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Jonathan's aides stranded as B'Haram attacks Maiduguri

JANUARY 26, 2015 BY FIDELIS SORIWEI, OLALEKAN ADETAYO AND KAYODE IDOWU 128 COMMENTS

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Director of Defence Information, Maj.-Gen. Chris Olukolade

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Nine soldiers and 56 insurgents are believed to have lost their lives in an attempt by Boko Haram to capture Maiduguri, Borno State on Sunday morning.

The attempt by the sect to capture the town began at about 12.30am and could not be suppressed by a combined team of soldiers, Air Force personnel and vigilante groups until about 11am.

It was gathered that hundreds of heavily armed insurgents tried to enter the state capital through Jinikin-Moronti along the Jos-Kano Highway and close to the 1,000 and 707 housing estates in the city.

But as gunshots boomed less than four kilometres to the city, another set of militants launched attacks on Mongunu, Kodunga and Gubio, also in the troubled state.

They were said to have taken over Monguno and seized a military barracks during a fierce battle in which the Brigade Commander and some of his men were injured.

The PUNCH learnt from an eyewitness that the terrorists, who tried to invade Maiduguri were confronted by the soldiers from the 33 Battalion Barracks and other security operatives at the city's entrance.

The exchange of gunfire between them started at about 12.30 am till 3.30am when the insurgents retreated.

Just when residents of the city began to heave a sigh of relief, the militants came back at 5.40am with renewed vigour and engaged the soldiers in another round of fierce fighting.

The military had to deploy Airforce jets to carry out aerial bombardments to suppress the insurgents at about 11am on Sunday.

Some members of President Goodluck Jonathan's campaign delegation to the city were said to have been trapped. Jonathan left Maiduguri on Saturday immediately after his reelection campaign in Borno State.

A vigilante, who did not want his name in print, said about nine soldiers and 56 insurgents were killed at the end of the battle.

He added that the terrorists also lost three Armoured Personnel Carriers and two Toyota Hilux vans during the battle.

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Another member of a vigilance group claimed that the bodies of the felled soldiers were conveyed in a military van to the Garrison Command along Pompomari at about 12.30 pm.

Some Airforce jets were seen hovering over the town even after the battle which made fear-stricken residents to stay away from churches ended.

Modu Baana, another vigilante, who spoke with a group of journalists, said "It was around 2am that we heard that over 100 heavily armed men with APCs and Hilux vans were about coming into the town through Jimtilo. But we thank God that fighter jets really helped to make them to run away.

The development made military authorities to slam a 24-hour curfew on the city to enable security operatives fish out some insurgents believed to be in a hiding.

The Public Relations Officer, 7 Division of the Nigerian Army Col. Sani Usman, in a text message to journalists, advised residents to stay indoors.

But the Defence Headquarters later said in a tweet on its twitter handle on Sunday, that the curfew was indefinite.

"Curfew is imposed on Maiduguri with immediate effect till further notice as pursuit of retreating terrorists begins," the tweet read.

The DHQ had in an earlier tweet on Sunday morning, said that troops were repelling another attacks on Mongonu by the insurgents.

"Troops are repelling simultaneous attacks on Monguno and Maiduguri by terrorists. Coordinated air and land operations are being conducted now," it added.

The Director, Defence Information, Maj. Gen Chris Olukolade, in an electronic mail on Sunday, however said that "scores of the terrorists died in the course of the three attacks (Maiduguri, Monguno and Kodunga) while many of them were also captured with wounds."

Olukolade added said that some troops were killed and others who sustained injuries taken to hospitals for medical attention.

He explained that soldiers pulled out of Monguno following injuries sustained by the Brigade Commander of Monguno and his men.

The Defence spokesman said that the military had commenced an air campaign in Monguno since the ground troops retreated from the town.

He added that a cordon and search efforts had also started to determine the "casualties suffered by the terrorists" in the three encounters.

According to him, items recovered from the insurgents included a Cobra armoured vehicle, heavy artillery guns, as well as some machine guns and other weapons...'

He stated also that three Volkswagen Golf cars loaded with explosives were destroyed.

Olukolade explained that troops successfully repelled the attempt by the militanst to seize Konduga.

