A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON FIELD TRIP TO THE NATIONAL WAR MUSEUM, UMUAHIA.

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Abstract

This paper titled A Comprehensive Report on Field Trip to the National War Museum delves into the multifaceted aspect of the National War Museum Umuahia, offering an in-depth analysis of its historical significance, curatorial strategies, educational initiative and societal impact. The Nigerian and Biafran war antiquities have been meticulously conserved at the National War Museum in Umuahia. This comprehensive report addresses the problem of limited firsthand exposure many students have to Nigerian history, particularly regarding the Nigerian Civil War. A field trip to the National War Museum in Umuahia offers a valuable opportunity to bridge this gap. The methodology involved gathering information from exhibits, taking detailed notes and pictures, and potentially interviewing museum staff. This data was then analyzed to assess the historical accuracy, educational value, and emotional impact of the exhibits. The report further examines how the museum contributes to national unity and reconciliation efforts. This paper, "The National War Museum: A Comprehensive Report," explores the process of national reconciliation and healing while also highlighting the perils of war and putting the unpleasant aspects of the conflict behind us. With the creation of the Research and Production Unit of Biafra, or RAP, the Biafran people have demonstrated great inventiveness in the field of technology. Engineers from RAP created military weaponry during the conflict. This paper offers an insightful analysis of the National War Museum's contributions to historical research, public memory, and the advancement of peace and understanding in society through a critical lens. The museum makes sure that future generations will continue to learn from the past and work toward a better future by preserving historical items and recording human tales. Also, the Umuahia National War Museum serves as a moving reminder of Nigeria's fortitude, bravery, and resolve in the face of hardship. This paper recommends that Government should provide funds to encourage and enable student visit places like the national war museum and other historical sites.

Keywords: National War Museum, Report, Field trip

Introduction

The Post-graduate students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt embarked on a visit to the National War Museum in Umuahia on the 5th of October, 2018. On arrival to the museum, we were asked to gather under a mango tree. At this point, the educational officer welcomed us and introduced herself as Mrs Peace Otumbamo

Mrs Peace explained that the Museum is a place where relics, like works of art or historical items, are procured, kept, studied and displayed. This is true, as Akinade (2005), affirms that Museum as a dynamic cultural institution that renders different services for different ends. He went further to say that the museum is a special institution that takes care of the cultural and natural heritage of a country. It sees to the acquisition of objects of cultural value, their restoration, conservation, preservation and exhibition for educational and cultural awareness of the public at large.

Veering away from the definition of museum, Mrs Peace Otumbamo explains further that it is interesting to know that the National War Museum is located at Umuahia, the capital city of Abia State and remains the only museum in Nigeria dedicated to the collection, conservation and exhibition of substantial cache of weapons and used during the thirty-month civil war as well as artifacts, photographs, publications and other materials associated with warfare in Nigeria. In Mrs Peace Otumbamo statement, T.Y. Danjuma was the brain behind the setting up of the National War Museum in Umuahia in 1977 and 1985, the museum was opened to the public by Major General Babatunde Idiagbon. Nwabuife (2007) also agrees to the establishment of the museum on the 15th of January 1985 that is fifteen years after the war and was officially commissioned on September 14th 1989.

Umuahia was also the second capital of Biafra after the fall of Enugu. Relics of this period are the biggest tourist attractions in the city. Umuahia has two well-preserved bunkers used during the civil war in Nigeria, they are the Ojukwu Bunker and the Voice of Biafra Bunker. According to Mrs Peace Otombamo, the voice of Biafra bunker is where Ojukwu and a man called Okoko Idem stays to broadcast to the world how the war was going on. Most interestingly, as the war was going on Okoko Idem was broadcasting from Umuahia but told the public that he was broadcasting from Enugu Uku in Anambra state which made the Nigerians continuously bomb Anambra state, unknowing to them that the Biafrans were broadcasting from Umuahia. Enugu was the first capital of Biafra government but was captured by Nigeria which Biafra to move their state capital to Umuahia. Umuahia became their state capital instantly after Dr. Michael Oparah donated his personal house to the Biafrans. Immediately Umuahia became the Biafra state capital, and Nigerians started bombing Umuahia which led to the construction of the Ojukwu bunker.

