

10-9-2009

John Esenwa oral history interview by S. Elizabeth Bird, Charles Massucci, and Fraser Ottanelli, October 9, 2009

John Esenwa (Interviewee)

S. Elizabeth Bird (Interviewer)

Charles Massucci (Interviewer)

Fraser M. Ottanelli (Interviewer)

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), [Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Esenwa, John (Interviewee); Bird, S. Elizabeth (Interviewer); Massucci, Charles (Interviewer); and Ottanelli, Fraser M. (Interviewer), "John Esenwa oral history interview by S. Elizabeth Bird, Charles Massucci, and Fraser Ottanelli, October 9, 2009" (2009). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 2.
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/2

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

This Oral History is copyrighted by the University of South Florida Libraries Oral History Program on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Florida.

**Copyright, 2011, University of South Florida.
All rights, reserved.**

This oral history may be used for research, instruction, and private study under the provisions of the Fair Use. Fair Use is a provision of the United States Copyright Law (United States Code, Title 17, section 107), which allows limited use of copyrighted materials under certain conditions. Fair Use limits the amount of material that may be used.

For all other permissions and requests, contact the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA LIBRARIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, LIB 122, Tampa, FL 33620.

Asaba Memorial Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: A34-00002
Interviewee: John Esenwa (JE)
Interviewers: S. Elizabeth Bird (EB), Charles Massucci (CM), and
Fraser Ottanelli (FO)
Interview date: October 10, 2009
Interview location: USF Tampa Library
Transcribed by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Transcription date: May 17, 2010 to May 18, 2010
Audit Edit by: Dorian L. Thomas
Audit Edit date: May 18, 2010
Final Edit by: Kimberly Nordon
Final Edit date: May 19, 2010

S. Elizabeth Bird: Good morning.

John Esenwa: Good morning.

EB: This is Liz Bird, and I'm with Chuck Massucci. Today is October 10, 2009, and I am at the University of South Florida Tampa Campus Library conducting an oral history with John Esenwa for the Asaba Memorial Project. So, to start off with, welcome. If you could say your name, spell your name, say where you were born, and when you were born?

JE: Okay. My name is John Esenwa, J-o-h-n E-s-e-n-w-a. I was born in Kano, a city in Northern Nigeria, June 23, 1953.

EB: Thank you. Okay, what we'd like to really start with is kind of setting the scene for where you were and thinking about the events that culminated in October 1967. Were you—you were born in Kano, but you were living in Asaba in early October?

JE: Yes, as happens mostly with civil servants. My parents were federal civil servants, so they tend to be transferred back and forth. They were residence in Lagos, and I was in high school in Asaba. That's a distance of about 300 miles from where my parents resided. So, I was in a boardinghouse in a secondary school in Asaba.

EB: Were any of your family with you?

JE: No, except a cousin, who was a year ahead of me in the same secondary school.

EB: So, in 1967, you would be—fourteen?

JE: Fourteen, yes.

EB: We understand that, sometime before that, the Biafran troops had occupied Asaba. Is that correct?

JE: Yes. They had occupied—I don't remember the dates, but they rolled into Asaba about midnight. I don't remember the dates, you know. They then proceeded, within ten hours, to occupy the states. I believe they occupied Asaba for about six months, until the Nigerian troops pushed them back across Asaba into then-Biafra, separated by the River Niger. When the Biafrans rolled in, we remained in school, because they were on their way to other parts of Nigeria, and it was peaceful. Indeed, I don't believe there were any Biafran troops stationed in Asaba. But the Nigerian army soon pushed them back, and we were in school, also, when the Nigerian army pushed them back.

The secondary school is a bit—it's about maybe two or one mile outside Asaba itself. But, remember, the killings happened in Asaba town, so in a way, we were—there's always this respect for schools, as if schools were sanctuaries. So, we never had federal troops, Nigerian troops, come into the college, into the high school. We really had nothing, and were very—we never really knew what was happening in the town. You know, it was like a sanctuary.

EB: What was the name of the school?

JE: St. Patrick's Grammar School—St. Patrick's College, Asaba. SPC, you know.

EB: So, you said you were boarding in—

JE: In SPC, right.

EB: You were boarding in the school.

JE: In the school, right. Yeah, in the school. As it happens, most secondary schools had boardinghouses: you lived on campus.

EB: What was your sense of the mood of the people? Maybe it was difficult, because you were not in the town, but the mood about—say, when the Biafran troops had occupied the area. Were people in support of that, or alarmed, nervous?

