

Lore of the Corps

From Graduate Class Student to Army Major General to King of Okpe: The Remarkable Career of Felix A. Mujakperuo of Nigeria

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It will come as no surprise to judge advocates that international officers attending the Basic and Graduate Courses often excel as students. Israeli Captain Gal Asael, for example, was the number one student in the 56th Graduate Course. Similarly, the high caliber of these international officers means that they often return to their home countries and go on to have stellar careers. For example, Major Michael D. “Mike” Conway attended the 124th Basic Course; today, he is a major general and the Judge Advocate General of the British Army.

But arguably the most remarkable international officer to have studied here is Felix Mujakperuo of Nigeria. He graduated from the 36th Graduate Course in 1988, returned home, and subsequently retired as a major general in the Nigerian Army. In 2006, Mujakperuo reached even loftier rank when he was crowned Orhue I of the Okpe Kingdom in Nigeria.¹ No one in our Corps history has previously achieved the title of “His Royal Majesty,” and this alone makes the story of Felix A. Mujakperuo worth telling.



The Orodje of Okpe Kingdom, His Royal Majesty, Major General Felix A. Mujakeruo (retired)

In July 1987, then Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Mujakperuo arrived in Charlottesville to attend the 36th Graduate Class. A soft-spoken, distinguished-looking officer, Mujakperuo had been born in 1946 and, after graduating from Urhobo College, had joined the Nigerian Defense Academy as an “Officer Cadet” in October 1968. In March 1971, he graduated as “Best All-Round Cadet” and was commissioned in the Infantry. Mujakperuo subsequently served as a company commander (1971–1973), instructor at the Nigerian Army’s Infantry School (1976–

1978), and battalion commander (1978–1986). While in this last assignment, he had also been a student at the University of Lagos and the Nigerian Law School, from which he obtained law degrees in 1985 and 1986, respectively. Now that he was a lawyer, it made sense for the Nigerian Army to appoint him as the Director, Army Legal Services. He had served in that assignment for a year when he arrived in Charlottesville in 1987 to attend the year-long Graduate Course.²

According to other biographical details that LTC Mujakperuo submitted to The Judge Advocate General’s School (TJAGSA), he was married and had five children (three daughters and two sons). Additionally, this was not the first time that he had attended a U.S. Army school; Mujakperuo had previously graduated from Fort McClellan’s Military Police Officer Advanced Course in 1986.

If his distinguished educational and military background were not sufficient to set LTC Mujakperuo apart from his classmates, his remarks during the first week of class, when he introduced himself in a five-minute presentation were unforgettable. After talking briefly about his family and his career in the Nigerian Army, LTC Mujakperuo told his classmates that one of the greatest challenges of his career had occurred recently. As he explained, there had been an attempted coup against the government and, after those responsible for the rebellion had been apprehended, tried, and convicted, it had been his responsibility to see that the death sentences imposed against these coup-plotters were carried out. According to Mujakperuo, this assignment had been made even more difficult because some of those who were executed had been his friends. As then-Captain (now Colonel (Retired)) Richard E. “Dick” Gordon remembers, the matter-of-fact manner in which LTC Mujakperuo related this story only made it more shocking to his fellow Graduate Course students.³

² THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL’S SCHOOL, 36TH GRADUATE CLASS DIRECTORY 42 (1987) [hereinafter 36TH GRADUATE COURSE DIRECTORY] (entry for Felix Mujakperuo).

³ E-mail from Colonel (Retired) Richard E. Gordon, to author (Oct. 1, 2014, 11:14 A.M.) (on file with author). In addition to Colonel Gordon, who had a distinguished career as an Army lawyer, another member of the 36th Graduate Class who excelled after graduating was Malinda E. Dunn, who became the first active component female brigadier general in the history of the Corps. Brigadier General Dunn retired in 2009.

¹ See OKPENATION, ORHUEI, available at www.okpenation.org/doc/ORHUE%I.pdf (last visited Nov. 14, 2014).

When LTC Mujakperuo graduated on May 20, 1988, he received the newly authorized LL.M. in Military Law, setting him apart from all other international student officers who had previously attended the Graduate Class.⁴ He then returned to Nigeria, where he resumed his military career.

More than ten years later, in July 1999, now Major General Mujakperuo was in Freetown, Sierra Leone, as part of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (USOMSIL). He was the Commander of the Military Observer Group of the Economic Community (ECOMOG) of West African States. The United Nations Security Council had established the UNOMSIL as a peacekeeping mission in June 1998. A rebellion against the Sierra Leone government had resulted in much bloodshed and damage to civilian property, and the ECOMOG, operating alongside UNOMSIL, was attempting to restore a semblance of order.⁵



UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (2d from left) visits with Major General Felix A. Mujakperuo (3d from left) in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 8 July 1999. Mujakperuo was the Commander, Military Observer Group, Economic Community of West African States

After retiring from the Army in 1999, Mujakperuo apparently began working as a senior partner in a law firm in Lagos. His life took a new direction in 2008, however, when he was selected by the Orhue Ruling House Chieftaincy Selection Committee to be the next king of the Okpe Kingdom.⁶ The previous king, His Royal Majesty Orhoro I, had died in early 2004 and, to avoid any “controversy” about who would be the next king, the Supreme Council of Okpe had “empannelled a committee . . . to examine the issue [of royal succession] and advise accordingly.”⁷ The end result was that, on July 8, 2008, Felix A. Mujakperuo was elected as Orhue I, the Orodje (King) of the Okpe Kingdom.⁸

He was officially installed on Saturday, July 29, 2006, in Orerokpe, the headquarters of the Okpe Kingdom. To this day, Mujakperuo continues his reign as His Royal Majesty Orhue I.⁹

Certainly no one would have contemplated that when LTC Mujakperuo was studying Government Information Practices, Fiscal Law, and Legal Assistance (among other topics) in the 36th Graduate Class that he would one day be a monarch ruling a kingdom. On the other hand, perhaps the LL.M. he was awarded in 1988 was the key to his future success.

More historical information can be found at

The Judge Advocate General's Corps
Regimental History Website

Dedicated to the brave men and women who have served our Corps with honor, dedication, and distinction.

<https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/8525736A005BE1BE>

⁴ In addition to LTC Mujakperuo, two other international students were the recipients of the first LL.M.s: Major Sadi Cayci, Turkish Army and Major Seong Jae Lee, Korean Army. 36TH GRADUATE COURSE DIRECTORY, *supra* note 2.

⁵ UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE—BACKGROUND, available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/unamsil/background.html> (last visited Nov. 13, 2014).

⁶ The Okpe kingdom is located in Delta State, Nigeria. For more on the Okpe kingdom, see ISAAC S. MEBITAGHAN, A BRIEF HISTORY OF OKPE KINGDOM (2001).

⁷ OKPENATION, *supra* note 1.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*