

The Nigerian Navy, 1956-1966: Manpower and Platform Development and the First Court Martial

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Abstract:

This paper examined the establishment of the Nigerian Navy and the circumstances surrounding its origin. It narrated the conditions that led to the first naval court martial, examining if there was any ethno coloration in the event. The research also studied the sources, as well as the nature of its early development within the first ten years of its existence. The research in addition analyzed the impact of the British or colonial government on the creation of the Nigerian Navy. The study relied heavily on documentary data and lightly on oral data. The oral data were based on unstructured interviews with few former senior naval officers; and the documentary data were sourced from colonial government annual departmental reports, correspondence, books and magazines. The oral data were transcribed for analysis. The documentary data were subjected to textual and contextual analysis. The researcher found out that the emergence of the Nigerian Navy was the result of interplay of forces such as the ex Royal naval officers, Nigerian nationalists and the colonial administrators. It examined the first court martial.

Keywords:

Origin, court martial, platform, naval force

I. Introduction

The final decision to establish a naval force can be traced to the Colonial Secretary's statement to the House of Representatives on the 1st of March 1955, arising from the dissolution of the Marine Department into the Nigerian Ports Authority on the 1 April 1955. Captain F.W.J. Skutil, the last Director of the Colonial Marine Department became the first expatriate to head the Navy when it was finally established in 1956. The Nigerian Navy that emerged in 1956 emerged from the ideas of some of these Nigerian nationalists who were fighting for Nigeria's independence. Maitama Sule, for instance said, he would like Nigeria to have "a Navy which can be justifiably proud and which is worthy of this great country ." Jaja Wachuku was unhappy with the old Marine department, when he commented that "What do we see here - it is just the old Marine Department changing name and nothing more ", and M.A. Sanni asserted that "If we are to have a Navy, we should not just have a nominal Navy. The substructure of the Navy should be quite strong to pave the way for stronger superstructure." K.O. Mbadiwe stressed the necessity for having a navy and a strong army.

G.O.D. Eneh summed up the Nigerian aspiration: "Without a strong navy Nigeria will never hope to be a country worthy of its name on the continent of Africa." The then Minister of Transport, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, reiterated an insight into the decisions made in the policy paper; when he gave the condition of the kind of people who should work in the Nigerian Naval Service. He said the people who live mainly in the creeks and the delta areas were mostly accustomed to jobs in the littoral areas of Nigeria and would form a greater percentage of the employed staff. Balewa established the fact that those of the littoral delta had been prominent as "staff of the Marine Department which was now the Nigerian Port Authority" . Balewa agreed with men like Solaru on issues such as the cost of maintaining the armed forces. He asserted that

“navies cost a lot of money and there is hardly any country which can produce sufficient funds for a navy....” Despite this view of Balewa, nations like Japan, Russia, the United States and Great Britain still consider the operations of littoral forces necessary to their growth and would rather spend a large amount from their budget to support their navies. The new navy was a coastal navy in role and duty at its inception. The 1956 Nigerian Navy Ordinance constitutes the origin of the new navy, identifying the schedule of the manpower and their significance. The Royal Navy (British Navy) would be the force that safeguarded Nigeria’s territorial waters against any external aggression in the colonial days.

The early hydrographic role given to the Nigerian navy was that it only had to delineate a littoral (sea) area of just three nautical miles. This is adequate charting to complement the Laws governing the international waters of the 50s; delineation such as the Straits of Gibraltar or Malacca was also adequately catered for . Littoral nations such as the United States of America and Britain are in the ‘satisfactory’ range level of adequacy in its hydrographic survey . But it is nations like Nigeria that are being adversely handicapped by the lack of adequate hydrographic data and charts. The ability to develop the littoral areas of Nigeria is prerequisite to maintaining and improving the country’s economy. This role linked the Royal Nigerian Navy to the Nigerian state hence its duty to cover the International Waters close to Nigerian Borders on behalf of the Nigerian state . The navy’s other responsibility was to maintain the custom laws associated with the colonial maritime economy. Finally, it was the navy’s role to train other maritime organisations; the training institution like Quorra was used to train organisations such as Nigerian Ports Authority, Inland Waterways and the Merchant Navy. The choice of a new naval force was an important turn-around in the history of Nigeria’s maritime environment. In layman’s language, the Navy was established to protect those resources contained in Nigeria’s littoral environment and to fend off any threat to them.