JE: Oh, no. People were in support. Remember that behind all tensions and conflicts in Nigeria, there's always the problem of ethnicity and tribe. We were of the same tribe, so people were mainly in support. People were quite happy. And remember, also, the Biafrans declared our state the Republic of Benin, all to win over the people, who were quite supportive, because in the events preceding this, which were the pogroms in the North, when people were killed, the distinction was not made between so-called Biafrans and Igbos who were not from Biafra.

I don't know how well you understand this, but remember, the Igbos are about six or seven million by then—about that, six or seven million. Eighty percent or 90 percent of Igbos are across the Niger, this so-called Biafra. Asaba, containing Asaba and its immediate environs, were Igbo-speaking, also. (inaudible) Essentially, when the killings had been done in the North, the various pogroms in the North, the killers, who were basically everyday men, not very well educated, they did not make a distinction and could not have been able to. They just saw these people as foreigners. Indeed, unlike what you are told, not just Igbos alone were killed. Other minority ethnic groups were also killed. As long as you were a Christian, you were foreseen as a Muslim—I'm sorry, you were seen as a foreigner.

So, because the Igbos were close to 90 percent of those who lived in the Northern part of the country were Igbos—about 10 percent were non-Igbos. They were also victims, but nobody remembers to talk about them anymore. It's like we say the Holocaust, but we forget that Gypsies were also killed, you know. That was the sort of—you know. So, it was easy for those across the Niger—the Biafrans, as they've been called—to identify with the Igbos, because the killings that led up to that, the distinction was not made. So, in answer to your question, yes, they were happy to see the army roll through.

EB: So, when news was starting to come of the federal troops' arrival, how was the mood then?

JE: The mood became very dark, because these were people who supposedly were—these were from the same tribes that killed us civilians. Now they were afraid that there would be whole-scale massacre. So, the mood was dark. Not for us students; we couldn't care any less, because somehow, we believed our schools were sanctuaries. But the mood—and I could tell the mood was dark, because we heard what the staff in the school said: not just the staff, we heard the cooks, the cleaners, and so on. They were worried as they advanced. In most wars, you know, people are worried at the advance of the advancing army, because you can never tell what will happen. But they weren't quite expecting that there would be whole-scale massacre, because it has not happened, or there had not been any reports of whole-scale massacres in the cities conquered by the federal government. But, given the past history of Nigeria, there was a chance that it could flare up. People were worried, yes, but not too much.

EB: Perhaps you could just walk us through what happened once the federal troops were in. In your personal experience, what was the sequence of events then?

JE: Well, the sequence of events, as I can remember, was once they conquered Asaba, which was a very—it was a very fast oppression, in the sense that the Biafran army quickly disintegrated and ran across the Niger. So there was no combat, really, in Asaba—and even its environs, because the army quickly broke apart and ran across the Niger. The federal troops rolled into town. Perhaps there were battles preceding that, but there was no shooting. The only thing was the bridge was blown up. So, it was quite peaceful as the Arabic troops occupied the city. That's the best of my recollection. There were no shootings. Of course, you could have mortar rounds being fired, but there was no fighting. That is the best. And remember, again, that we had no cause to go down to the city. You would normally have very strict restrictions about leaving the campus.

EB: So, what happened—what happened next?

JE: To the best of my knowledge—and I'm being very, very careful with this, because I realize the importance of truth in these matters—I did not know. And, indeed, I did not know, and most students did not know about the killings in Asaba. It was not mentioned. I think I was decently aware of politics, even at fourteen that I was keenly aware of what was going on. We did not know about the killings, because the cooks and the support staff stopped coming to the school the moment federal troops rolled into town. Everybody went into hiding. The school was being run by a Catholic order, and they decided they had to close the school, because [there was] nobody to cook and service the school.

So, the issue—so there was no communication between the city and the school. That was very important, so nobody knew what was happening in the city. But the reverend fathers decided to close down the school, because they couldn't run the school, so the issue

became that we have to leave: how to evacuate the students? And that was where we stopped. So, we stopped having classes. Those are the events I now know. So, what was happening in the city? We did not know about it. There were no phone services and no people were coming. So, they decided that we had better evacuate the school.

Ninety percent—at least 90 percent of the students are from Asaba and its immediate environ of about a radius of ten, fifteen, or twenty miles. My parents lived in Lagos. My ancestral hometown is about twenty miles from Asaba, so if I had to leave, I was going to go to my ancestral hometown, where my uncles and everybody was. So, the issue was how to evacuate the students.

