

16 suspected vandals killed in explosion

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No fewer than 16 suspected pipeline vandals have been reportedly killed in an explosion in the Arepo area of Ogun State.

PUNCH Metro learnt that the vandals had attacked men of the Joint Task Force, codenamed *Operation Awase*, when the attack boomeranged and killed the suspects.

The Joint Task Force was said to have stormed the area to flush out the vandals by clearing the bush,

which provided a hiding place for the vandals.

It was learnt that the officers wanted to clear the bush from Arepo to link the Ikorodu area.

A source said the vandals, who got a tip-off, went ahead of the officers and poured petrol on the path the military officers were to take.

He said, "As the military men moved in to start their operation, they were not aware that the vandals were already spying on them and watching their movement.

"However, it was another set of vandals that went to set the path on fire. These vandals did not know the extent to which the first group poured petrol and they had unknowingly entered into part of the place.

"As they threw the firebomb at the military men, the fire consumed them. No fewer than 16 of them died."

A motorcycle rider told *PUNCH Metro* that he sighted the officers taking some corpses out of the creek.

He said, "I cannot count the number of casualties, but they were many. There were three military vehicles. The fight between the military and the vandals is on a daily basis and we have not been having peace in this community. We are always afraid."

A top official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that there was an explosion, but said he could not tell if there was any casualty.

"I was told that the NNPC officials were already there and they said they had been trying to put out the fire without any result. As of today (Wednesday), they are still on it," he said.

Flag Officer Commanding Western Naval Command, Rear Admiral Ralph Osondu, said, "I don't have the authority to comment on it. It is only the defence headquarters that can talk about *Operation Awase*."

The Public Relations Officer of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, Ohi Alegbe, said, "The vandals again broke into the system. We are working on putting out the fire. There is no casualty so far."

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