II. Review of Literature

Although some studies have made reference to the Marine Department and the Nigerian Navy when discussing the political, economic, manpower, platform and maritime history of Nigeria, in most cases these references are either too restricted or too general apart from the fact that they were too superficial in their understanding of these organisations. There are publications in which references have been made to the circumstances under which the Navy was established in 1956, but these references are cursory and rely on very limited evidential documentation. Among the publications on the development of the Nigerian Navy worth mentioning include *The Making of Nigerian Navy: A Chronicle of Events*, written by the Naval Information Service.

The book chronicled the events that shaped the history of the Nigerian Navy. Another book written by the Information Service is *The Nigerian Navy in Historical Perspective*, which is a miniature form of *The Making of the Nigerian Navy: A Chronicle of Events*. They were both written to commemorate the Nigerian Navy 50th anniversary of 2006 and the Nigerian Navy Day ceremony of 2010. *A Sailors Dream: An Autobiography of Rear Admiral Nelson Bossman Soroh* is an important publication as it gives a naval perspective on the general role played by the Nigerian Navy in Nigeria’s history. The limitation of the book is that it is an autobiography. Another book having this limitation is *Akin Omosefunmi and F. Akinlonu, 30 Days in Power, 4 Years in Command: The Story of Vice Admiral Akin Aduwo*. The book is important to this research because of its narration of Nigerian Navy’s Platform Development.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1 Manpower and Platform Development in the Nigerian Navy, 1956-1966

Manpower development is a process that seeks to optimize an organization's usage of its human resources. It requires an integrated approach that addresses multidimensional aspects of employees, ranging from enhancing technical and interpersonal skills to creative thinking and leadership. Naval platforms are the specific facilities which host and use equipment that has a particular military task that is needed in the theatre of war. This applies to air, ground, water, and multi- environment configurations and one vehicle or facility will often act as a platform for several different categories of equipment and infrastructure. The concepts of infrastructure development synonymous in this to platform development can be defined as progressive movement from the simple to the complex and higher stages in the provision of developing military armoury and conducive environment for the administration of the organisation.

The colonial impact on infrastructure was exploitative. Although infrastructure can be described has the basic physical structures needed for the operations of organisations. The Navy started with these littoral platforms as the: Pathfinder, Petrel, Challenger, Chaser, Valiant, Frances, Trojan, Beecroft, Jade, Nymph and Penelope . The first land infrastructural platform of any naval force is a naval base. The naval base was bought £15,000 and was formally transferred back to the government with effect from April 1, 1957 . In 1957, a base development plan was drawn indicating the sites for the proposed jetty, slipways, workshops, and stores, also including buildings already being converted for use by the Naval Service . The architectural plan was favourably commented upon by the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic and South America, Ian Campbell, who was then in charge of Nigeria. The first instalment of funds was voted for at its inception and the plan was passed to the consulting engineers, Messrs Coode and Partners, London, to prepare the detailed architectural plan for the brown new naval base .

The drawing also made provision for a jetty capable of berthing a vessel of 2,500 tons with twenty feet of water at low water alongside refuelling, procuring freshwater and battery-charging facilities, and provision of sheltered mooring in the camber for small crafts . Provision was also made for two slipways, one of 700 ton capacity and the other of 250 ton which can be built as at when required. All workshops were to be of the 'Arcon' type of construction, which can be extended as required, in accordance with a pre-arranged and agreed newly added development plan . Land space was also made for the planned expansion of the Navy. The manpower that was made available to the newly established naval service and to work inside the base in 1956 was derived mainly from three organisation sources, namely, the Marine Department, the Nigerian Ports Authority and the Inland Waterways. The officers were mostly made up of British personnel . It is worth remarking that apart from being employed in the marine environment which exposed them to ships and harbour crafts, port operations and dockyard services, those Nigerians who formed the nucleus of the naval ratings were not used to naval operations in the modern sense. However, littoral Nigerians had participated in small wars even before the coming of the Europeans. The Totor war between the Ilajes and Ijaws easily comes to mind here.

The manpower for the officer cadre were virtually all British expatriate staff mostly retired Royal Navy personnel or simply marine professionals.

