

IN-DEPTH

How bandits kidnapped 17, killed cop in 'unique operation' in Maru

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No fewer than 17 people including women and children have been confirmed abducted and a policeman killed in Ruwan Dorawa village of Maru Local Government, Zamfara State.

The incident occurred on Sunday, November 19, when some armed bandits stormed the village around 12midnight.

Although Maru has witnessed a series of banditry attacks in the past, the Sunday's incident was described by many residents as a well-coordinated operation the bandits had ever carried out in the state.

The armed bandits numbering about 150 stormed the village on 50 motorbikes with each bike carrying three persons. The operation was suspected to be led by the popular bandits' kingpin, Dan Nagala.

On arrival at the village, the bandits were said to have divided themselves into five groups. Three groups were stationed at strategic entrances of the village, while the remaining two entered the village and abducted the villagers.

Daily Trust also gathered that unlike the previous operations carried out in some parts of the state, the bandits this time around applied a unique method of operation.

Though the bandits were armed with guns and they spent four hours operating in the village, however, the operation was conducted silently, as no single shot was fired for the purpose of scaring the residents.

A resident, who craved anonymity for fear of victimisation, said throughout the 4-hour-long operation, the bandits fired only a single shot that claimed the life of a policeman.

The resident said even though the community had prior knowledge about the coming of the bandits since Friday, that did not stop the bandits from accomplishing their mission, as according to him, all plans put in place to avert the attack were defeated.

He said the community was able to mobilise members of vigilante group to ambush the bandits on their way to Ruwan Dorawa but the plan was not successful.

"Members of the vigilante took cover at a particular location along Ruwan Dorawa-Kanoma road with a view to ambushing the bandits, but they spent the whole night there and the bandits did not show up. We suspect that the bandits also got to know about our plan and therefore changed theirs.

"So, on Sunday at 12am, the bandits stormed the village and carried out their evil operation. When they arrived, they divided themselves into five groups. Two groups entered the village while the other three were stationed at different locations to fight any reinforcement that may come from outside.

"Even the two groups that entered



■ Police Commissioner of Zamfara State, Muhammad Shehu Dalijan

the village, I can understand, have their specific targets to attack. I believe it is the handiwork of their informants. After the bandits entered the village, a group headed straight to the residence of Alhaji Saleh Mai Buhu Ruwan Dorawa and the other to the house of the Village Head, Marafa Kabiru Makau.

"The group spent about two hours trying to gain access into Saleh's house before they moved to the residence of Babangida Kafinta and later to Alhaji Bakwai's home.

"They tied up Babangida Kafinta with rope and dragged him out of the house, but they realised he was sick, therefore untied him but abducted his two children. From there, they moved to the house of Alhaji Bakwai and abducted his two grandchildren."

The other group that went to the house of the Village Head, Marafa Kabiru Makau was not so lucky to have its target as he managed to escape while the bandits were trying to gain access into the house. However, they have abducted his wife.

After Marafa's house, the bandits while on their way to the next house, met three policemen sitting on a bench in front of the police outpost that is adjacent to Marafa's residence and on seeing them they opened fire at them, thereby killing one on the spot.

According to another resident, from there, the bandits moved to the residence of a commercial driver popularly known as Bago and abducted his two wives among them a-day-old-

bride. The resident explained that the bandits rounded off the 4-hour-long operation at the residence of a resident known as Dan Malam where they abducted seven people.

"The bandits searched all the rooms in the house looking for people to abduct. They succeeded in abducting seven persons.

"Although this is the third time the bandits were attacking this village, we have never seen this kind of smooth and silent operation. I can confidently tell you that many residents got to know about the operation after the bandits fired the gun shot that killed the policeman. They spent hours operating quietly while residents were asleep.

"During the previous attacks, the bandits fired sporadic gunshots into the air to scare the sleeping residents before abducting their victims, but this time around, they fired only a single shot. Indeed, this is a terrible development. The banditry, I can say, is now taking a new and dangerous dimension. And if this continues, only God knows where this problem will take us to.

"The issue is that if the bandits continue to use this silent method of operation, many communities will suffer more in their hands because residents will not be able to make any resistance whenever they are under attack. You know, some communities used to resist bandits' attacks and it helped a lot, but with the coming of this kind of operation, the bandits can operate for several hours without having

any resistance from the residents.

"Villages like Ruwan Dorawa, Kanoma and Sado among others that are sharing borders with a thick forest that linked Maru with various towns and villages like Anka, Dansadau in Zamfara State and Birnin-Gwari and Zuru in Kaduna and Kebbi states, respectively, will continue to be in serious danger at least for being soft targets for the bandits. The bandits can easily storm the villages, abduct and take their victims into the forest unchallenged."

Another factor that gives the bandits an opportunity for conducting their devilish acts in Maru axis, according to the locals, is the increasing activities of local mining.

According to a resident, who also does not want his name in print, the bandits are also aware of all the business activities that are taking place in the area, therefore, have the knowledge of money that is being circulated among the people.

"The bandits have full knowledge of all the business activities that are taking place in the villages around. They know who got what among the residents and whenever the money exchanged hands, they know and they will follow it up with whoever is involved.

"Take Mutunji village for instance. It is a village that is agriculturally blessed. The community had planted a large quantity of crops this year, but the bandits have placed a N200 million levy on the farmers. They said the farmers must pay the money before harvesting their crops.

"Again, the village was endowed with huge mineral resources. So, activities of mining are also taking place in this village and the bandits are conscious of what the local miners are getting. Therefore, anytime a local miner got gold or any of the mineral resources available in the area, they will follow it up with him. They will either abduct the miner himself or any of his relatives and they will ensure that a handsome ransom is collected before releasing whoever is abducted. This is the situation we find ourselves in."

Daily Trust reports that for the 17 victims of Sunday attack, up till the time of filing this report, the bandits did not call relatives of the abducted persons to demand for ransom.

Efforts to get a reaction from the police did not yield any positive result, as the Police Public Relations Officer, Zamfara State Command, ASP Yazid Abubakar did not respond to the several calls put to him by our reporter.

However, a source within the police confided in Daily Trust that a team of policemen attached to Maru Police Divisional Office were dispatched to Ruwan Dorawa on Monday to recover the corpse of the murdered policeman.

"Our people were at Ruwan Dorawa village on Monday and they brought the corpse of the policeman to Maru Police Divisional Office. I am sure the corpse was handed over to the family of the deceased for a befitting burial."