



# Major Battles in the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970: A Revisit of the Battle of Onitsha

Tobias Hangeior Utsaha, PhD.

*Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence College Nigeria*

**Received:** 01.02.2026 | **Accepted:** 20.02.2026 | **Published:** 23.02.2026

**\*Corresponding Author:** Tobias Hangeior Utsaha, PhD.

**DOI:** [10.5281/zenodo.18739821](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18739821)

|          |                           |
|----------|---------------------------|
| Abstract | Original Research Article |
|----------|---------------------------|

The Nigerian Civil war, which broke out in 1967 was fought by the Federal Government of Nigerian against the defunct Eastern Nigeria region that had declared itself the sovereign state of Biafra. The Federal Government of Nigeria sought to keep the region as a Nigerian entity while the defunct region sought to secede. This study focuses on the Battle of Onitsha; one of the most significant battles in the Civil war, owing to the strategic location of Onitsha. A brief background to the battle is also given for a better understanding of the trend of the Onitsha operation by both forces as the city was important to the contending parties. The paper reveals that the outcome of this Battle boosted the moral of the Federal forces although the Biafran troops continued to fight until the end of the war in 1970. The study further analyses the resilience, improvisation, and defensive ingenuity of Biafran forces, whose effective use of terrain, observation posts, mines, and the locally produced Ogbunigwe significantly shaped the course of the campaign. The aftermath, including the Abagana ambush, reveals the vulnerability of overstretched logistics and the limits of tactical victories achieved without sustained operational support. Drawing from these events, the work identifies critical lessons for future commanders relating to strategic adherence, force preparation, discipline, intelligence, terrain appreciation, logistics security, adaptability, and the role of innovation in warfare.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Civil War, Biafra, Onitsha.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

## INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Civil which is often referred to as the Biafran War broke out in July 1967 and eventually ended in January 1970 following the surrender of the Biafran forces. Several battles were fought by both the Federal forces and the Biafran troops to determine the outcome of the war; one of these battles that played a major part in the war was the Battle of Onitsha. The battle of Onitsha was preceded by several other battles in the Nigerian

Civil War. Prior to this battle, several other battles had taken place resulting into victories and losses to both forces. The war itself was marked by intense struggle for control over key locations, with each side seeking to gain tactical and strategic advantage. The human cost of the conflict was significant, with many communities affected by displacement, famine, and destruction of property. These battles defined the strengths and weaknesses of the combatants, their respective strategies as well as



tactics employed in the conduct of battles. The paper aims to analyse the battle of Onitsha, with critical lessons for future commanders. To achieve this aim, emphasis will be laid on the prelude to the battle of Onitsha, the battle of Onitsha, and thereafter, critical lessons for future commanders. Understanding the events leading up to this battle provides crucial insight into the larger dynamics of the conflict, including the motivations and decisions of the leaders involved. Furthermore, examining the aftermath of the battle offers a perspective on how it shaped the course of the war and its ultimate resolution.

### PRELUDE TO THE BATTLE OF ONITSHA

The Nigerian Civil War began as a police action on 6 July, 1967 with an operation code named Operation Unicord. The operation was meant to be a sharp and short police action to crush rebellion and to reintegrate fully the former eastern region which was declared the sovereign state of Biafra with the rest of the Nigerian polity. The Operation was to be launched in two fronts by 1 Area Command. The command was divided into two brigades with three battalions in each brigade. 1 Brigade was to advance and clear Ogugu, Ogurugu, Nsukka and explore south of Nsukka. 2 Brigade was to capture Gakem, Obudu and Ogoja.<sup>1</sup> This was aimed in order to create a favourable environment for the eventual capture of Enugu. The Government of Nigeria believed that once Enugu fell, the war will be over. However this perception was proved wrong in due course, as the war progressed it became obvious that some more adequate measures were required to bring the war to an end within the shortest possible timeframe. The Biafrans met the initial Federal advances from the Northern Region with full resistance. They used to their advantage the fact that they were fighting in

their home territory, capitalizing on the availability of manpower to hinder Federal advances. Traps, ditches and obstacles were placed in the paths of attacking Nigerians. These only slowed the Federals, who used their superior firepower to saturate prepared positions and their mobility advantage to outflank Biafran strong points.<sup>2</sup> On the Ogoja front of 2 Brigade, the plan was to storm Gakem and Obudu before laying siege to Ogoja. These operations were spearheaded by 2, 20 and 23 Battalions. This operation resulted into casualties on both sides.