As part of the general restructuring of the Nigerian Armed Forces before independence, an Act of Parliament was passed in 1958 which designated the Nigerian Naval Service as the Royal Nigerian Navy. This was to reflect the Independence Constitution which recognised the British monarch as the Head of State to be represented by the Governor General . However, the British began to train some Nigerian personnel in Quorra, under its new name of the Nigerian

Navy Training Establishment, HMNS Quorra, on the 1 November 1957 . The original Quorra buildings were in Apapa Dockyard, and were therefore vested in the Nigerian Ports Authority . In consequence, for the Navy, it was necessary to move to what was known as the Old Port Depot and convert and adapt buildings there to re-establish the Training Establishment . In 1957, Quorra 1, which had been converted to the accommodation block was fully completed and provided sleeping, messing, eating and toilet facilities for 100 Junior Ratings . Quorra III, which comprised a library/reading room and three lecture space, one of which was used as cinema and film projection room, was completed also in 1957 . The training block, a new block which housed the Commanding Officer, the Assistant Training Officer and the instructors was completed and occupied on 16 December 1957 . The buildings known as Quorra I, Quorra III and the Training Office Block, all of which form part of HMNS Quorra, the Naval Training Establishment, were completed and occupied in November 1957 . Some bushy areas were cleared, levelled and planted out with grass to form a parade ground (Parade is an important aspect of Military drill), and a large flagstaff erected in the site.

The Post and Telegraph office and the installation of the wireless station which provided communication between the naval headquarters and ships either by radio telephone or wireless telegraphy were also completed, Although the Training Establishment could accommodate 100 Junior Ratings, the first intakes were sixty to ease the strain on the administration, as both the officers and four out of the six instructors were new . The first intakes to be trained were divided between the three organisations formed from the Nigerian Marine: the Nigerian Naval Force, the Inland Waterways Department, and the Nigerian Ports Authority . Included in the Nigerian Ports Authority entry were four engineer cadets and four deck cadets. All were expected to work with the Merchant Navy under the auspices of the Joint Scheme sponsored by the Nigerian Ports Authority and the leading shipping companies ; with the exception of the prospective Merchant Navy cadets who would only serve for three months, the basic course for all other Junior Ratings was six months . At the end of six months, the junior ratings serving with the Inland Waterways Department and the Nigerian Ports Authority returned to their organisations while the Junior Naval Ratings were required to undergo a further three months training in purely naval subjects . All branches of the Navy undergoing the basic course did the extra three months adopted only for the Nigerian Naval Service . The basic course provided elementary training in seamanship, all forms of visual signalling, boat work under oars, sail and power and parade training . In addition to the instruction which was given ashore, HMNS Challenger was converted to act as a sea-going tender to Quorra and could take up to twenty ratings away for short cruises along the Nigerian coast . Also added to HMNS Challenger for the training of ratings at Quorra was a twenty-seven feet sailing whalers, two gigs, two seventeen-feet sailing dinghies and a sixteen feet motor boat, Nymph, all attached for training purposes .

The training of other organisations (personnel) was indeed intentional and partly one of the ways proposed for the Navy to earn revenue for the colonial government. The Navy was expected to be a revenue-earner and contribute to the coffers of government and as such plans were put in place for it to achieve this objective. For the Navy to be revenue-earning, the Navy would train boys from the Nigerian Ports Authority, merchant navy and other government institutions so as to enable it to collect fees to meet up with the cost of training its own boys. For the smooth administration of the Naval Service, a store and cost section was created in 1957 . On April 1, 1957; the accounting department became self-accounting and auditing . The Hydrographic Department is one of the oldest departments in the Nigerian Navy, and it was established to fulfil one of the roles of the Naval Service, i.e., to produce charts for Nigeria's waterways . It was also charged with the publication of nautical information and data for the use of mariners. The staff disposition for officers working for the Hydrographic Department was

nine . As at 1957, the department was yet to have any dockyard, or repair facilities, hence the refit of its vessels was to be done by external outfits. One of the naval ships, Pathfinder, was re-commissioned in 1957 and was able to visit Bonny almost the same time. The department performed the following hydrographic survey works for the Nigerian Ports Authority between 1956 and 1958: Lagos harbour, Imo River entrance, Escravos River, Forcados River, Nun River, Bimbia River, Burutu and Benin River .

