



The Caged Bird Sang No More: My Biafra Odyssey, 1966–1970

By Philip Efiog

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This is Philip Efiog's account of the Nigeria–Biafra Civil War (1967–70). He was a key player during the event and second-in-command to the Biafran leader, General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu. The story begins with the coup d'états of January and July 1966, and recounts ensuing ethnic and regional conflicts.

After the first coup, Efiog is posted to State House as Principal Staff Officer and then to Kaduna as Acting Commander of the First Brigade. But the second coup is executed shortly after and he is forced to escape from Kaduna following a failed attempt on his life. He makes his way back to the East where he also relocates his family after officers have been directed by the new military government to return to their regions of origin.

Efiog is in Enugu when talks break down between the new military head of state, then Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon and the Governor of the Eastern Region, Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu. The result is a declaration of secession by the Eastern Region (Biafra), which leads to the outbreak of war in July 1967. In Biafra, after holding a number of positions, Efiog ends up as Chief of General Staff and second-in-command to the Biafran leader. With each incursion and onslaught by the enemy, the author moves his family to a new town or village until they arrive in Owerri, their last place of refuge before Biafra's collapse. Ojukwu then flees and hands over power to Efiog who performs the final task of leading a delegation to Lagos to negotiate peace and deliver Biafra's surrender. The war formally comes to an end on 15 January 1970, after which former Biafran officers, including Efiog, receive punishments ranging from dismissal to imprisonment.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Philip Asuquo Efiang was born in 1925 in Aba, present Abia State, Nigeria. He joined the army in 1945 and in 1956 was commissioned second lieutenant after receiving his officer training in the UK. He served in peacekeeping roles in Cameroon and the Congo before his appointment as first Nigerian Director of Ordnance Services of the Nigerian Army in 1963. After the first coup d'état of January 1966, he was posted to Supreme Headquarters as Principal Staff Officer and in May of the same year served as Acting Chief of Staff. In July he was posted to Kaduna as Acting Brigade Commander of the First Brigade but narrowly escaped back to Lagos following the countercoup of 29 Jul. In compliance with orders that officers return to their regions of origin, he returned to the East where, in 1967, the civil war broke out. As a Biafran officer, Major General Efiang served in various capacities as Chief of Logistics, Chief of Staff, Commandant of the Militia and Chief of General Staff. In January 1970 he called for an end to hostilities and voluntarily led a delegation of surrender to Lagos. He died on 6 November 2003.

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