



**THE NATIONAL
WAR MUSEUM
UMUAHIA**



THE NATIONAL WAR MUSEUM UMUAHIA

National Commission for Museums
and Monuments (NCMM)

Development Alternatives
and Resource Center (DARC)

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FOREWORD

I am delighted and honoured to write the foreword to this book, *The National War Museum, Umuahia*, which is the end result of one of several efforts by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) to preserve the history of our nation. I am of the view that we all must continually strive to put history in its proper context whenever we get the opportunity to do so.

The National Commission for Museums and Monuments, since its establishment, has been consistent in playing a lead role in the drive to dispassionately put the history of Nigeria and the people in its right perspective. It is no surprise, therefore, that the National War Museum, which is located in Umuahia as part of the NCMM network, was established to preserve the relics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970 as well as serve as a centre for research and information on warfare in the country.

The book, *The National War Museum, Umuahia*, outlines the evolution of warfare in Nigeria, from the use of bows, arrows and spears in the past to today's more sophisticated weapons like the cannons, the artilleries and Armoured Personnel Troop Carriers. It also details the shift from traditional 'shock weapon' like stones to firearms and modern day missiles. Beyond these, the book provides several interesting historical details and colourful illustrations on the Nigerian Civil War. Over 180 illustrations were selected to adorn this 150 page book.

The National War Museum, Umuahia is well researched and delivered in simple English. It provides as much quality information as would interest any reader with a hunger for an unbiased history of Nigeria. It is, therefore, recommended as a reference material for further research, studies and general knowledge.

One Nigeria, One People United!

General Dr. Yakubu Gowon, GCFR.
Former Head of State
Federal Republic of Nigeria.



PREFACE

I am glad that a book of this nature on collections at the National War Museum, Umuahia, Nigeria, has finally been published! As somebody who was born in the late 60s and brought up in Umuahia in the 70s, the War museum, then known as *Ojukwu Bunker* occupied and still hold a special place in my heart for the remembrance of the horrors of the Nigerian civil war and the need to continue to commit to building a peaceful, just and united Nigeria in my lifetime. From the first time I visited, I have never stopped being fascinated by the collections of inventions made during the civil war and imagining what could have been possible if those technologies of war and survival had been harnessed and deployed to building a safe, prosperous and inclusive Nigeria.

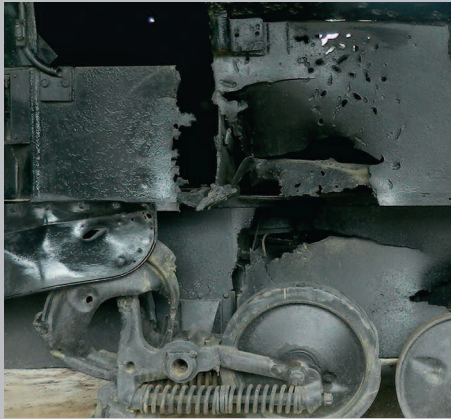
The National War Museum Book is a thoroughly researched text, which documents an interesting collection of artifacts in the National War Museum. The reader gets to see the war artifacts of the Nigeria Civil War and a brief description on how they were engaged for combat. The book exhibits both the primitive hand fashioned tools to the more sophisticated war machines that were fashioned in graphic illustrations to show the creative nature of human beings for survival as part of the exigencies of war.

The evolution of the Nigerian Armed Forces comprising the Army, Air Force and Navy, their influential personnel, war veterans on both sides of the war and their diverse roles are documented and showcased in the book. It also contains an array of colourful pictures of the uniforms worn by various officers, the images of famous battle scenes and the adverse effect of war on some communities in the battle zone.

The six chapters that make up this important historical text take the reader through the civil war gallery, the open air museum, and the National War Museum annex sited on the former house of Dr. M.I. Okpara (premier of the eastern region of Nigeria 1963–1966), the contents of the Late. Gen. Emeka Ojukwu's Bunker and other aspects of the Museum including related heritage sites to make the book a truly expository read for the history lover and researcher.

I encourage everyone to not only get a copy of the book but also to make out time to visit the Museum, reflect on the collections and more importantly commit to building an inclusive Nigeria.

Innocent Chukwuma
Ford Foundation, *Representative for West Africa*
Lagos, Nigeria



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the development of National War Museum Umuahia (NWMU) since its inception in 1989, but it may be difficult to chronicle all their names here. Suffice to say that we sincerely appreciate the works of the former Director-Generals of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), the former Directors, former Curators of the National War Museum Umuahia, Military Officers and others who contributed in one way or the other, whether directly or indirectly to its progress and development. Their works created a foundation for this book project.