Hydrographic survey work was also done for The Shell D'arcy Petroleum Development Company in 1957 in Bonny and Calabar River which was a series of oceanographically and meteorological observations carried out over three months, with a view to finding out how and why the bar at the entrance to the Bonny River formed and the weather that can be expected in Bonny vicinity under the worst conditions which occur during the rains . The work done by the hydrographic branch was a source of revenue for the Navy. Through its vessels, it made charts and arranged for the provision of those aids to navigation which were important to ocean-going and coastal ships. The Navy made gains by charging organisations such as Nigeria Ports Authority and Shell D'arcy Petroleum Development Company, which sought to do business with the Nigerian Navy . The income proposed for the Hydrographic Department in 1957 was 75% of the total cost of operating Pathfinder, a survey ship . In 1957, it was believed by the colonial government that the naval force could be operated at a minimal cost if revenue could be generated from ventures such as the vessels attached to the Hydrographic Department . The public works department erected the security fences and gates in 1958 . A canteen for use of the staff was completed in 1957 which provided food services for the personnel of the Naval Service

It must be said that the Naval Service, just like the Marine Department, was still being treated like a department before an Act of Parliament established a full-fledged naval force in 1958. In that same year, Captain Skutil, the first director of the service retired from the force to be replaced by AR Kennedy in 1958. Improvements were also made to the inherited naval fleet during the period between 1956 and 1958. For instance, Valiant was completed by her builders, Messrs Yarrow & Co., Glasgow, and it arrived on July 8, 1957 on Nigerian shores . Valiant was specially designed for the use of the governor-general for official tours of inspection on the rivers . Pathfinder was readjusted to enable it receive her armament, a 40mm Bofors gun; and the provision of additional accommodation for her crew, was completed in 1957. Penelope was designed as a sea-going vessel, and would be capable of working independently from the parent vessel Pathfinder . Penelope had accommodation for two surveying officers and four recorders in addition to the ship's complement. Penelope was stiffened forward to carry a 40mm Bofors gun and strengthened and suitably fender to be used as an armed boarding vessel in connection with the Port Examination Service in time of war . Although the vessel was primarily a sea-going vessel her design also enabled Penelope to use the inland water ways if necessary, to allow for constabulary duties. The first naval training ship was the Challenger. The Challenger was adopted for the new role of a sea-going tender to the training establishment Quorra .

By May 1959, the Royal Nigerian Navy had begun to expand its fleet and shore facilities. A new naval base known as HMNS Beecroft was established in 1960, while six ships were further transferred to the Royal Nigerian Navy by the Royal Navy. HMS Hare was transferred by the Royal Navy to the Nigerian Navy and renamed HMNS Nigeria . Among the six ships transferred with HMNS Nigeria were HMNS Kaduna, HMNS Calabar, and HMNS Sapele, all seaward defence motor launches . These ships joined HMNS Pathfinder, a survey vessel, HMNS Challenger, a motor launch, HMNS Penelope, another survey vessel and HMNS Valiant, the Governor-General's official yacht. All were previously inherited from the Nigerian Marine. At the beginning of 1960, the Royal Nigerian Navy started with the following Nigerian Naval

Officers: On the executive branch, Lieutenant Nelson Bossman Soroh was the only Nigerian Officer. In the engineering branch, the Navy had Lt. Nathaniel A. Pearse, Lt. Edet Akinwale Wey and Warrant Engineer Officer A. Coker. In the Supply branch were Lts. A. Akinloye, O.Z. Chiazor, S/Lts. S. Duyile, B. Martin and A. Oni . The rest of the officers were retired Royal Navy Officers. The Indian Navy training team joined in 1962 . As a matter of fact, the total number of expatriate officers serving with the Royal Nigerian Navy was twenty-four . Most of the foreign officers were now staff officers and a few assigned to training duties. Gradually, the number reduced and by the end of 1964 most ships came under the command of Nigerians . The force since 1957 had been engaged in massive recruitment of Nigerian citizens into the service but this did not bear fruit until 1960 when more Nigerians began to join the Navy .

The Royal Nigerian Navy was also involved in Nigeria's diplomatic row with the Cameroons in 1960. In order to maintain Nigeria's territorial sovereignty over Southern Cameroon, which was part of Nigeria, HMNS Nigeria (HMNS Hare) was assigned the duty of transporting the soldiers of the Nigerian Army and officers. For this reason, naval officers and army officers met on board HMNS Nigeria and shared their peculiar organisational experiences. On the ship, were men such as Lieutenants (army) Jack Gowon, Michael Ivenso, Patrick Amadi, and Gabriel Okonweze . On 23 February 1960, there was a ship's exercise off Victoria (Cameroon) . On December 1, 1960, Lt. Soroh took over command of HMNS Kaduna . He took over the command of the ship from Lt. Cdr. Nelson Walting thereby making him (Lt. Soroh) the first Nigerian that took over the command of a naval ship . However, the problem with the Cameroons was resolved diplomatically. Eventually, on February 11 and 12, 1961, a plebiscite was held in the British Cameroons to determine the wishes of the inhabitants of Northern Cameroon and Southern Cameroon. The population of Northern Cameroon voted to join Northern Nigeria while the population of Southern Cameroon voted to join the Republic of Cameroon .

