

Navy commander, three others killed in Warri gun duel

A NAVY commander and three ratings have been confirmed dead in the Wednesday night gun battle and hijack of two military vessels by Ijaw youths in Warri, Delta State.

The soldiers are: E. E. Ugwu, Commander of the

Navy team; A. K. Ujuwa; Mohammed Abera and M. Alfa.

They were killed by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) shot into their boat by the youths, it was learnt.

Four other soldiers, who were wounded in the fighting, are being treated

From Shola O'Neil, Warri

at the Chevron Clinic in Escravos. *The Comet* sources said they would be flown to Warri as soon as they are stable.

The remains of the soldiers were recovered before mid-day yesterday.

They have been deposited in the morgue of the Chevron Medical Centre in Warri.

They and their colleagues were ambushed at Chanomi Creeks in Warri South-West Local Government Area on Wednesday night by the youths, who reportedly stormed their boat in about

20 speedboats.

The Commander, Joint Task Force, 'Operation Restore Hope', Brig.-Gen. Alfred Ilgho, confirmed the report.

The military men, according to our correspondent's finding, were providing security for some

equipment belonging to the American oil firm, Chevron Nigeria Limited, en route the company's Escravos Base.

Two military craft carrying 23 naval men and soldiers were diverted by the rampaging militia

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members to an unknown destination, suspected to be the dreaded Okerenkoko in the council area.

The Comet gathered that 18 of the embattled soldiers were able to make it to Escravos in the dead of the night.

A military source told our correspondent that the military craft were recovered yesterday by the team which recovered the remains of the victims.

Our source said a bullet-

resistant boat conveying the soldiers had dozens of bullet holes while a fast attack craft (FAC) conveying naval men was punctured severally with bullets.

The death of the naval officer and ratings rankled military top brass in the Niger Delta yesterday, including the Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Andrew Azazi, an indigene of the area.

Lt.-Gen. Azazi, who was in the region on a two-day

peace shuttle, was being hosted by the Delta State Government when the incident occurred.

Similarly, it was gathered that the military aircraft carried out reprisal bombardment of target communities in the area in early yesterday.

Ijaw youth leader and member of Ondo State House of Assembly Kingsley Kuku alleged a heavy bombardment of Ijaw communities by soldiers.

Kuku claimed that 20

persons were wounded, adding that the condition of two of the victims were "critical".

Panic-stricken residents of Ijaw communities in Warri and Benin River are fleeing their homes in the wake of the clash.

Some of the fleeing riverside dwellers told our correspondent yesterday that their action was based on the fear that soldiers would launch a vengeance mission the area over the killing of their colleagues.