* at a given time? The answer can only lead to, 'Who is qualified to determine leaders or leadership: self-assumed leaders or weaklings?' In any case, a leader is remembered through good or bad leadership of a people, a village, a town, a state of a country and a country. Global leadership is something that is in doubt as at now and such a pre-eminent title is contestable for a leader of a country to pronounce himself as the foremost among leaders. Such egotism will lack acceptability by leaders of other countries.

The purpose of this book is to examine the concept of leadership as a preamble to the Nigerian situation where military leaders were unwittingly or deliberately called in to assume a wider role than military leadership. Efforts will be made to highlight all the ingredients of leadership qualities in order to establish that the qualities are universal. The exploration of the subject will also attempt to answer the distinction between leaders and leadership in peace time and in crises. It is not unlikely that crisis management techniques might have been responsible for the varying views of evaluators or assessors of leadership values in rulers, commanders or anybody

who at any time played or plays a recognizable role in the life of his community.

Nigeria and Africa have had a rich past in terms of leadership that a recourse to other European leadership dignitaries may not be too necessary. But to treat the subject in isolation is to gloss over other acknowledged and other disreputed leaders throughout the world. The dragnet will be sufficiently spread in order to treat the subject in a fair manner. This is necessary in order to establish whether leadership is inherent in one race and non-inherent in other races. Despite varying factors, each community had produced its own leaders.

If military intervention in politics is incompatible with the ethics of the military profession, whose responsibility is it then to change a bad government? This is a question that this book fails to answer in full. In Africa generally, bad rulers fail to turn to the electorate and when they do, rigging and other election mal-practices usually alter what should be the verdict of the electorate. Perhaps Africans need to cultivate the habit of thorough self-examination to be able to know when things are bad and call it quits. Public opinion of an African government, however low, cannot force the ruler to quit. What then can be the instrument of change in lieu of military intervention? The strategy of 'Civil Disobedience' which is conversely, 'Non-violence, Non-cooperation' by the late Mahatma Gandhi is still a very effective weapon. However ruthless a ruler may be, the will of the populace will eventually triumph. A military *coup d'etat* is the greatest act of cowardice as their victims are slaughtered in cold blood without a chance to challenge the assassins. Shooting of an unarmed person is not a feat of arms. The governed can topple a bad government and legitimately invite the military if it is seen as a better alternative to the ousted government.

The script of this book was completed in August, 1981. Before publication the two Lieutenants-Colonels (Mr Yakubu Gowon and Mr Chukwuemeka Ojukwu) whose personal feuds became one of the reasons for the Civil War were granted 'pardon'. I find no reasons whatsoever to change my comments on both.

The book, *Why We Struck* by Mr Adewale Ademoyega, a former Nigerian Army Major who was booted out of the Nigerian Army, would under normal circumstances have led to amendments because of my views on the emergency of revolutionaries in the

Nigerian Army. After reading through the book I did not see any need to change my assessment of the plotters as contained in this book.

Perhaps what one needs to do is to examine the value of the book from Operations angle. Chapter Three of *Why We Struck* pages 33-46 contained the ideology which the revolutionaries wanted to propagate if they had succeeded. But there was no time stipulation for the implementation and the withdrawal from the political scene. In short, the revolutionaries wanted to rule the country indefinitely under the guise of a military toga as their proposed reorganizations will still remain under military leadership. There was no time table for return to civilian rule.

In Chapter Four of the book, the author after dealing with revolutionary personalities went on to say that there was no intention to kill any of the victims except they resisted arrest. This was either a white lie or mere naivety. The graduates among the plotters had reached the highest ranks within a short span of service and hence the elimination of the senior officers who were in commands and staff appointments. In any case, how could they inculcate the proposed ideology if those from the North who were assassinated were to be kept in some prisons peacefully in the full view of an Army that was Northern — dominated to the magnitude of 70% in both cadres, Officers and Other Ranks. What prevented an immediate counter stroke was the belief or faith that Major-General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi in his capacity as the General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army and now the Head of State would bring the culprits to book. It was this mistaken faith coupled with overtures that gave Major-General Ironsi a tenure of office of six months.

One could easily see Major Nzeogwu as a practical officer when compared with his theoretical graduate collaborators in the South. One defect in the Operations in the South was the plan to release Chief Obafemi Awolowo from the Calabar prisons on the D-Day before any 'Success Signal' was received. Had Captain Udeaja obeyed and brought Chief Awolowo to Lagos, the Chief could have been made to face hostile salvos from rifles and guns as opposed to a gun salute as Major-General Ironsi had no plans to release him.

The author denounced Lt-Col. A. Madiebo so much and asserted that he was not in the know. If he was not in the know, 'how did it