Specifically, I want to recognize the National War Museum committee that published the first Guide to the National War Museum Umuahia in 1989 under the chairmanship of Ishaya Rizi Bamayi (Major-General Rtd, then a Colonel) Late Vice Admiral Mike Okhai Akhigbe (Rtd, then a Commodore) and our own Samuel Adedayo Adeloje of blessed memory. They are the few of the unforgettable pioneers of that guide.

The NWMU is experiencing the dawn of a new era by the replacement of the National War Museum Guide with a well-researched National War Museum Book. This indeed has added a significant value to the exhibition in the War museum. The people behind this feat deserve our commendations. Therefore, on behalf of the Director General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Yusuf Abdallah Usman, I want to express our profound gratitude to our sponsors and collaborators, Ford Foundation under the able representation of Mr. Innocent Chukwuma. The interest and experiences of this great man served as a spring board to this National War Museum Book.

In furtherance to the attainment of the high quality and professionalism we aimed at, Professor Sylvester Ogbechie and Dr. Chijioke Onuora were approached by Development Alternatives and Resource Center (DARC) to carry out the research work. Their excellent work cannot be quantified. We are deeply indebted to the Project Managers: Development Alternatives and Resource Center (DARC) represented by the Executive Director, Mrs. Ngozi Ezi-Ashi for their professional input towards the production of the book.

Our special gratitude goes to Chijioke Onuora (Ph.D.) and his research assistant, Mr. Iheanyi Onwuegbucha who visited the War Museum severally in search of relevant information to write this book; they also took the wonderful photographs that adorn the pages of the book.

Kudos to the NCMM Headquarter staff who proof-read and effected all the necessary corrections on the book. They are: Yusuf Abdallah Usman, Director-General; Olubode Adesina,

Deputy Director of Research, Planning and Publications; Peter Odey, Deputy Director of Museums; Humphrey Ohadoma, Deputy Director of Finance and Accounts; and Mrs. Folayemi Famoroti, Assistant Director of Publications, Research Planning and Publications.

It will be negligence on my part to forget in a hurry the contributions of Nwele Charles, Chief Research Officer National War Museum Umuahia; Obiageri Augusta Ochiobi, Acting Librarian National War Museum Umuahia; Julius Ogar, Chief Documentation Officer, National War Museum Umuahia; Theo Amadi, Chief Curator National War Museum Umuahia; Nweze Augustine, Chief Exhibition Officer; Mrs Peace Otumbadi, Chief Education Officer of the War Museum; and Chief Sunday O. Oladele, Assistant Director of Funds.

Finally, I'm grateful to God for using me to initiate the entire process and to witness the production of this book as the Curator of NWMU. To God be the glory.

Justin C. Nwaneri (JP)
Curator,
National War Museum
Umuahia

INTRODUCTION

When the decision to establish a national war museum in Umuahia to commemorate the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) was taken by the Military Government of Nigeria, in 1977, little did they know, after four decades, what its effects would be on the people of Southeastern Nigeria in particular, and the Nigerian nation, scholars as well as tourists in general. Having educated and entertained its visitors for many years; having acquired more artifacts and hosted many researchers, conferences and workshops since its establishment, the need to upgrade its documentation gives rise to this publication.

The book is divided into six chapters and is designed to assist every visitor to access the exhibits. The first chapter discusses the traditional warfare gallery including examples of indigenous weapons of war as well as other pre-colonial Nigerian war implements. The development of the Nigerian Armed Forces (which comprises the Army, Air Force and Navy) is discussed on Chapter Two while the Civil War Gallery is presented rather dramatically as it takes the visitor down the subterranean site of the former Radio Station, the Voice of Biafra, symbolizing a low point in the Nigerian Project. A stairway out of the bunker emerges into the Open Air Museum, comprising some of the war machines used by both sides of the Nigerian Civil war, which are discussed in Chapter Four. The National War Museum Annex, sited on the former house of Dr. M. I. Okpara (Premier of Eastern Region of Nigeria 1963–1966) and the contents of the Ojukwu Bunker are discussed in Chapter Five, while other aspects of the Museum including related heritage sites are documented in Chapter Six.

In the spirit of the aim of establishing this war museum, it is my belief that although it is worthwhile to preserve the ingenious scientific achievements recorded during this period of the Nigerian Civil War, we must admit that war is never a solution to human conflicts.

The idea of establishing a National War Museum in Nigeria was first mooted by Lt. General Theophilous Danjuma after an official visit to Yugoslavia in 1977. It was thoroughly debated and approved by the Supreme Military Council of the Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo administration in the same year. Consequently, the National War Museum committee, headed by Colonial Ishaya Bamaïyi teamed up with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments to undertake exploratory studies for its establishment. In 1985, under the leadership of General Muhammadu Buhari, the project was officially launched by Major-General Tunde Idiagbon, Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters. This launch coincided with the 21st anniversary of the first military coup in Nigeria as well as the 15th anniversary of the end of the Nigerian Civil War (aka Biafra Conflict). The project, originally planned to be executed in three phases

chose as its main site, the *Ugwunchara*, a hilly part of the Ebite Amafor area of the Isingwu Autonomous Community of Umuahia North Local Government Area in Abia State. The three thousand seven hundred and seventy eight (3,778) hectare site prior to the Civil War, served as the premises of the former Eastern Nigerian Television Relaying Station. It is located a little off the Umuahia-Uzuakoli road, about three kilometers from the Umuahia City Center.