The Federal troops attacked Gakem on two axes right and left of the main Garkem-Afikpo road by bombardment using artillery and heavy mortars. As these attacks ensued, the Biafran forces withdrew to both flanks and advanced to make contacts with the Federal Infantry troops which were advancing half-heartedly some 400 yards away.<sup>3</sup> This took the Federal troops by surprise and resulted in heavy casualties on their side. As the Biafran troops advanced further, they ran into heavy fire both from the front and from the armoured vehicles which were returning back to rejoin their troops and this again forced them to return to both flanks and avoid any confrontation with their enemies. According to Obasanjo, A force of attrition was formed under Lieutenant Haladu to prevent Biafran reinforcement of Garkem and Obudu from Ogoja. A bridge on the route of advance to Garkem was blown up by the troops to delay and canalize 2 Battalion. By last light on the second day of offensive, 2 Battalion had captured Garkem and 20 Battalion had entered Obudu. However, preventive plans of the force of attrition could not be carried out as rebel reinforcement came from Ogoja to a launch major counter attack on Garkem. The counter-attack was repulsed and the damaged bridges were rebuilt by

<sup>1</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Command: An Account of The Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970*, (Lagos: Kachifo Limited, 2015), 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> M. R. Stafford, "Quick Kill in Slow Motion: The Nigerian Civil War"

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1984/SMR.htm> accessed on 5 December 2025.

<sup>3</sup> A. A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing co.,1980), 24.

Army engineers for the advance on Ogoja. By 12 July, the battle for Ogoja had begun. And at dusk the two main villages making up Ogoja were fully occupied by troops of the Recce Corps, Army Engineers, 2, 20 and 23 Battalions.<sup>4</sup> “Advance on Nsukka was led by 21 Battalion under the command of Captain Wushishi and 22 Battalion commanded by Captain Isa Bukar. Resistance by Biafran troops to 21 Battalion advance was sporadic until the battalion arrived at Obukpa. Here the Biafrans successfully attacked the battalion from the air using B26... effects on troops’ morale were enormous.”<sup>5</sup>

Irrespective of this attack, the battalions-maintained pressure and advanced to Nsukka. Massive attacks were launched by the Federal troops on both two fronts- Ankpa-Ogugu-Enugu Ezike and Ida-Adoru-Okutu. On both axis, they shelled massively advancing with armoured vehicles.<sup>6</sup> The Federal troops encountered series of counter-attacks from the Biafran forces at Nsukka. The University at Nsukka was of great significance to the Biafrans and as such, they had sentimental attachment to the town of Nsukka. However, the series of attacks by the Biafran forces were not enough to defend the town as it fell to the Federal forces by 29 July, 1967. The Federal troops advancing on Okutu axis succeeded in making their way through Okutu town and on the Enugu Ezike axis, they bypassed most of the obstacles with armoured vehicles and moved to about two miles from Enugu Ezike town. The federal troops now set their sights on eventually capturing Enugu with the Biafran 53 Brigade Headquarters as the only fighting force between the Nsukka and Enugu road. However, they did not advance immediately, and this allowed the Biafran forces to reorganise their fighting forces and prepare for counterattacks.

As the Federal troops prepared for the invasion of Enugu, on 9 August 1967, in a surprise move, the Biafran forces widened the theatre of war

