

# Many feared dead as military helicopter attacks passenger boat in Rivers

Tola Adenubi | Lagos and Onyema Godwin | Port Harcourt

AN unidentified military helicopter on Thursday evening shot and killed some occupants of a passenger boat in Rivers State.

A member of the Association of Tourist Boat Operators and Water Transporters of Nigeria (ATBOWATON) in Nembe wharf, Mr Douglas Nyamu, explained that the military helicopter, apparently on the trail of sea robbers or sea pirates, opened fire on the passenger boat which was conveying foodstuffs from Nembe to Bonny Island.

Nyamu said: "The local boat that just left here to Bonny, within the Treasure Island area, a chopper or what I will call a flight helicopter descended so low to about 500 meters above sea level and started shooting at the wooden boat.

"From the information we got from a boat driver, there were passengers on the boat. The boat also contained foodstuff such as garri, rice and other items.

"Everyone knows that this is the route where we transport foodstuff to Bonny. Some people died in the boat as a result of the shooting.

"The identity of the helicopter has not been confirmed. We hear it belongs to the Nigerian Air Force while there are also rumours that it is part of the assets of the Deep Blue maritime project recently launched by the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), in collaboration with the Navy.

"We don't know what to believe because the helicopter, after shooting, disappeared into thin air. We need the authorities in charge of such craft to come out and take responsibility."

Confirming the incident in a statement on Friday, the

officer-in-charge of the Marine Police, Bonny, Solomon Adeniyi, said his office received a report about the incident, adding that efforts were being made to get further details on the incident.

Adeniyi stated that victims of the shooting, which he claimed happened along the Bonny River at Dutch Island in Okrika Local Government Area, were currently receiving treatment at an undisclosed hospital in Okrika while the other survivors were being conveyed to Bonny. He, however, would not talk on the number of the dead.

As of the time of filing in this report, it was unclear whether

the chopper belonged to the Nigerian Air Force or the Nigerian Navy, or any other arm of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Shrugging off fears as to whether the chopper is one of the assets of the Deep Blue project, NIMASA explained that all aircraft under the Deep Blue project were presently at base in Lagos.

In a message to *Saturday Tribune* on Friday, Mr Ubong Esien, Special Adviser to NIMASA Director General, Dr Bashir Jamoh, quoted the Deep Blue Commander, Commodore D.E. Dauda as saying, "Deep Blue Project Special Mission Helicopters and aircraft are presently at

base in Lagos.

"I didn't deploy any for mission in the last two weeks. The Special Mission Helicopters were not even armed as of yesterday, Thursday the 26th of August, when on display during the graduation ceremony of the pilots and technical crew."

Also speaking on the incident, the Commanding Officer of the Forward Operating Base (FOB), Nigerian Navy, Bonny, Captain Rafiu Oladejo, said investigation had commenced to ascertain the veracity of the incident.

The 115 Special Operations Group, Nigerian Air Force, Port Harcourt could not be reached for comment.

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