

## Five feared dead as navy, gunmen clash in Rivers

A GUN duel with suspected sea bandits has left one naval rating, three gunmen and a civilian dead during an attack on a houseboat protecting Shell Petroleum Development Company flow station at Orubiri in Rivers State.

Sea pirates also raided a ship owned by Norwegian freighter Spar Shipping near Port Harcourt in the early hours of yesterday.

*The Guardian* learnt that about 30 bandits stormed the Orubiri houseboat at about 1:45 a.m. yesterday. The gunmen, whose motive could not be ascertained, were said to have engaged the

naval personnel on board the houseboat in a gun duel.

The Joint Task Force spokesperson, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, who confirmed the incident told *The Guardian* that naval personnel gallantly responded to the challenge and successfully repelled the attack, although not without casualty. It is greatly feared that one naval rating might have died in the process and also a civilian worker who was hit by militants' stray bullet.

Musa also revealed that three of the bandits were killed during the gun duel which lasted close to two

*From Kelvin Ebiri,  
Port Harcourt*

hours, while several others sustained gunshot injuries of various degrees.

The bandits reportedly made away with two Passport-19 patrol boats anchored by the houseboat. The boats are specially designed light river craft used for waterway patrol from a designated command point.

It could not be confirmed if the bandits attacked any oil facility in

the area. Efforts to reach officials of Shell by telephone throughout yesterday proved abortive.

Similarly, the Norwegian vessel, *Spar Gemini* was raided in the early hours of yesterday near Port Harcourt, when an unspecified number of sea pirates invaded the vessel, which had a 22-man crew said to be from India and looted valuables from it. Weapons were allegedly used in the attack, but no one was reported injured in the

incident.

After the raid of the 53,000-ton bulk carrier which is owned by Bergen-based Spar Shipping, the sea pirates left the ship without abducting any of the crew members on board.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of Bonny Council Area, Mr. Edward Pepple said security had been beefed up on the island to forestall further attacks from armed bandits who recently attacked a military checkpoint and police station.

Pepple told *The Guardian* that security

operatives under the aegis of the Joint Task Force (JTF) had been deployed to various parts of the community to further enhance previous security arrangements.

He described as untrue the allegation that thousands of persons have fled the island for fear of attack by bandits.

The recent spates of attacks have forced most of the banks operating in Bonny to close down, but the chairman said they had reopened following the assurance given to them by the government and relevant security agencies.