by attacking the Midwest region which was under the administration of Lieutenant Colonel David Ejoor as Military Governor through series of connivance and lightening with senior officers and took over completely the machinery of government. The commander of the Midwest invasion was Lieutenant Colonel Victor Banjo- a Yoruba officer from the Western Region. Lieutenant Colonel Banjo’s initial plan was to capture the Midwest and attack Ibadan and Lagos from there, but for personal reasons, he chose to remain in Benin to reorganise the troops which had captured the Midwest with ease. Banjo stayed in Benin, forbidding further penetration westwards. According to Forsyth, Banjo’s plan was to negotiate with his fellow-Yoruba, a situation whereby someone loyal to him should seize the Military Governorship of the West in place of Adebayo, Ejoor should stay on in the Midwest and General Yakubu Gowon should be toppled to make way for Banjo himself.<sup>7</sup> This development compelled the Federal Forces to open a new front using 2 Infantry Division and declare total war on Biafra instead of the “so called Police action” that was the concept at the commencement of hostilities. In order to prevent further Biafran troops incursion, the Federal forces moved 3 Battalion out of Ibadan to Okene to prevent Biafran advance into the North from Midwest and also quickly formed 2 Infantry Division under the command of Colonel Murtala Mohammed. 2 Division was assigned the task of clearing the Biafran troops from a part of the Western Region and a large area of the Midwest Region. The Division was made up of three Brigades; 6 Brigade commanded by Major Alani Akinrinade, 8 Brigade commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Aisida and 7 Brigade commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Godwin Ally. Ibadan was designated the rear Division and was commanded by Colonel Olusegun Obasanjo.<sup>8</sup> Further command structures were re-designed, 1 Infantry Division under Colonel Mohammed Shuwa for the formation in the North

<sup>4</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Command...*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Command...*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> A. A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution...*, 29

<sup>7</sup> F. Forsyth, *Emeka*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1982), 98.

<sup>8</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Command...*, 53.

formerly operating as 1 Area Command, and 3 Infantry Division for the Lagos Garrison Organisation units operating in the south under Colonel Benjamin Adekunle.<sup>9</sup>

As Colonel Banjo delayed his attack on Lagos and Ibadan, 2 Division under the command of Colonel Murtala Mohammed marshalled out plans to push the Biafran forces out of the Midwest. The Division not only halted advance into the Midwest, but also succeeded in pushing the Biafran troops out of the Midwest and across the River Niger.<sup>10</sup> Thereafter, 2 Division reformed its command and prepared for advance to Asaba and Onitsha. While that was going on during September/October 1967, the Federal forces led by 1 Brigade under Lieutenant Colonel Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma also achieved singular success by capturing Enugu, the Biafran capital.<sup>11</sup> His command overran the University of Nsukka and then bombarded the Biafran Capital with heavy armaments. The Military operation was aided by Egyptian pilots flying the Nigerian army's brand-new British, Czech L-29 Dolphins and Soviet MiG-17 and Ilyushin Beagle II-28 aircraft.<sup>12</sup> The capture of Enugu however did not force the Biafran forces to lay down their arms. Further unexpected lull in operations continued to be encountered and this dragged the war much longer than it was expected.

## THE BATTLE OF ONITSHA

The fall of Midwest and part of the Western Region to the Biafran forces as aforesaid was not due to the military capability of the Biafran soldiers. Although there were no major operations on the part of the Biafrans, yet the capture had clearly indicated

that a strong force would be required to clear the West and Mid-West of Biafran forces. This necessitated the formation of 2 Infantry Division with the responsibility to clear Biafrans from part of the West and large area of the Midwest. The men of the Division were hurriedly collected in Lagos and consisted mainly of office clerks, radio operators, physical training instructors and recruits from Ikeja with only a few days training. The Plan of the Division was to advance on Benin from two directions. 7 Brigade was to clear Ore in the Western end and advance from there to Benin. The other two Brigades 6 and 8 were to advance on Benin along the Ibilo and Ososo Axes.<sup>13</sup> 6 Brigade comprised 11, 61 and 63 Battalions. While 61 Battalion captured Ososo, 8 Brigade remained in Okene and followed 6 Brigade in series of swift movements until Auchu was captured and two brigades met at Igara. From Ehor, the two brigades continued the advance on one axis, which took the Division through Agbede, Ekpoma to Ikoba Hill, leading to the capture of Benin on 22 September 1967.<sup>14</sup> From Escravos, Major Ochefu's group—comprising the 6, 31, and 32 Battalions, which had been preparing for the Calabar operation under 3 Division—was ordered to clear the riverine areas of the Mid-West and link up with 2 Division in Benin.<sup>15</sup> Upon linking up in Benin, most of the troops were recalled to resume preparations for the Calabar operations. This left responsibility for the Mid-West almost entirely to 2 Division.