EB: What's the name of your ancestral town?

JE: Ezi, E-z-i, and it's about twenty miles [from Asaba]. Igbo-speaking, also.

So, the issue was how to evacuate the students. The reverend fathers tried to find transportation to evacuate the students. They couldn't. So, it became, "Well, we'd better find a way out." I suppose they must have known something was happening in the city, but they wouldn't let us know. But they decided it was in our interest to leave the city, to leave the school. And, by the way, in the nights preceding that, on two occasions—I'm a heavy sleeper. Mortar rounds landed close to the school at nights, and everybody would panic and run into the bushes. So, the air—you know, there was tension in the air. Coupled with lack of communication, the reverend fathers decided to close down the school and evacuate everybody. Perhaps they knew about the killing, and they didn't want the troops coming and seeing a captive group of about 400 students. So, transportation was a problem.

Now, the day—what I witnessed, and that's the most I know, really, on a first-hand basis was—there's a way tension builds, you know, and suddenly, everybody is on nerves. On this particular morning, it was things had to give, that you just had to leave, for whatever reason. So, we were hanging by the gates of the college, everybody with a small bag. Then, a truck rolled up: it's a cattle truck. It's normally used—by the way, there was a Nigerian army encampment next to the college, next to the Ughelli border. It must have been a school, a hotel they took over; they requisitioned and took over. We've always had a very good relationship; we'll cross, you know, and go by and play soccer with them, and ate with them. That is very important to me: we ate with them, and they teased us and so on. So, we had a very good relationship. But oftentimes, if there was a nasty battle, or if any of the shells being lobbed across the Niger hits, then their mood soured and we knew not to get too close to them. But all in all, they were very decent to us: they fed us and so on.

So, they had these cattle trucks that supplied them food; it comes in and goes back empty. One of those trucks was rolling by, past the school, and stopped, seeing the students. “Do we want a ride?” for those leaving Asaba. But the students from Asaba, the Asaba indigents, were not going to leave, because that was their hometown. We said yes, and some of the people ran and jumped into the truck. I jumped into the truck, and then realized my cousin, who is six days older than me, was not in the truck.

I screamed and asked the truck to stop, and I said I wasn’t going to leave because my cousin was in the school, and if the truck could wait? They said no, they weren’t going to wait. I said I wasn’t going to leave, then, and then I tried to walk back to the school. And, of course, you had a Nigerian soldier with these machine guns you mount on the road, and he wouldn’t let me cross back. But there was no way I was going to leave my cousin. It just escaped me; he kept firing like a V from back, and the truck kept on honking. I should decide what I want to do. And then the truck left, and he got exasperated with me and said okay, I should go, and I walked back into the school. And that was it.

We later heard—so, I did not witness, I did not see, nor have I had anybody officially state that he saw or knew what happened. But the story was that everybody in that truck, they were killed, because they ran into the soldiers coming back from—because there were still pockets of Biafran troops operating. The evacuation out of that region was not an orderly one; it was not orderly, you know, so there were still elements of Biafran troops, and occasionally they ran into Nigerian troops and they would exchange fire. So, they must have run into such an encounter. They were in an angry mood, or whatever it is, and then see this truck with able-bodied young men, ages seventeen to eighteen, nineteen, and they say, “Well, if you’re not soldiers, you’ll end up being soldiers,” and they killed everyone in that truck. There has not been an official confirmation, but everybody believes and says this happened.

So, as I say, it’s simply because in a way, I could have been one. That could have been me. And I do believe I have met someone who claimed he lost his brother in that truck. I can’t remember the name. So, did I witness it? No. Did I have anybody give me—recite an eyewitness account? No. But have I heard this story told thousands of times? Yes. So, that is much of what I know.

Of course, not knowing this, I went back to the college and I remained. By the next day, we found another transportation and then left Asaba. A week after, I went back to Lagos, the federal capital, and that is the best of what I know of the incidents.

Charles Massucci: Just to help me understand and to help us understand, during the Biafran occupation, did you see the soldiers? Were you able, with being a student, to see where the soldiers were, what they actually occupied?

JE: Well, yes, because the night they rolled into town, they were preceded by a DC—maybe a DC-7 plane, flying very low. So, the noise, which was quite unusual, was really what woke everybody: hey, a plane. They rolled in past the school about twelve midnight. There was a long column of troops in various vehicles, so long that it was enough—there was enough time passed for us all to rush to the main gates, and we saw the troops. It was a typical ragtag army, 'cause I can remember some of them hanging on trucks wearing bedroom slippers. And some of us really wondered. We thought this was a war; how come they're wearing their—? Much later, I knew there was a word for that ragtag army.