On September 30, 1960 (at 11.59pm), it was a naval rating 'Ordinary Seaman' Akano who brought down the British Union Jack, a symbol declaring Nigeria as independent . Even though the Navy was small in size, a naval rating was given this honourable duty. It is generally accepted within military circles that when it comes to such ceremonies, the Navy was looked upon as the best for parade ceremony . The Royal Navy, for instance, has always been at the forefront during parades in Britain; thus the choice of a naval rating was not regarded as an anomaly. The officer who led the ceremonial parade to usher in Nigeria's independence was Lt. Onwura Zonyeuno Chiazor. Chiazor was also first ADC to Nigeria's Governor-General, Nnamdi Azikiwe

3.2 The First Court Martial in the Nigerian Navy

A court martial is a trial in a military court of a member of the armed forces who is charged with breaking a military law. Court martial have jurisdiction over people subject to military service and in war. The court martial trials are lawfully provided in the Armed Forces and act as of the disciplinary tools in the armed forces. The Nigerian Navy Court Martial rules came into force on 1st April, 1962. The Court Martial Rules prescribe the procedure whereby a person desiring to appeal to the Federal Supreme Court against his conviction by a court martial may give notice of appeal. The first Naval Officers involved and indicted in a Court Martial were Commander H. Akinloye, Lt. Cdr. O.Z Chiazor, and Lt. Samuel Duyile.

Onwura Zonyeuno Chiazor joined the Nigerian Navy from the Canadian Navy. He was persuaded by the Nigerian government to join the Nigerian Naval Force. He was not from the 'old marine' or any other Nigerian organisation. He was trained in the Royal Canadian Navy, where he had his Queen Commission in 1956. Chiazor was the first Nigerian to be

commissioned as an officer in Navy. He became a Sub- Lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Navy in 1957. On August 21, 1958, the officer became 'the first African to be accepted for training at the Royal Navy for a Sub-Tech Course. Joseph Edet Akinwale Wey who became the first Nigerian Chief of Naval Staff was commissioned in 1958. Chiazor travelled to Canada in 1943 as a stowaway. His mission was to become a medical doctor at the University of Manitoba. The fact still remained that he was serving on board the Royal Canadian Navy Flagship when the Nigerian government through the Governor-General, Nnamdi Azikiwe, requested that he came back to Nigeria to help build the Nigerian Navy . In 1958, Dr Dennis Osadebe a prominent politician visited Canada and encouraged him to come back home and join the Nigerian Navy, which he did.

Chiazor was court-martial and found guilty for failing to comply with the Commodore's Temporary Memoranda Nos. 188 dated 21 May 1963 and 252 dated 31 December 1963 . Three officers: Commander H. Akinloye, Lt. Cdr. Chiazor, and Lt. Samuel Duyile were charged with mis-appropriation of naval funds . This incident could be regarded as the Navy's first major controversy after independence. All the officers were dismissed and within the Navy a lot of uproar among officers was provoked by the court martial. The officers protested their treatment to the Federal Court of Appeal to claim their innocence. Rotimi Williams assisted by Abraham Adesanya stood the appeal for the petitioners . The Federal Court of Appeal dismissed four counts and upheld two counts . These two counts were on negligence. The court martial brought up all sorts of insinuations of ethnic or deliberate organisational intention to ruin the careers of the three officers. However, this was dismissed out-rightly by such men as Sub. Lt. Akin Aduwo (later became the Chief of Naval Staff in 1980).

I was at their court martial. It was not as if they wanted to ruin their career because he is Igbo or Yoruba. There was nothing like tribalism. The ship had comradeship.

In fact, for people like Aduwo, the Navy was an obscure force just known to mostly southerners. For him, there was nothing like tribalism, or sectionalism within the Navy. Aduwo, commenting on the relationship among officers, described it "as one that was cordial and having a sense of comradeship" and so there was no problem among officers. This was disputed by Chiazor. For him, naval officers had tribal loyalties like their political pay masters . Also, there were divisions along career recruitment lines, that is, those who were recruited from the 'old marine' versus those that did not come from the old marine. Chiazor, in particular, attributed this to why he was dismissed from the Navy in 1964.