Having forced the Biafran troops to retreat out of the retaken Midwest region, 2 Division commander, Colonel Murtala Mohammed set his next target at capturing Onitsha. However, the Command's advance into Onitsha was halted as the Biafran troops blew up the Niger Bridge which

<sup>9</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Command...*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Watch*, (Lagos: Kachifo Limited, 2014), 205-206.

<sup>11</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Watch...*, 206.

<sup>12</sup> C. Achebe, *There was A Country : A Personal History of Biafra*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2012), 136.

<sup>13</sup> TRADOC NA, "Military History Lectures One and Two" [https://tradoc.mil.ng/material/MIL%20HISTORY%20LECTURES%201%20&%202\\_%20VOL%201-3.pdf](https://tradoc.mil.ng/material/MIL%20HISTORY%20LECTURES%201%20&%202_%20VOL%201-3.pdf) accessed on 5 December 2025.

<sup>14</sup> TRADOC NA, "Military History Lectures One and Two" [https://tradoc.mil.ng/material/MIL%20HISTORY%20LECTURES%201%20&%202\\_%20VOL%201-3.pdf](https://tradoc.mil.ng/material/MIL%20HISTORY%20LECTURES%201%20&%202_%20VOL%201-3.pdf) accessed on 5 December 2025.

<sup>15</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Command...* 54.

linked Midwest and Onitsha as the Federal forces approached the bridge, forcing them to resort to other strategies regarding the invasion of Onitsha. According to Siollun, 2 Division could now enter Onitsha by a dangerous or direct assault via a river crossing or by crossing the Niger River unopposed via territory held by neighbouring 1 Division, then proceeding overland to Onitsha.<sup>16</sup> Biafra had well prepared defences with bunkers and good communication trenches. The Asaba- Onitsha Bridge was prepared for reserved demolition and good look out posts were established at vantage points. The Biafrans had an effective and active monitoring system about all that were happening at the Asaba end, thus were fully aware of 2 Division's intention to cross the river. The Biafran 11 Division, which consisted of the 11, 12 and 18 Battalions, were given the task of defending Onitsha. 12 Battalion under Colonel Mike Inveso was responsible for defending the area between Idah and Nsugbe, 18 Battalion under Colonel Assam Nsudoh was responsible for defending Onitsha town, and 11 Battalion under Major Joseph Achuzie defended the area between Atani and Ndoni. The beaches around Onitsha were heavily mined and were backed up by Biafran machine guns and anti-tank weapons. Realizing the dangers and complexities of a direct river-based assault on Onitsha, the Nigerian Army headquarters advised Murtala to choose option to cross the Niger River at Idah but with total disregard of this advice from the Nigerian Army Headquarters in Lagos, he chose to attack Onitsha head on.<sup>17</sup>

On October 4, 1967, Colonel Murtala Mohammed ordered Nigerian artillery to begin bombarding Onitsha. The pattern and intensity of the bombardment was to pave way for an eventual follow up attack from Asaba across the River Niger. Eight days later Colonel Mohammed personally led a 10-boat armada carrying about 5,000 Nigerian soldiers across the Niger River into Onitsha. The

Biafran 18 Battalion resisted stubbornly but was forced to retreat in disarray as it lacked the requirement to resist the water crossing. Their lone artillery gun tried to engage the boats with direct fire, but packed up after firing six rounds out of the available twenty rounds. At mid-stream, the Federal forces split into two-one force continued to move down towards the Onitsha market beach, while the other wheeled off towards the ferry point in the area of the Prisons. However, instead of pursuing the retreating Biafrans and occupying the town, the Federal Forces turned their attention to looting and burning the Onitsha market to the ground. This gave the Biafran 18 Battalion time to reorganize and make a counter-attack. The 11 Battalion under Major Achuzie made their way up the New Market road, while the 18 Battalion under Colonel Nsudoh swung down the Old Market road towards Onitsha.<sup>18</sup> With this development, the Biafran troops launched their attacks from these directions and things ran out of control for the Federal Forces as individual soldiers ran for their dear lives, some running towards the North to Idah, while others ran southwards and ended up in the hands of Biafran forces. Federal Forces of the 2 Division stationed in Onitsha were totally routed and most were either killed or taken prisoner, only a few who came back in a dug-out canoe or those who could swim survived. The first attempt at crossing the River Niger from Asaba to Onitsha had resulted into a disaster for the Federal Forces. Biafran forces who had earlier been dislodged from their strongholds in Onitsha reorganised and moved back to join in the mop up operation as Federal troops within Onitsha in total disarray made efforts to avoid further onslaught from their enemies.