On completion, this first phase was commissioned by the then Minister of Defence, Lt. General Domkat Bali on September 14, 1989. The former residence of Dr. Michael Iheonukara Okpara, the former Premier of Eastern Nigeria region, also located at the Government Reserved Area at the heart of the Umuahia capital city, serves as an annex of the museum at Ugwunchara.

Location

Umuahia, a strategic and popular railway town, known before the Civil War for its extensive commercial transactions in oil palm produce and reception of goods from the Northern part of Nigeria, was chosen as the site for the museum for two main reasons. It was the administrative capital of the Biafran nation after the fall of Enugu in 1967. Not only was it the last seat of Biafran government, many of the important battles for the survival of Biafra was fought around this area. Secondly, it has the two best preserved bunkers which housed the Voice of Biafra (V.O.B.), Biafra's major news outlet to the outside world and the Ojukwu Bunker, the subterranean seat of the Biafran Government.

As one veers off into the narrow "Museum Road," off Umuahia-Uzuakoli road, the noise of the city ceases abruptly and serenity greets the visitor. Approaching the museum complex, the view of the hull of a warship peeps from the surrounding vegetation and gradually comes into full view with various war planes in the background. From the museum one has a view of some part of Umuahia city, with the spectacular rusty roofs of buildings, dotted with bright colours of new ones. The museum complex is surrounded by farmlands and fallow lands which further add to its serenity.

The Aim of Establishing the National War Museum

The National War Museum Umuahia was established for the glory of Nigeria and for the purposes of "preserving for posterity, Nigerian war efforts through the ages" and for "consolidating the gains of National Unity." The Motto of the Museum is "That they did not die in vain."¹

1. The texts on the commemorative plaques unveiled during the launching of the Museum reads: "To the glory of our fatherland and for the purpose preserving for posterity, Nigerian war efforts through the ages, this National War Museum Complex was launched on January 15, 1985 by Major-General Babatunde Idiagbon (fss.mni) Chief of Staff." Also, the commemorative plaque unveiled during the commissioning of the Museum reads: "To the glory of God and our fatherland and for the purpose of consolidating the gains of National unity, this National Museum was commissioned on September 14, 1989 by Lt. General Domkat Yah Bali (ofr, fss, r.c.i.s.), Minister of Defence and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff." Both plaques have the motto, "THAT THEY DID NOT DIE IN VAIN" inscribed below the main text.

The Museum is considered as a memorial² to the soldiers, civilians and all other casualties of war and conflicts in Nigeria, particularly the Nigerian Civil War. The establishment of the War Museum is not an attempt to glorify the war effort but an attempt to demonstrate that wars are never solutions to conflicts. The exhibitions in the Museum are meant to promote a society devoid of conflict, tribulation, rancor and disharmony.

Drawing from comments from these influential members of the Nigerian military which set up the museum, one could deduce that the main reasons for its establishment was to preserve Nigeria's war relics and to serve as a center for research and information on warfare in Nigeria. Also, the Museum is a tourist attraction and a place for the exhibition of war-time technology.

The Museum consists of permanent exhibitions in three exhibition galleries in addition to the Open Air Museum and the Museum Annex. They are the Traditional Warfare Gallery that displays the evolution of weapons both in pictures and objects, from the earliest times to the present day; the Armed Forces Gallery showing the evolution of Nigerian Army from 1963 to date, the diverse roles of the Nigerian Army from 1963 to date and the important personnel of the Nigerian Navy, the Air Force and their soft ordinances; the Civil War Gallery which has on display photographs of the victims of the coup d'état of 15th January 1966 as well as photographs and objects related to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970. The Open Air Museum which is in three sections, exhibits heavy military hardware used during the Nigerian Civil War by the Army, the Navy and the Air force. A guided tour of the Museum usually begins at the Traditional Warfare Gallery.

This book catalogs the collection of the National War Museum, Umuahia with the intent to provide a guide to the documentation of the development of Nigerian Armed Forces, the important persons and events of the lead-up to and the actual civil war and the military hardware used during the civil war with emphasis on the ingenuity of the people of Eastern Nigeria who produced indigenous technology in severe war conditions to defend their sovereignty.

Dr. Chijioke Onuora

2. *A Guide to the National War Museum, Umuahia* (Owerri: The National War Museum Committee, 1989).