The Ojukwu bunker is a complete house that has a conference room, bedroom, dining, kitchen, toilet, escape route and a cell where captured soldiers are kept. According to Mrs Peace Otumbamo, the conference room is where Ojukwu and other Biafra leaders have their meetings from time to time. The conference room was also where Ojukwu stayed to plan his war strategies.

In her talk, she asked us to look around and that we would see different types of war relics, adding that the war relics are not here to remind us of what happened during the civil war or to glorify our efforts in war but that the museum is a conflict resolution centre. It is a museum of peace and technology. The museum according to her was aimed at putting the ugly episode of the war behind and speeding up the process of national reunion and healing. She also added that the national war museum is a research institution where people from different part of the world come to for research and also that the war museum is a tourist centre.

According to the educational officer, in technology, the Biafrans have shown much ingenuity as they (RAP) which means the research and production unit of Biafra. RAP is a unit made up of engineers who fabricated war weapons during the war. They fabricated weapons like the armored cars which the Biafra calls the Biafra Red Devil. The armored cars are produced in types like type A, type B and type C. They also fabricated the "Ogbunigwe" which means mass killer, they also fabricated a mini refinery called the Biafra oil cooking pot. The Biafra cooking pot was used by the Biafra's to refine their crude oil which was used to drive their armored cars. They also fabricated an anti-aircraft gun called buffa.

The National War Museum Umuahia: Indoor Galleries

After the educative introductory session given by the chief education officer, we headed for the museum's indoor galleries. There, we were educated through the galleries of the museum by Mr Ade Akombi. According to him, the indoor museum gallery space is distinctively segmented into three gallery sections. These galleries hold collections connected categorically according to historical events and periods in history. In order of arrangement or sectioning, the galleries are: the traditional warfare gallery, the armed forces gallery and the civil war gallery.

1) The Traditional Warfare Gallery

The traditional warfare gallery is further divided into two sections: A and B. The first section holds collections of African and European war histories. The collections in this are all pictorial representations of the wars, most of which are drawings. These pictures are all well framed and displayed at ideal eye level. The pictorial collections are also displayed systematically to tell the story of warfare and weaponry advancement in succession and depict the way the Africans and Europeans were fighting, their means of transportation and dress style. Some of the collections are:

Shaka Zulu- the great warrior king of the Zulu kingdom of South Africa. He is depicted wearing a shirt-like raffia and an ornamented head gear with a bare upper body region. He also holds a long spear.

Amazons of Danomey- amazons or female warriors known for their aversions to male children. They kill male children while training female children to be warriors.

Ethiopians who used elephants to fight in AGIN court (1415AD)

others include the Ethiopian Emperor (1883), Zanzibari (1859), the American War of Independence of 1776, advanced European machine guns, canons and many advanced weaponries of their time.

The Traditional Warfare Gallery B

This second section of the first gallery holds pictures and some weapons and war aids believed to have been used in inter-tribal wars in Nigeria. They are displayed in their categories. Some of the relics are: imaginary paintings of early men, stone weapons, polished axes, iron swords etc.

Shock weapons: swords, daggers and knives for both ceremonial and warring purposes. Staff weapons: javelins, lances and spears for hunting, Shields of metal and leather Bows and arrows.

Others include equestrian figures, crossbows, charms, locally fabricated guns, canons, etc.

2) The Armed Forces Gallery

This gallery is divided into three sections: the army, navy and air force. We were first introduced to the army gallery sub-section. We were told and indeed it was true, that the three armed forces gallery sections have their distinctive flags installed at the entrance of each section.

a) The Army Gallery Sub-Section

This gallery collection tells the story of the birth and growth of the Nigerian army. The pictures at the fore here show the shabby and disreputable appearances of the army during the colonial era. Soldiers are depicted bare-footed, dressed in shorts and bare upper bodies. As one moves through the collections, evidence of a gradual change in the appearances of the soldiers are seen. A striking photo of the British Queen on her visit to Nigeria speaks of the modification of the dressing of the army and the change in their address as the 'soldiers of the queen’s regiment'. Another picture reference dated 1956 speaks of the change of the army's identification name from the soldiers of the queen's regiment to the 'royal Nigerian army'. In 1963, the name was yet changed to its final name 'the Nigeria Army', which it bears till date.

