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## Navy: 12 gunmen dead in southern Nigeria clashes

The Associated Press

Published: August 15, 2008

**PORT HARCOURT, Nigeria:** Unidentified gunmen attacked a Nigerian navy convoy in restive southern Nigeria on Friday and a dozen assailants died in the clash, military officials said.

The two naval vessels were heading to a base near a Royal Dutch Shell PLC installation in the Niger Delta when attackers riding in speedboats fired on the convoy, prompting a counterattack that left 12 assailants dead, said navy spokesman Lt. Olabisi Way. Way said no sailors died in the clash.

Myriad armed gangs roam the southern delta region where oil is pumped for Africa's biggest petroleum industry. While armed men frequently clash with members of the military task force sent to the region to calm two years of stepped-up violence, such high death tolls are very rare.

It was unclear to which faction the gunmen belonged or why they attacked the navy. Gunmen often try to overrun military patrols with the aim of stealing military equipment.

The region's main militant group, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, didn't immediately respond to e-mails seeking information. The attack took place in an area known to be a hotbed of gunmen allied with the head of a criminal syndicate called Ateke Tom.

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Criminals and militants are closely intertwined in the Niger Delta, with various groups vying for predominance in regions where oil pipelines can be illegally tapped and the crude sold overseas for millions of dollars.

Two years of stepped-up violence have slashed Nigeria's total daily oil output by about one-quarter, helping send prices higher in international markets.



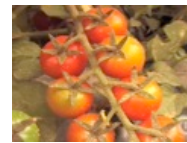
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Jacky Naegelen/Reuters

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