

JTF troops shoot boat driver dead in Bayelsa

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Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Tukur Buratai

Simon Utebor, Yenagoa

The troops of the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, *Operation Pulo Shield*, have opened fire on some boat passengers in the Brass area of Bayelsa State, killing a driver in the process.

It was learnt that the driver, identified simply as Ernest, hailed from Olugbobiri, in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of the state.

A resident of Brass community, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Ernest, until his death, worked for an oil-servicing firm in the region.

The source added that the troops, who were patrolling the waterways on Sunday in search of militants, mistook the occupants of the speedboat operated by Ernest for hoodlums and fired at them.

He said trouble started when the soldiers sighted the 200-horsepower boat, which was moving

from Brass to an unknown location and flagged it down.

The boat driver allegedly refused to stop.

He claimed that the occupants of the speedboat, who noticed the troops' boat and armed uniformed soldiers, however, thought the soldiers were pirates.

The source said, "Ernest was coming from Brass when he noticed the soldiers' boat. But all the occupants of Ernest's boat thought the boat belonged to pirates. They reasoned that pirates had always disguised like soldiers to attack unsuspecting members of the public.

"They ignored all the efforts by the patrol boat to stop them. While they were speeding out of perceived danger, the soldiers released a warning shot into the air; but the speedboat kept moving. Out of fear, the passengers jumped into the water and swam into the mangrove."

He, however, said Ernest was the only one left in the boat when the soldiers fired at it, adding that the bullet hit the boat operator and he died on the spot.

He said the soldiers later approached the boat and discovered that the dead driver was unarmed.

"They took his remains to a morgue in a hospital in Yenagoa, the state capital," the source added.

A human rights activist, Alagoa Morris, condemned the killing of the boat driver.

Morris, who is the Bayelsa State Coordinator, Environmental Right Action, said the troops did not display professionalism.

He said, "The killing of a law-abiding citizen by the soldiers is highly condemnable. The victim deserves justice."

Efforts to reach the Coordinator, Joint Media Campaign Centre, Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Col. Ado Isa, were not successful as his mobile phone indicated that it was switched off.

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