Anyway, yes, I saw them, but they had no reason to remain in Asaba. Asaba has a border with Onitsha, and there were no—this was a friendly population, so they did not retain a military presence in Asaba. All the troops rolled to Benin, about eighty miles away, where they were shot when they started the encounter, because federal troops—federal troops were not in this area; it's called Mid-West Region. Federal troops—part of the agreement was that Nigerian troops were not to station any troops; it was to be regarded as a border, as a buffer, which Biafra violated by moving in. And that's why they could roll into the states, and only met resistance at the border. So, we didn't see Biafran troops, in answer to your question. There wasn't.

CM: You just saw them passing on one way?

JE: Precisely. Precisely. Yeah.

CM: And then you spoke about the federal troops that occupied the property near the school.

JE: Right. Yeah.

CM: How long were those troops occupying?

JE: Oh, all throughout, all throughout: from the time they moved into the city until the end of the war they occupied it. It was also across from the hospital, and this was where the major casualties were being treated. So, there was a heavy military presence in that immediate environ. And this is why I am very careful in using the word "genocide." I'm

very—I've said this in the past. I'm sorry I was not able to elaborate on it in my presentation yesterday.

What happened in Nigeria wasn't genocide; it was at best a pogrom, as has always been the case, because they had every reason, if the intent was to destroy the people. They had every opportunity to kill the students, kill everybody. I believe I'm digressing, but the best comparison I can give to what happened in Asaba is the case of Lieutenant [William] Calley in the My Lai Massacre. If you're going to call the My Lai Massacre a genocide, then that's your definition. That is the best explanation, that for whatever reason, a group of soldiers decided to mow down some people. That is, you know, what happened in Asaba, because frankly, it did not continue. It did not continue, and they had every opportunity to do it. There were casualties still coming. It is clear the townspeople were in support of Biafran troops. There was no hiding it. Nigerian troops occupied my ancestral hometown: not a single person was killed.

I suppose, and if you ask around, the officers involved in the killing are still alive. Some of them are still alive. It might be best to track them down and ask this question: what really happened? And also, I don't know how many people were truly killed. I don't know the element of exaggeration, I don't know. So, it might be worthwhile, really, to find out what was the sequence, how many people were killed. I'm sorry, I digress.

EB: No, this is very useful.

CM: Let me ask you: After you were transported out of there, did you ever return to Asaba?

JE: No. No, because within a week—you must understand, also, that—I'm not a student, but I've seen a lot of conflicts. There is something remarkable about the Nigerian conflicts: that, unlike most conflicts, it ended and ended sharply. There were no reprisals, no killings, nothing. The moment it ended, it ended sharply, and people went back to work as if nothing happened. To that extent, I believe the Nigerian government was quite magnanimous in the sense—why I say so is that the moment I crossed over, I got money, I entered a commercial transportation, and rode through the state to Lagos. There was no fear, nothing. So, that tells you how the killing was an isolated incident.

And, by the way, left unsaid—and I hope we'll find the opportunity to bring it up sometime—is Biafran troops killed, also. Somehow, where you come with dirty hands, you know, be very, very careful. Biafran troops also killed. Yes, they killed; we know this. They killed, and because there were also other minority groups in what was Biafra, when they tell you their stories—and I've heard them say those stories—you'll be

shocked. Biafran troops, as they retreated from minority areas, did the same thing. So, for you to evaluate this, you must also consider that.

Consider also that—I hope there'll be an opportunity to bring up this issue before I leave—that nobody talks about a memorial for them.

CM: In Nigeria, Asaba?

JE: Yeah, in Nigeria, Asaba. And I think victims should be honest enough to recognize themselves as members of a family of victimhood. Nobody talks about them, you know. And also, if I had known this conference was being organized by the so-called Igbo Renaissance Group, I would not have come for this conference. And truly—I'm leaving today. I'll bring this issue up, and people don't like my saying that. No matter what they say, some of these people are really the equivalent of ethnic supremacist groups. That's what they are. That is what they are. I can't find a better word for it. And these associations claim and walk around in the guise of the *intelligencia*. They are nothing less than tribal groups. Perhaps that is why they don't talk about the killings of Biafran troops, committed by Biafran troops.

CM: Could you just specify: Biafran troops committing acts of violence, or—

JE: Precisely. Yes. Precisely. And that's my interest in this. Human life should not be taken, no matter whose life it is.