Subsequent efforts were later made by the 2 Division of the Federal Forces to invade Onitsha via water crossing. One led by Captain Basse Inyang was a failure and the other by Lieutenant Colonel Akinrinade almost ended in chaos and gross disobedience by the troops and open disagreement

<sup>16</sup> M. Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture 1966-1976*, (New York, Algora Publishing, 2009),163.

<sup>17</sup> M. Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence...*, 163

<sup>18</sup> Alexander A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian...*, 200

between Akinrinade and the Division Commander; Akinrinade had to leave the Division. According to Alabi-Isama, their tactics of a frontal attack on the enemy at the opposite end of the river was one of the blunders of the Nigerian Army during the Civil War. Akinrinade had protested against the plan to cross the river frontally at Asaba and he fell out with his commander, Colonel Murtala Mohammed.<sup>19</sup> After three unsuccessful attempts at crossing the River Niger, Colonel Mohammed realised there was no hope in attacking Onitsha from Asaba and began heading north towards Idah.

In December 1967 the Nigerian 2 Division under Colonel Murtala Mohammed along with the Nigerian 6 Brigade under Captain Shehu Musa Yar'Adua crossed the Niger River at Idah and made their way to Enugu. In early January 1968 Colonel Mohammed led a two pronged attack in which they encountered the Biafran 53 Brigade under Colonel Christian Ude, who was re-enforced by mercenaries, while also attacking the Biafran 12 Battalion under Colonel Mike Inveso at Adani, forcing them to retreat. Colonel Mohammed's war machine rolled on, smashing through Biafran made obstacles, including detonated bridges. His formidable force was accompanied by a convoy of heavy road construction equipment, which were used for clearing the roads and reconstructing the bridges immediately. They were armed to fight indefinitely even without re-supply whereas no Biafran unit was well equipped to fight without supply for up to a day.

Despite heavy casualties, Colonel Mohammed's troops stormed into Udi on two main axes- Olo-Umueze-Mgbagbu Owo and Ngwo-Nsude-Udi. They eventually overpowered the Biafran 53 Brigade under Colonel Ude and followed up by invading Ozalla a few days later, cutting off the Biafran Special (S) Brigade from the rest of Biafra. With artillery and aerial assistance, the 2 Division rolled on and managed to overrun numerous towns and cities. In the face of overwhelming pressure, Biafran soldiers retreated and began to set up defensive positions. The Biafran 14 Battalion

under Major Opara, put up stiff resistance to prevent the 2 Division linkup between Ozalla and Emene, but this could only last for three weeks as his command was forced to retreat.

On January 19 the Nigerian 2 Division invaded and occupied Awka, with the road to Onitsha now open to the Nigerian 2 Division. By March 20, 1968, Nigerian 2 Division troops marched through Abagana and finally reached Onitsha. According to Alabi-Isama, it was not until 21 March 1968 that 7 Brigade, formerly under Lieutenant Colonel S.F. Daramola, came under Captain Shehu Yar'Adua to take Onitsha, forcing Biafran troops under Colonel Nwawo into the Nnewi enclave.<sup>20</sup> On 23 March 1968, Onitsha fell to a two-pronged attack from the Federal Forces bringing to an end the six month battle to an end. Although the Nigerians were forced to pay with heavy casualties they managed to capture Onitsha while the Biafran 11 Division retreated to Nnewi.

The victory was pyrrhic as Federal forces of 2 Division were demoralized and largely ineffective as a combat organisation. It had difficulty moving beyond Onitsha and clearing its sector. Although Federal forces of 2 Division marched into Onitsha and eventually captured it; its administrative support remained at Abagana. With this development, the Biafran troops resorted to prevent this administrative support from getting to Onitsha. This, they did on March 31, 1968 in an ambush of a 96 car convoy transporting supplies to Onitsha at Abagana. A homemade Biafran missile "Ogbunigwe" was launched at a petrol tanker truck and caused an enormous explosion that tossed armoured cars like tin cans, devastating the entire convoy. This disaster was possible as because of as the movement of the large convoy on a narrow route, on which they were susceptible to ambush.<sup>21</sup>

By 12 May 1969, following the appointment of new Commanders of the Nigerian Army Divisions (1 Division- Colonel Illiya Bisalla, 2 Division-

<sup>19</sup> G. Alabi-Isama, *Tragedy of Victory: On-the-Spot Account of the Nigeria-Biafra War in the Atlantic Theatre*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2013), 73.