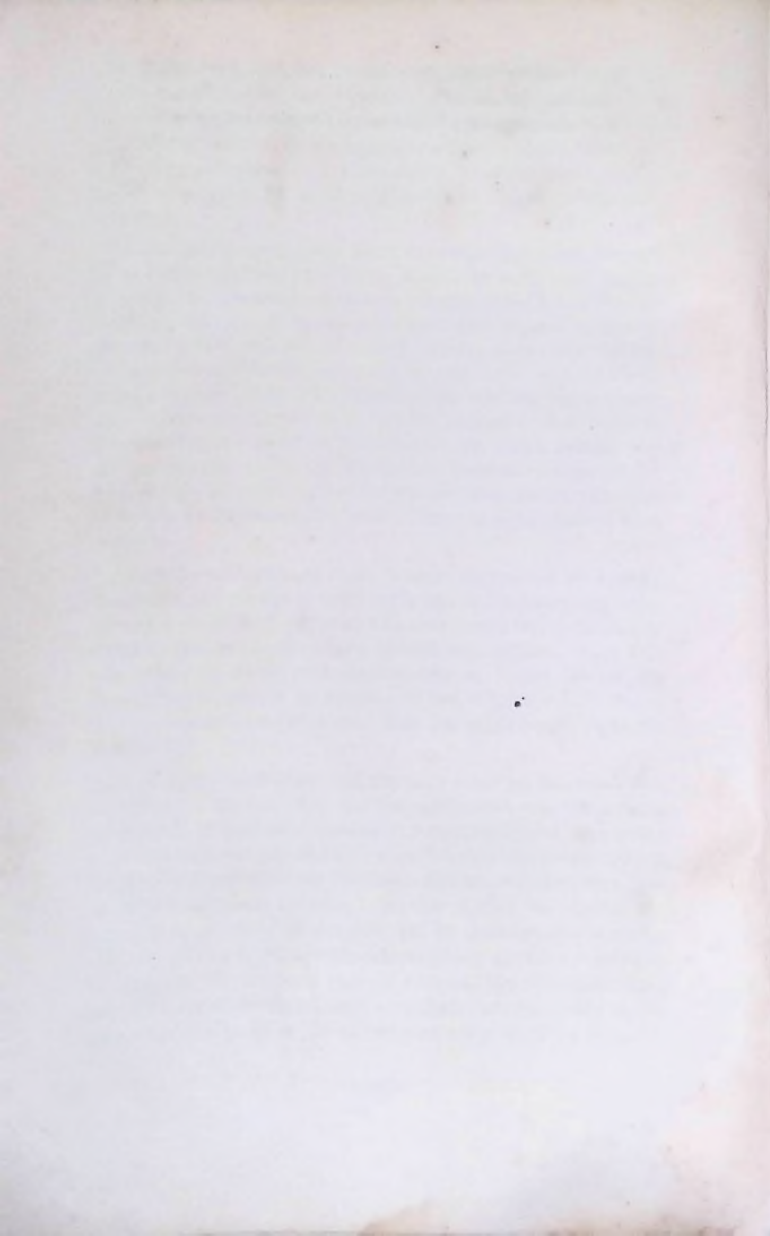
come that he had so much influence on Major Nzeogwu after the operation in Kaduna was completed?' One can easily conclude that there was a communication gap among the plotters otherwise Lt-Col Madiebo could not have been able to influence Major Nzeogwu to the point of turning victory into defeat. Madiebo was a confidant of Nzeogwu as far as the plot leading to the *coup d'etat* was concerned.

Finally, the operation in the South was left to be led and directed by the two graduate army officers, that is the author and Major Ifeajuna. The theoretical approach, oversimplification of logistic problems, distances of operational areas, application of troops to tasks and other things clearly showed craziness as the Nigerian Army was not sufficiently penetrated to make the coup national. What was observed by non-graduates then was that the graduate army officers saw themselves as superior because of their political education but they could not understand fully, simple military tactics and strategy. Lt-Col. Victor Banjo's ill-fated invasion of the Mid-Western State and parts of the Western State and the direction of the war by the secessionist leader, Chukwuemeka Ojukwu were examples.

After vigorous studies of revolutionaries throughout the ages by the author, the attempt to climb the ladder to the leadership status by the self-styled revolutionaries who were merely reactionaries was foiled or thwarted by the simple minded army officers whose *I.Q.* was under-rated by the graduate army officers. Infact, some of the revolutionaries were in the category of bad officers in both theory and practice and yet the author rated and described them in the superlative.

I had earlier mentioned that the main work on this book was completed in August 1981 but the publication was deliberately withheld till an appropriate moment. Appropriate time has nothing to do with acceptability and high sales. Because I discussed in some details why Chief Obafemi Awolowo (SAN) could not have won the 1979 Presidential election, I felt that putting out reasons just before another round of elections will be tantamount to putting obstacles in his way particularly with reference to points relating to his image in the northern part of Nigeria. His opponents may magnify some of the points and particularly the one relating to the death of his co-actors in the deluge that swept the First Republic

away for the military administration. By this delay I am convinced my writing has not offended anybody and neither does it help anybody in the manning of the Federal Government apparatus.



## CHAPTER I

# Leadership and Methods of Assumption

It is now pertinent to see what can be gathered from some sources on the subject of 'Leader and Leadership'. In Webster's Third New International Dictionary Volume II, it is stated: *Leadership ... the office and position of a leader*. Spelling out the definition fully, it goes on to state that a leader is a 'person or animal that leads a person, who directs and usually accompanies armed forces (Commander, Captain, Captains of war and leaders of their armies), Floor leader, Leader of Opposition etc. and goes on to state the qualities of a leader as having 'capacity to lead, having that ingredient of personality which causes men to follow, successful solution of problems and moulds individuals into a team'. Borgadus in 1928 defined leadership as 'the creating and setting forth of exceptional behaviour patterns in such a way that other persons respond'. A research work in the same book revealed the following other amplifications of Leadership: focus of group process, personality, art of inducing compliance, exercise of influence, act of behaviour, form of persuasion, instrument of good achievement, effect of interaction, role differentiation and initiation structure. Then followed a distinction between the leader and the followers to the effect that the leader must possess more intelligence and ability, personality, task motivation and performance and social competence. The foregoing are salient extracts which are not distinctively different from other definitions. The definition of leadership and the attributes of a leader are applicable to both political, industrial and military personalities.

In the military, more emphasis is laid on leadership because of its delicate nature. Delicate in the sense that military leaders can best be described as 'trained killers' of their enemies and friends. Killing the enemy is a straight forward thing unlike killing own friends