CM: Can I ask you a question, then? In your opinion, is there a value to this excavation, which would allow us to find physical evidence to possibly substantiate or refute some of the rumors and stories?

JE: Precisely. And that is a very essential—it is not so much that you want to identify them, like what is going on in Yugoslavia or some of those excavations. It is not so much that you want to return family members to family members, but to authenticate, verify, if this happened, really. How many people were truly killed? Was there a mass burial? This is the first time I'm hearing that there was a mass burial, and I doubt that there could have been a mass burial. I doubt it. It is not in the nature of our people to—if they were killed, they were just simply mowed down, and the villagers would have come and picked the bodies [up] and gone and buried them. So, there couldn't have been any mass burial. We wouldn't do that. It is extremely unlikely that the Nigerian troops would then dig a grave and bury en masse. You do that when you want to hide a crime.

So, don't be surprised that you will not find a mass grave. Don't be very, very surprised. And I don't know—in fact, I'm going to ask this question today. Did anybody see a mass grave? Did anybody? Sometimes, you repeat these stories, and people take it for the truth. So, be very, very careful. I don't know, but I doubt that it could have happened. So, yes, the whole investigation is good, if nothing else, so that the truth can be said that no, only ten people were killed. Under what circumstance, I don't know. Or no, 3,000 people were killed. We must know that, if it is the truth or not. I don't know if I answered your question.

CM: You did. From the stories you've heard, and you've clarified that you weren't a direct witness to the shootings in Asaba, from the stories you've heard, do you have an estimate of how many people were killed in Asaba on this one particular date that could possibly lead to a mass grave?

JE: Oh, for the—no, not at all. Not for the—in fact, I didn't hear about the killing in Asaba until long after, long after the war. The only one I heard of was that truck. I can, in looking back now, say the truck must have contained about thirty to forty people, about that. That's looking back, you know, I can make that estimate. But I don't know, truly, if they were killed or not.

EB: You heard that they were killed by federal troops or by Biafran troops?

JE: Federal troops. Federal troops, as they left Asaba. These were returning federal troops. They were returning from an encounter with some elements of the Biafran army, and they ran past this truck and stopped the truck, and killed them. Yeah.

EB: Do you know—would you know the names of some of the people who were on that truck?

JE: Oh, no. No. Uh-uh. No, I wouldn't.

EB: So, what do you think about the notion of memorializing, apart from the excavation itself, the idea of the oral history project, the creation of some kind of a memorial? Do you think this is appropriate, or a mistake?

JE: Oh, yes, it's appropriate. It's appropriate. But the point I want to make when I raise this issue is perhaps the people of Asaba, if they were massacred, should be generous

enough and expand it to a memorial of the victims of the war. If human life must be valued, why will you, even among the dead, make a distinction and say, “Well, no, we just want those killed in Asaba, and not others killed under the same circumstance by both Biafran troops and Nigerian troops”? I mean, the last time you called—if you can tell the truth to each other, we must tell the truth even to the dead, and honor [the dead]. Equal weight—it should be a memorial.

I mean, I’m not telling you what to do. Perhaps you say, “Well, let them go find their own memorial.” But even in death, we can at least agree to respect each other’s dead. If it turns out that very few were killed, even if it is ten, it is wrong to kill. If it turns out that, yes, similar events occurred elsewhere in Nigeria, let’s use the case of Asaba to serve as a memorial to all those killed, not just Asaba. Because, granted, yes, there was a similar massacre in Babi Yar in Poland—in Russia, sorry—and various other areas, but there’s a Holocaust memorial. You cannot put memorials in every little town where there were killings. Perhaps Asaba should serve.

I have seen the memorial to the Bay of Pigs in Havana, Cuba, when I was in college, and it’s a central place. Granted, there’s so much propaganda around it, but it’s a central place all Cubans can come to. Perhaps that would be a memorial for the victims of killings in Nigeria. It should be more like a library, memorial, and so on. And I don’t think that the true victims, you know, will object to that.

CM: The surviving families of the victims?

JE: Yeah. I’m sorry, yeah. They will not object to that. The people who might object to it are people who want to hijack these events to further ethnic divisions. Yes, they will. But surviving family members may well see, because they can identify with each other as victims. This issue will come up, and I think, hopefully, it will come up today. And I’d like to see how people react to it. (inaudible)

EB: I would like to talk with you a little bit more about some of these issues, but perhaps off camera.

