

Bunkering: 50 die in Bayelsa

AT least, 50 able-bodied youths ran into death last week in one of the Bayelsa creeks while engaging in an illegal bunkering business.

The Nation gathered that about 10 big boats with which they were doing the unholy business were also lost to the inferno that lasted several hours.

Some militants were said to have employed sophisticated equipment to "tap petrol" from NNPC pipelines at different creeks which they "allocate" to their customers from different states.

It was learnt that petroleum dealers from the littoral states, particularly Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Delta and Ondo take the lead in the business, Popularly tagged *mole-mole*.

Although they had been in the business for months, with minor incidents, the dealers, had a bitter story to tell after the last Wednesday's encounter with fire.

"It was the worst experience I have had since I reluctantly joined them four months ago.

"My initial fear was the risk of being arrested while returning to base by security agents, and with the uniform men well taken care-off, we never envisaged any problem," a dealer

By Alex Kalejaiye

who lost his boat with four "boys" narrated.

He lamented that his two 40 horses power outboard engines equally went down the sea with the boat without a trace.

"I did not follow them that day, but from what I gathered, someone must have been careless with fire," he said.

He explained that the militants foresaw such incident and made it mandatory that the boats are positioned at safe distance.

"Not less than 10 boats are involved in the fire disaster, and each boat usually have between four and six persons. Conservatively put, over 50 people must have been consumed by the fire.

"Unfortunately it is not a thing that can be reported to the police because it is illegal.

"The only painful thing there are the souls that are gone. Ordinarily, I could just hire a boat and the militants will fill my tanks for me to meet up again," he said.

An average boat, built in the likeness of a ship, contains about five standard petro tanks with a capacity for thousands of litres.

Denied access to their God-given resources, the youths opted for a self-help measure to ensure better share of the cake.

When contacted, a source at Bayelsa State Police said the command was not aware of the accident.

He explained that so many of such had happened in the past without any one informing the police.

"They know it is their cross which they don't need

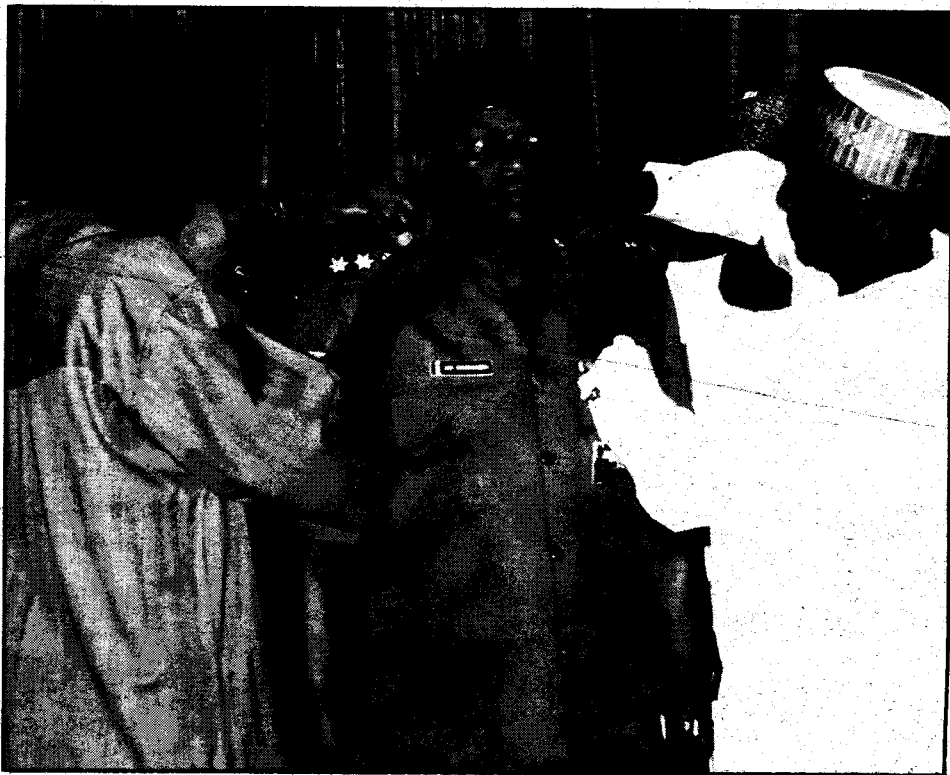
to share with the public and we are not bothered," he said.

Ijaw and Itsekiri militias clashed around Madangho area of Delta state penultimate week over control of illegal bunkering 'territory'.

It was gathered that the disputed route was ceded to them by security agents and multi-

national companies to ensure peace.

The Bayelsa inferno occurred barely 24 hours after the Christmas day petroleum pipeline fire that happened at the Agbagbo village in Iru Local Government Area of Lagos State.



• President Umar Musa Yar'Adua, (left) and his Vice, Dr. Jonathan Goodluck, decorating Lt. Col. Mustapha Onoyiveta with his new rank of Colonel at State House Abuja on Friday