He said that the military would lift the curfew on Maiduguri as soon as the mopping operation was concluded.

The DHQ "spokesman however explained that 'citizens will be allowed to go about their lawful activities from 6am tomorrow (today)."

The insurgents, according to sources, attacked the town with heavy equipment and were able to suppress the soldiers before hoisting their black and white flag.

One of the sources claimed that the soldiers who withdrew included Cameroonians that had assisted to keep the place secured before the attack.

It was also gathered that some of the people that were killed were Customs officers and residents hit by stray bullets.

Governor Kashim Shettima who shelved a planned trip to Abuja, called on the people to stay calm since security forces were making frantic efforts to safeguard their lives and property.

Shettima, who also regretted the attack on Monguno, praised the security agents for pushing back the insurgents from Maiduguri.



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Quote of the day.

"I am sure and let the world know that the people who did this thing were PDP members and those politicians in Abuja were the ones behind it; they were not APC members." *Bauchi State Governor and member of the National Executive Committee of the PDP, Isa Yuguda, saying those who organised the youths that threw stones and pelted the President with sachet water, were members of the party from Abuja.*

He said his government was screening and taking records of survivors of the Monguno attack with a view to accommodating and offering them immediate palliatives as internally displaced persons.

He called on them to regard what happened as ordained by God, praying that the situation "will insha Allah, come to an end, through intensified commitments on the parts of all stakeholders and sustained invocation of God for divine intervention."

The governor, in a statement by his media aide, Isa Gusau, said his administration would continue to do everything possible until territories seized by insurgents were reclaimed and sustainable peace and stability achieved in all parts of the state.

Shettima said, "Our armed forces gallantly repelled attacks on parts of Borno State today(Sunday). We must commend their patriotic efforts. We are very much in touch with leaders of security forces and we will continue to afford them all the support they need as we have always done from our first day in office till date.

"So long as we have the resources, we will continue to regard the efforts to reclaim peace, our number one area of commitment.

"I want to reassure the good people of Borno State that we will never abdicate our responsibility as those they entrusted with leadership. I was supposed to be in Abuja this (Sunday) morning for an important engagement but I have canceled all engagements outside Borno State. We will remain behind with our people through thick and thin as we have been doing as a matter of constitutional and moral covenant."

Meanwhile, *The PUNCH* learnt that the members of the advance team of Jonathan who were trapped in Maiduguri had been moved to a military facility in the city for their safety.

The team comprises representatives of the media, medical and security units of the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

It was gathered that the initial plan was for the team to leave the city immediately after the rally on Saturday. But one of them said on the telephone that they decided to travel on Sunday based on a security advice.

He added that the hotel where they stayed before they were moved to the security facility was one of the worst hit by the battle for Maiduguri.

The team member said, "We are stranded. We can't move out of Maiduguri. Security men fought the insurgents till day break. There is so much sound of exchange of fire. I guess we were the targets of the insurgents.

"We wanted to leave yesterday (Saturday) after the rally but we were told that it was too late to do so.

"This morning (Sunday), we wanted to leave by 7am but the insurgents started advancing again. So we are still in the security formation where we were taken to."

On Saturday, Boko Haram insurgents raided six villages in Michika Local Government Area of Adamawa State.

A hunter, Ibrahim Gulak, who spoke on the telephone from Michika, claimed that the terrorists killed some people and kidnapped youths and women after destroying properties worth millions of naira.

He gave the names of the villages as Mbororo, Shahu, Liddle, Garta, Kamale and Ghumci.

Gulak said the insurgents came in their hundreds in vans and on motor cycles at about 8pm when the villagers were preparing to go to bed.

He said, " The attackers were mercilessly slaughtering people from house to house. They also burnt houses after looting them.

"Most of the villagers fled to the mountains For now, I can't say the number of casualty as we are still in the bush, but they slaughtered many. They also abducted many trapped residents, mostly youths and women."


A member of the Adamawa State House of Assembly, Adamu Kamale, who said the attacks started on Friday, called on the government to come to the rescue of the villagers.


The sect, according reports late on Sunday, released about 200 women and children it abducted in Yobe State.


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