

Militants Kill Five Naval Officers

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• Ijaw Allege Reprisal Attacks

Navy Commander Francis Niyi Kolawole, four ratings and two civilians were on Wednesday night killed by militants who ambushed two Chevron vessels in Chanomi creek, Delta State.

Several other Naval men

and the crew members were seriously injured.

The two ships, which left Warri on Wednesday afternoon, were conveying equipment and food items to their base in Escravos when they were attacked by youths in

20 speed boats.

The news has devastated the base of NNS Delta in Warri.

Joint Task Force (JTF) Commander, Brig. Gen. Alfred Ilogho, confirmed the attack but said informa-

tion on the deaths was still sketchy at press time.

"The attack may not have been carried out by militants but by hoodlums hiding under the guise of militants," he explained.

NNS Delta Commander,

Navy Capt. Mufutau Ajibade, was in a meeting when contacted on Thursday, so he could not make comment.

However, the only Ijaw member of the Ondo State Assembly, Kingsley Kuku, said in a telephone interview that reprisal attacks are be-

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ing carried out on Ijaw villages by the military.

He alleged that the troops are searching for those who killed the Naval men, a claim denied by a senior Naval officer who insisted that report on the deaths was still being collated.

A statement issued on Thursday in Abuja by Naval Director of Information, Captain O.C. Medani, confirmed that the Navy has begun investigation into the killings.

He announced that Kolawole would be buried tomorrow at the military cemetery in Rivers State.

Medani added that although "information is still very sketchy, we are investigating to know what actually happened.

"In the militant attack that killed four other ratings and two civilians, the late Kolawole displayed outstanding bravery. He was killed while courageously

and gallantly defending some foreign oil workers and a gas plant that was being attacked by the militants.

"Kolawole refused to give up the gas plant to the militants or abandon the foreign oil workers and, despite overwhelming odds, fought to the very last man."