

15 Oil Thieves Feared Dead In Clash With Navy

From KELVIN EBIRI AND ROSEANN CHIKEREUBA, PORT HARCOURT

THEY were already in their act, the oil thieves, when nemesis caught up with them. They were reportedly discovered by men of the Nigerian Navy who decided to shout first before asking questions.

By the time the rattle of gunfire quietened around the Soku creeks in Rivers State, the boats in which they stock piled the proceeds of their illegal bunkering act were aglow with fire.

No fewer than 15 of them were roasted. It

was late Thursday night.

A source in Ajakajak community in Andoni Local Council of the state where nine of the victims hailed from, told *The Guardian* that the deceased persons were carrying out illegal bunkering activities when the Naval personnel encountered them and decided to open fire on them.

The Guardian learnt that the bullets from the Naval gunboats triggered off the fire that gutted the boats of the oil bunkers and killed

them in the process.

According to the source, the bunkerers' boats and a vehicle that was conveying tons of raw petroleum went aflame. It was a deadly incident.

"Nine boys from my community, Ajakajak, were victims of the incident. You will recall that some youths from this community last year December were also killed in similar circumstance," the source said.

When contacted, the spokesperson of the Pathfinder Naval command, Lieutenant Way Olabisi and that of the Police, Mrs. Ireju

Barasua said they were not aware of the incident because of the remoteness of the area where it occurred.

Meanwhile men of the Nigerian Navy also yesterday paraded 10 suspected persons arrested for oil theft along Agwo waterways in Onne, Rivers State in Port Harcourt.

While parading the suspects, Lieutenant Way Olabisi explained that the navy patrol team ran into them in the early hours of yesterday while they were siphoning petroleum products into some vessels and barges.

The Naval spokesman said the suspects were caught in the act and that some barges and vessels recovered from them varied in quantity.

According to him, "We did night patrol along the waterways. And it was in the process that our men ran into some vessels on illegal exercise. They had AGO and the source is illegal because we recovered some equipment from them used for bunkering operations."

He disclosed that the ship had 120 liters AGO while the barge had five thousand of the same product.