The Navy was devoid of problems such as hatred from the Nigerian people as was the case with the Nigerian Army. The Army was seen as an oppressive tool because of the role it played during the colonial period. The Navy until 1980 was unable to attract enough northerners to join it. According to Aduwo, "Sokoto State had no naval officer until 1980" . This imbalance in favour of the south in the early recruitments of the Navy did not come to haunt the institution as it was with the Army. In the case of the Nigerian Army, it was part of the reasons that the nation fell into a civil war.

IV. Conclusion

In 1964, Commodore Edet Akinwale Wey became the first indigenous Nigerian officer to become the Chief of Naval Staff . He was then the most senior Nigerian naval officer. He took over from Rear Admiral A. Kennedy, a British officer. It was an appointment Aduwo described as “an aberration but intentionally made only to satisfy the politicians .” For Aduwo, Wey was an engineering officer and should not have been made the Chief of Naval Staff . Navies all over the world are controlled administratively by the executive group or the seamen, so they are expected to become commanding officers of their ships and as such the Chief of Naval Staff. The peculiar (Nigerianisation) situation of 1964 allowed this position to be given to an engineering officer, something which would be most unlikely in the later period of the 20th century. However, the choice of Wey was popular with the politicians. The politicians were not ready to be drawn into issues of who really was appropriate to command the Navy. Admiral Wey commanded the Navy from 1964 to 1973.

Prior to 1966, the British government withdrew Royal Navy ships which were on a long-term lease to the Nigerian government. Among the withdrawn ships was the country’s only frigate, HMNS Nigeria, the former HMS Hare. The Royal Nigerian Navy placed order for the new flagship for Nigeria in 1962 with the Dutch shipbuilding yard of Wilton Fijenoord in Schiedam, Holland. The Dutch government decided to present the Queen Wilhelmina, which was in their reserve fleet, to the Nigerian government . This was to help the Royal Nigerian Navy to train her officers and men prior to the commissioning of the new frigate (NNS Nigeria). The commissioned Queen Wilhelmina became NNS Ogoja , and immediately became the new flagship. For a replacement for HMNS Nigeria, the country purchased from the Wilton Fijenoord of Holland the frigate also called Nigeria. The ship was commissioned on 21 September 1965 (it was bought for £3,500,000) . In addition to the acquisition of the new NNS Nigeria, the Navy acquired two additional old Seaward Defence Boats (SDBs), namely, NNS Benin and NNS Ibadan, from Vickers Shipyard in the United Kingdom on 1 July 1966 . Apart from a new SDB, NNS Enugu, ordered new for the Navy in 1960, Nigerian naval ships consisted of old ex- Royal Navy ship and NNS Ogoja, an old ex-US Naval Patrol Boat handed to the Nigerian Navy by the Royal Dutch Navy as a part of the procurement of the Nigerian Navy’s first frigate NNS Nigeria on order from a Dutch shipyard in 1964 . NNS Ogoja was a corvette, with a length of 185ft, carrying the following armament: 1x3” gun, 4x40mm Bofors, 6x4mm Oerlikons and A/S Equipment. NNS Enugu also was an SDB, with a length of 110ft, carrying an armament of 1x40mm Bofors and A/S Equipment . NNS Sapele and NNS Calabar were twin in outlook: they were minesweeping motor launches with a length of about 112ft and carrying an armament of 2x20mm Oerlikons and minesweeping gear . NNS Challenger was a Patrol Motor Launch, carrying an armament of 1x40mm Bofors . NNS Penelope was a survey vessel; its length was 79ft and carried an armament of 1x40mm Bofors . The first and only land craft before 1966 was NNS Lokoja; its length was 188ft and it carried an armament of 2x20mm Oerlikons. Nigeria did not build any of these ships.

Prior to 1966, naval officers had a cordial working relationship with the politicians who were at the helm of affairs . The relationship between officers and their political masters was based purely on professionalism. This working link between the politicians and naval personnel however related to loyalty from the officers and sometimes jealousy and envy; all of this became apparent within the internal structure of the Navy and Army during the two coups of 1966. The Navy did not play a major role during the coups but supported their army counterparts by endorsing the two military administrations.

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