<sup>20</sup> G. Alabi-Isama, *Tragedy of Victory...*

<sup>21</sup> M. Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence...*, 165

Colonel Gibson Jalo, and 3 Marine Commando-Colonel Olusegun Obasanjo), 2 Division like the other two divisions equally experienced an adjustment in its boundaries and areas of responsibilities. For 2 Division, its area of responsibility in Onitsha was taken over by 1 Division and with the task to advance beyond Nnewi, while 2 Division's new role in the war was to defend the Mid- West and hold defensive position along River Niger to prevent infiltration from across the river into the Mid-West.<sup>22</sup> From then on, it was mostly quiet on 2 Division's front.

## LESSONS FROM THE BATTLE OF ONITSHA FOR FUTURE COMMANDERS

The Battle of Onitsha stands as one of the most instructive engagements of the Nigerian Civil War, offering enduring lessons on strategy, leadership, and operational execution. The campaign involved complex river-crossing operations, urban combat, and engagements shaped by challenging terrain and a determined adversary. Its mixed outcomes marked by initial failures and later adaptation provide valuable insights for future commanders on the importance of sound planning, intelligence, discipline, and flexibility in modern military operations. The lessons drawn from the Battle are as follows:

### Strategic Guidance

A key error in the campaign was the disregard of higher headquarters' directive to cross the Niger at Idah rather than attempt a frontal river assault from Asaba. Future commanders must recognise that strategic-level advice is often informed by broader operational and intelligence considerations.

### Adequate Preparation

2 Division was assembled hurriedly, with many personnel lacking sufficient combat training. This contributed directly to poor discipline, panic, and operational failure. Proper force preparation, training, and integration are prerequisites for

complex operations, especially river crossings and urban assaults.

### Indispensability of Intelligence and Reconnaissance

The Biafran defenders maintained excellent observation posts and a robust monitoring system of Nigerian movements. Conversely, 2 Division lacked accurate situational awareness prior to each river crossing attempt. Reliable intelligence, reconnaissance, and continuous battlefield surveillance are essential for shaping operations and avoiding surprises.

### Terrain and Nature of Operations

The River Niger and the narrow roads around Abagana significantly shaped outcomes. The river crossing became a death trap; the Abagana route provided a perfect ambush corridor. Terrain analysis must drive planning. Commanders must adapt tactics to terrain and avoid predictable movement along constricted routes.

### Never Underestimate an Adversary

Although outgunned and poorly supplied, Biafran forces displayed resilience, tactical creativity, and effective defensive preparations, including mines, trenches, and the Ogbunigwe. A determined, adaptive adversary can inflict disproportionate damage, even with limited means, if underestimated or poorly engaged.

### Adaptability

The shift from the disastrous failed river crossing attempts by troops of 2 Division to the more successful Idah crossing showed the necessity of adapting strategy. Therefore, Commanders must be willing to reassess failed approaches and rapidly adopt alternative courses of action based on evolving realities.

<sup>22</sup> O. Obasanjo, *My Command...* 84

## Conclusion

The paper discussed the Battle of Onitsha during the Nigerian civil war. A prelude to the Battle was also given to provide a detailed understanding of necessities of the Onitsha campaign. The Battle of Onitsha stands as one of the most intense, protracted, and instructive campaigns of the Nigerian Civil War. What began as a bold attempt by 2 Division to exploit its gains in the Mid-West evolved into a complex and costly struggle shaped by difficult terrain, determined resistance, and crucial leadership

decisions? This Battle serves as a compelling case study in the interplay of leadership, logistics, discipline, terrain, and adaptability. It demonstrates that military success cannot rely on boldness alone but must be anchored in coherent strategy, preparation, and learning. For modern commanders, the campaign remains a powerful reminder that battles are won not only by firepower, but by sound judgement, disciplined troops, flexible planning, and an unwavering understanding of the operational environment.