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JTF kills 18 militants

• *We killed 3, captured 4 —MEND*

• *'No, we lost 1'*

DENNIS NAKU, Yenagoa and NAPOLEON EHIREMEN, Warri

THREE naval ratings were feared killed and four others captured yesterday when militants attacked operatives of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) guarding an oil facility belonging to Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in the Nembe creeks of Bayelsa State.

JTF said, however, it lost one rating while two others were injured by the militants.

Its spokesman, Col. Rabe Abubakar, who confirmed the incident, said the task force head killed an unspecified number of militants during a shootout on Sunday at Okilo creeks, also in Bayelsa State.

He said over 20 armed militants were travelling in six speed boats when they were intercepted by JTF troops near Igbomotoru river.

Abubakar said four out the six boats were sunk and their occupants drowned while militants in the remaining two boats escaped with injuries.

A militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), denied any involvement in the attack, but claimed that naval personnel had opened fire on some youths who then regrouped and launched a reprisal attack on the military formation.

MEND claimed that three personnel of the Nigerian Navy were killed and four abducted, while two navy gunboats were seized by the militants.

The development has caused a setback to the recent federal government

amnesty offered militants who were willing to lay down their arms.

In an online statement obtained by Daily Champion, MEND said it would, however, intervene to secure the release of the captured servicemen.



The attack reportedly occurred about 2.00 a.m. on Monday when the gunmen led by one Kitikata attacked the military position close to the oil facility they were guarding and succeeded in overpowering them.

The attack on the SPDC facility in the Nembe creek, it was learnt, caught security operatives unawares as the militants were said to have taken advantage of the poor visibility due to bad weather.

Sources in the area told our correspondent that the invasion might not be unconnected with the February attack on the same SPDC facility in which one Kitikata, said to be a notorious militant, was said to have invaded the place to drop letters to the oil major for recognition and that the company should be making payment of N3 million monthly to his camp.

It was further learnt that the invaders had threatened to attack the company and cripple its operations in the area should SPDC refuses to meet their demand.

Confirming the incident in a statement, JTF said there was an unprovoked attack on its troops at Nembe Shell location in Bayelsa State on April 13, 2009, at about 1.45 a.m.

Abubakar said the attack was a retaliatory one on the earlier sinking of four of the militants' speedboats which led to their occupants being drowned.

He said: ``The attack was jointly carried out by Kitikata and Fara Dagogo; it was however foiled, regrettably and in the process of defending the facility, one naval rating was killed, two sustained minor injuries and four Shell speedboats were carted away by the miscreants."

He said the JTF had launched a manhunt for perpetrators of the attack and ``in just a matter of time we would get them."

The JTF also warned that the armed hoodlums would pay dearly in the event of any other attack on its locations and economic facilities, ``as we have resolved to carry out a decisive and appropriate response within the provision of its mandate."

``The security outfit is calling on the militants to seize the opportunity of the `olive branch' being handed them by the Federal Government and disarm honourably for the overall interest of the region and the nation, as security and peace are panacea for any development and investment."

In another development, Abubakar said: ``It was a bad Easter for the militants numbering 20, who were conveyed in six speedboats caught in a

cross-fire with JTF troops on Sunday April 12, 2009, at Okilo Creek near Igbomatoru River, Tebideba Route, Bayelsa State.

JTF boss said it sank four of the armed militants' speedboats with all the occupants while two managed to escape with gunshot wounds inflicted on them.

He said only one soldier was injured and currently receiving treatment.

Abubakar said that ``the militants, led by its leader Ogunbos, were coming from their hideout in the creeks, after they have carried out armed robbery and rapes”.

Abubakar recalled that, the same militant leader, Ogunbos was responsible for attacks and destruction of houseboats belonging to Daewoo Nigeria Limited, stationed at Igbomatoru area of Southern Ijaw, recently.

``This and other heinous crimes committed by this militant leader and his unpatriotic men made the JTF being a custodian of security of life and property in Niger Delta pledged to trail him and apprehend him for the criminality he has committed so as to serve as deterrent to others.

Abubakar, however, said the actions of JTF are not retaliatory but to enforce peace and order in the region.