

Task force kills four policemen in Rivers

*From Kelvin Ebiri,
Port Harcourt*

FOUR policemen from the Rumuji Police Station were yesterday allegedly killed in error by men of the Joint Task Force (JTF) at the Mgbuitanwo junction in Emuoaha Local Council of Rivers State.

The JTF and the Rivers State Police Command have already commenced investigation into the circumstances surrounding the murder of the policemen comprising an inspector, a sergeant, corporal and a constable.

A senior police officer, who pleaded anonymity told *The Guardian* that the Rumuji Police Station received a distress call in the early hours of yesterday that there was a robbery incident along the Ogbakiri-Buguma Road, which prompted the official to move to the area.

He said: "Eye witnesses told us that the policemen were at a checkpoint when they got a signal that there was a robbery. We gathered that some people also allegedly approached

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them to complain of the robbery incident

"Based on this, the four policemen who were on duty close to the area were quickly dispatched to forestall the robbery. Incidentally, when they got there the robbers had left. But as they were driving back, they allegedly encountered men of the JTF," he said.

The Guardian further learnt that when the policemen met the JTF team comprising the Navy, Army, Air Force, and the State Security Services (SSS) who might equally have received same signal at

the Mgbuitanwo Junction, they stopped to identify one another.

An unconfirmed report claimed that the JTF team suspected the policemen to be militants or robbers and therefore disarmed them for a search. Afterwards, they allegedly forced them into a vehicle and drove them into a bush where they were shot. The remains of the policemen were later dumped near the road.

A police officer said that a team of investigators sent to the area yesterday morning to unravel the circumstances that led to the death of the security personnel

claimed that "the victims were shouting that they were policemen. But the JTF men refused to listen to their plea."

When contacted, the Rivers State Police Public Relations Officer, Mrs. Ireju Barasua, a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) confirmed the murder of the four policemen. She explained that the men were killed at Mgbuitanwo junction and that the circumstance of their murder was being investigated by the police.

The Brigade Commander of the 2nd Amphibious Brigade, Port Harcourt, in charge of the JTF, Brigadier-General

Samuel Salihu, told The Guardian on telephone, that he had heard of the incident and was investigating it. Salihu who returned to Port Harcourt yesterday after an internal security exercise at Abak, Akwa Ibom State, said: "I was told there was an exchange of fire, that there was an incident but I have not been briefed of the details yet."

Similarly, the JTF spokesperson, Major Musa Sagir, said he was yet to have the full details of the incident that led to the murder of the four officers.

The JTF had been sta-

tioned in Ogbakiri, a stronghold of militants and criminal gangs involved in the kidnapping of oil workers in the State. Last Sunday, the SSS paraded two suspected militants, Mr. Ekene Ibekuka (a.k.a. Jarol) and Nnamdi Eme Jackson, who were alleged to be involved in kidnapping around the Ogbakiri-Rumuolumeni axis.

They reportedly confessed that they were part of a 15-man gang that abducted Neil Robert Mirrlees (a Briton) and Graham Billy Ray an (American), both workers of Pivot GIS Limited.