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## Militants invade Bonny crude loading terminal

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Heavily armed militants on Saturday night invaded the crude oil loading platform in Bonny, Rivers State and shot at several vessels, which were carrying out legitimate businesses in the area.

A security source said the gunmen, who came in speedboats, stormed the platform at about 10pm and opened fire on an oil tanker, "Front Chief," belonging to Total Oil Nigeria Limited.

The source said despite the gunfire that was unleashed on the vessel, the crewmen, braved the situation and refused to allow the militants to come on board.

Apparently angry, he said the militants went on rampage and shot carelessly at other vessels that were within the precincts of the loading bay.

Some of the vessels and tugboats attacked within the loading terminal vicinity included Premier Njasi, MT Front Chief and two service boats; Wax Bill and MV Gabriel.

It was learnt that some of the militants that were patrolling the area beyond the loading bay, intercepted a tugboat, which was towing a barge from Bonny to Calabar, Cross Rivers State.

It was feared that the captain and one of the crewmen on the boat might have been killed during the attack which took place outside the reach of the Navy gunboats on patrol around the area.

It was also feared that the entire crew on Wax Bill might have been abducted as the vessel was found adrift near Total Amenam Field at about 8.15am on Sunday.

A source said the vessel had been towed back to Bonny without any soul on board.

Other vessels near the area made u-turns and moved deep into the sea, while sending signals to the Navy to come to their aide.

Meanwhile, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta on Sunday said it had separated the two Britons it held hostage while also moving them deeper into the creeks.

In an e-mail to The Punch, the spokesman of the group, Jomo Gbomo, warned against the continued military assault on fishing communities in the region, saying that Saturday's attack on Andoni communities was based on a faulty intelligence report.

Gbomo said the military wrongly raided Ajakajak, Uduangama and Okukpor communities in search of the British hostages; Robin Barry Hughes and Matthew John Maguire.

In a related development, there were indications on Sunday that the Joint Task Force may have missed its major target of freeing two British hostages which necessitated its invasion of three communities in Andoni Local Government Area of Rivers State on

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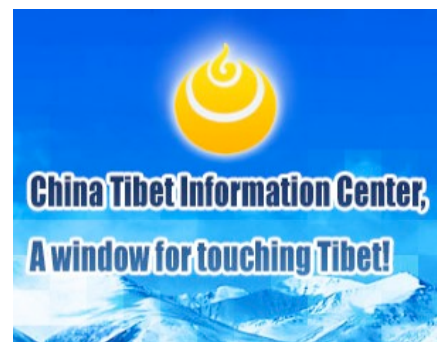
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Friday.

Associated Press reported militants on Sunday as saying that the Nigerian military botched a rescue mission aimed at liberating hostages.

The militants said the hostages were not in the village where the military launched its attack, which they said left some men, women and children dead.

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