The army gallery also holds records of defense medals used from 1939-1945. Other holdings include photos of:

Lord Lugard; ladies tantalizing soldiers; bands of Nigerian regiments; LT Bassey, who was the first commissioned Nigerian soldier; second commissioned soldier and first military head of state, Aguiyi Ironsi; Captain Kyari Maigumeri who was RSM for 24 years.

Display of ranks in a glass case.

Group photo of Odimegwu Ojukwu and other generals;

Photos of generals during their tenures in service: General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975) who was overthrown in a bloody coup; General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979); Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985)

Pictures of elites such as Abacha, Babangida, and Abubakar are mounted below the pictures of their distinctive cabinets; photos of the chief of army staff which include: Yakubu Gowon, who was the head of chief of army staff, LT General K.T. Minimah, LT General Lucas Agwai.

Photo of the first graduate of the army, etc.

b) **The Nigeria Navy**.

This section of the gallery accommodates the holdings related to Nigerian naval history which include: photos of Naval staff, medals, ranks, and ceremonial outfits. A few of the collections here are: Photo of the Vice Admiral, A.A. Aikhomu (1983-1986)

c) **The Nigeria Airforce**

On display in this third and last section of the second gallery of the National War Museum are photos of Air Force staff and non-pictorial collections of Nigeria Airforce history which include: a photo of Colonel G.T. Kurubo (with the dating detail January 1966- August 1967) and more; photos of aircraft; working uniform for squadron leader; service uniforms and ceremonial uniforms.

3) **The Civil War Gallery**

This gallery holds the most important relics of this museum. The gallery is the true description of the theme of the museum. It holds the VOB which is the reason for siting the museum in Umuahia. The collections here are housed in the VOB bunker. At the entrance is the prestigious flag of the resilient Biafra. The flag has four richly significant colours green, black, red and yellow. The green signifies the fertility of the Biafran land, Red signifies bloodshed, Black signifies mourning and the yellow sun signifies that the sun rises in the east. On the wall before the flag are pictures of casualties of the first (January 15th, 1966) and second (July 29th, 1966) coup d'etat. They include: Brigadier Zakariya Mamalan, Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Akintola, Kaduna Nzeogwu, etc. The photos here describe the disappointments, betrayals, deceits and lies that led to the conflict called the Civil War.

The Voice of Biafra Bunker: this is the structure that housed the short wave radio transmitter. Uguru (2015) mentioned that Voice of Biafra was the mouth-piece for Biafra during the war. It enabled the Biafrans connect with the outside world as the Nigerians blockaded the avenues through which Biafrans could access aids. The underground structure housing the shortwave radio

transmitter popularly known as the voice of Biafra was the reason for siting the museum at its present location. At its entrance is the prestigious Biafran flag flagging it life colours, red, black and green with the rising sun in the middle. There are also photographs of the Nigerian leaders who were victims of the war, starting with the January 15, 1966 coup of Kaduna Nzeogwu. The photographs are all in neutral colours. On either side of the staircase leading into the bunker are photo collections of heroes of the war from both the Nigerian and Biafran sides. Its main interior accommodates the transmission studio and the huge transmitter of Radio Biafra. The structure was strategically built with two stairways; for entrance and exit. Its situation on a hilly ground must have made it quite difficult for Nigerian soldiers to penetrate or ambush.

Moving into to VOB down the staircase is a linear display of photos of leaders of the two warring nations and their cabinets. On the left are the pictures of Ojukwu and his cabinets. Of course, the warlord's picture is the first in line with others following. Significant pictures in this line are: Eastern Nigerian coat of arms, top commanders at Isu watching a parade to the ark on the anniversary of Biafra independence in 1969, etc. First on the right is the photo of the then Nigerian leader Yakubu Gowon, followed by a photo of Shittu Alao who was the commander of Nigeria's air force, Major General Hassan Katsina and Gen Danjuma studying a map, Obafemi Awolowo etc. A section of this gallery shows the 'scenes from the battles' such as: soldiers being recruited into the army wearing only small shorts, federal troops transported into the battle, Coloniel Shuwa trying his hands at the general purpose machine gun, etc.

The section dedicated to 'war victims' shows worrisome scenes from the war. Some of the displays here are pictures of a dead mercenary identified as Henri Block who was killed by the federal troop in Calabar; kwashiorkor infested child suffering at the refugee camp, etc.

