

Militants attack warship, kill naval personnel

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THE daring Niger Delta militants, in the early hours of Wednesday, attacked the naval gunship, **NNS Obula**, killing a yet-to-be-identified naval personnel.

Five others who were critically injured in the operation are currently receiving treatment in an undisclosed hospital.

There were conflicting reports on the exact location of the attack, the time of the incident and number of casualties.

Our correspondent gathered from a naval source in Yenagoa that the militants attacked the gunship on the **Pennington River** in

Ekeremor/Southern Ijaw Local Government Areas of Bayelsa State, at about 2:15am on Wednesday.

The Spokesman of the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Major Omale Ochagwuba, in a telephone interview from Warri, however, said the attack took place at the Funiwa Offshore Oilfield, around 11:50pm on Tuesday, with six military men "wounded."

Ochagwuba added that one of the militants was killed and currently in JTF's custody, but declined to comment on the death of the naval personnel, stressing that investigations into the matter would continue.

A senior official of the Bayelsa unit of the JTF, who

craved anonymity, said the attack took place around Forcados River in Delta state, bordering Bayelsa state. He also confirmed the casualties.

NNS Obula is the naval gunship assigned to cover the Estuary of Amatu Field in Bayelsa State. The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria operates the EA field in Ekeremor LGA of Bayelsa State.

The outgoing Commander of the JTF, Brig.-Gen. Lawrence Ngubane, was contacted through his mobile telephone line for further details, but the phone kept ringing out.

The Chairman of the Dodo River Regional

Development Council, Mr. Berry Negerese, in a telephone interview in Yenagoa, also confirmed the attack and described the militants as "criminals who would be exposed by the gods of Ijawland."

As at press time, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta had claimed responsibility for the attack, with the men of the JTF still being deployed in the area to prevent further attacks and ensure the safety of the oil workers.

It will be recalled that members of the dreaded MEND had declared that they would resume attacks on facilities of oil companies in the region.