JE: Camera, right. (laughs)

EB: (laughs)

JE: Okay, I’m sorry, I talk too much anyway. (laughs)

EB: No, no, it isn't. No.

Fraser Ottanelli: I'm far from the microphone, but this is really a thing that we need to expand on.

EB: Do you know what happened to the school? You didn't go back to St. Patrick's School, did you?

JE: No, I didn't go back. The school is still there. Oh, if you want a source, an unbiased source in all these matters, although this happened some thirty, forty years ago—if you can track down some of the Catholic priests. Yes, if you can track down some of the Catholic priests. And it should not be difficult, you know, because it was the order of—you can always find out which order ran it, and if you ask a couple of questions, perhaps you can find them. They should be in their eighties, by the way. That would give you a very, very unbiased view into what happened.

EB: Do you have any recollection of any of the names of the priests?

JE: Oh, I can find that easily. That shouldn't be a problem, because the school will have a website. And if you ask around—Emma Okocha will know. Once they give you one name—all you need to do is to find out the order that ran the school, and if you call the order, they can tell you, "Oh, yes, we had some priests: these are their names." That will be a very, very good source, because again, the Catholic priests in the cities knew what happened, and they worked closely with the priests and the reverend brothers and reverend sisters who ran the hospital in the city. So, that will give you a different perspective, truly, what happened.

EB: That sounds like a very good idea.

CM: I'd like to ask just one or two practical questions. How long did you spend at the school?

JE: In all, about one year. I was first a freshman.

CM: If you were at the school and you required medical care and/or dental care, where would you have that conducted at?

JE: I believe there was, if I'm not confused now, because I went to five different secondary schools. In all the Catholic schools, invariably, there was always a hospital in the city run by the Catholic Church, and we received free health treatments. Third world countries will have few health care, unlike your rich country. (laughs) Yes, that is where we get free health [care], either in the school or in the hospital. There was never any problem. And that's why I'm saying the reverend sisters who ran the hospitals will be in a better position to tell you.

CM: Do you have a recollection of records-keeping? Was it—you know, I know my experience from going to the doctor, the records-keeping. Do you have a recollection of how adequate or inadequate records-keeping was at that time?

JE: They were, they were. And why I say so is that recently, a friend of mine needed to get hold of her birth certificate, and because she was born in a Catholic hospital, she was able to go and in two seconds they gave it to her. So, yes, the government hospitals, I don't know. Yes, there will be records, because back then, before Nigeria disintegrated, recordkeeping was as efficient as the Germans. Yes.

EB: The school—you said the people on the truck that left the school were students there?

JE: Yes. Students, yeah.

EB: The school would surely have a record if a large number of students had disappeared?

JE: No, I doubt it. I doubt it, because remember that after the war, a sizable of some students just didn't come back anymore. They didn't come back. But the school, I doubt that they will have a record. Well, yes, they will have a record of who was there before, who was there after, but there's no reason to know why this person was not there.

EB: When did the school reopen, do you know that?

JE: I don't remember. I don't remember. But I believe that the school must have reopened barely two or three months after this incident. In the other schools in the immediate towns—I'm talking about two, three miles out—life was functioning normally.

CM: Just to clarify one more point: do you have a date in mind when you were actually transported out of there? Do you know the month?

JE: No. No, I don't remember it one bit. I don't. But these are things you can—the exact sequence of events, frankly, if you can track down one of those priests or reverend sisters, they will give you this exact sequence.

CM: Then, the follow up question is: during the entire stay in all of this trauma, you never heard a single gunshot? You just spoke about one night.

JE: Precisely. I never heard a single gunshot. In fact, the only sounds of violence you could hear were mortar shells. And, oh, yes, you could hear machine gun fire, heavy machine gun fire—we had that twenty-four hours of the day—which were really Biafran and Nigerian troops exchanging fire across the bridge nonstop. That was it. And occasionally, you could just see there was a casualty. But we had our classes; life was really normal, you know, so we got used to hearing sounds of mortar exchange and so on.

CM: In the distance.

JE: In the distance, right.

CM: Is there anything else that we haven't addressed or asked you that you would like to speak of before we finish?

JE: No. No, no. But just to remind you that as you go and as you investigate, remember ethnic divisions can be very, very serious, and it colors the truth a lot in Nigeria. That's why you find everybody here in this conference are all of the same tribe. So, be very careful of the role ethnicity plays in Nigeria. That's all I can say.

EB: Thank you. Thanks very much.

JE: Okay.

End of interview