The 'external aid' section shows foreign correspondents who assisted Nigeria and the secessionist enclave during the civil war. The 'end of the war' section show Nigerian soldiers racing joyfully as the war ended, joyful soldiers smiling broadly at the camera and so on. These pictures show evidence of re-unification.

The Open Air Gallery

This gallery is a very interesting section in the museum. It keeps the vehicles that were used during the civil war. Some of the relics in this gallery are:



Biafra Red Devils

Armored tanks popularly known as the Biafra Red Devils are automated personnel carrier modified by the Biafran engineers during the heat of the war. They are improvements on the original or initial products. The initial product as asserted by Ukaegbu (2015) was a personnel carrier where shooting was done manually by troops. Progressive research and experimentation led to the production and installation of gun turret–a device that allows the weapon to be fired in many directions automatically. Instead of many troops manually shooting from the armored personnel carrier, an automated personnel carrier needs the services of fewer troops. At the museum, they are located at the outdoor premises.



The Biafra Cooking Pot

The cooking pot is a simple but large cylindrical distillery fabricated with heavy metal used by the Biafrans to refine crude oil into petrol or fuel. The act of distilling crude with the cooking pot was synonymous with the act of cooking. In other words, it is a refinery. In the words of Biersteker (1978) Biafra engineers also demonstrated the capability to produce petroleum and fuel oil on a large scale in numerous locations, distributed across the country, and without the assistance and supervision of expatriate technicians.8Researchers observed that petroleum refineries in Biafra is in conformity with the history of oil refining in today's advanced countries. Historically, small refineries that utilized a simple distillation process were widespread in the nineteenth century America. In Nigeria today, such simple distillation process is also being used to refine crude oil in various parts of the southern region.



The Flying Ogbunigwe

The famous weapon of mass destruction. It is one of the best weapons of warfare made by the Biafran technologists. It functioned like the mine except that it is not buried underground and is not launched or explodes by touch. It is activated by a personnel launcher. It is a cylindrically bomb, like a rocket. Arene (1997) and Ogbudinkpa (1985) described it as a mass destroyer and a formidable anti-personnel mine. Mechanism of launching the ogbunigwe is such that materials

such as stones, sand, pieces of glass, nails and various sharp objects were stuffed into the "bucket" or the cylinder sitting on a launching pad. As the system was activated/launched, the contents of the "bucket" flew out forcefully straight and towards the targeted direction, burying into the bodies of targets. the ogbunigwe is very potent at taking down enemies in mass. Thus, the name "weapon of mass destruction". This relic sits within the outdoor space of the museum with other large and even larger war relics.

The N.N.S. Nigeria and the Squid Mortar MK4 anti-submarine gun: N.N.S. Nigeria is a navy warship used by the Nigerian Navy during the civil war. It carried the squid mortar MK4 anti-submarine guns which were overhead launching weapons used to destroy enemy submarines. It was mostly deployed for the demolition of suspected minefields along the channel for the safe passage of Nigerian Navy ships during the Civil War.

Other relics displayed at the museum premises are the artillery gun 105mm Howitzer which is said to have been previously used by the Italians during the Second World War in 1943; the NAF 102 Downier 27 aircraft believed to have come from Luftwaffe Training Mission; the Biafran Mosquito which is a small aircraft used by the Biafrans to cause havoc in th Nigerian territory.

Conclusion

In addition to being vital to the preservation of Nigeria's cultural legacy, the Umuahia National War Museum also pays tribute to the men and women who gave their lives in battle. The museum makes sure that future generations will continue to learn from the past and work toward a better future by preserving historical items and recording human tales. Finally, the Umuahia National War Museum serves as a moving reminder of Nigeria's fortitude, bravery, and resolve in the face of hardship. As a ray of hope for harmony, peace, and reconciliation, it encourages tourists to consider the lessons learned from the past and strive for a better future.

Recommendations

This paper hereby recommends the following:

i) Government should provide funds to encourage and enable student visit places like the national war museum and other historical sites.
ii) National civil war should be taught in all secondary and tertiary schools in Nigeria,

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Oral Reference Table

Category	Talking Point	Resource Person
Museum Background	T.Y. Danjuma was the brain behind the setting up of the National War Museum in Umuahia in 1977 and in 1985, the museum was opened to the public by Major General Babatunde Idiagbon.	Mrs. Peace Otumbamo (Educational Officer, National War Museum Umuahia) Personal interview, October 5, 2018
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