

Samson Folarin

No fewer than three policemen and four residents of the Ogun Waterside Local Government Area of Ogun State lost their lives during encounters with some gunmen suspected to be militants.

PUNCH Metro learnt that the three policemen, attached to the Lagos State Special Anti-Robbery Squad, lost their lives last Thursday after the gunmen abducted a Chinese expatriate.

The operatives had engaged the gunmen in a shootout when the three policemen were killed.

Another resident was also hit by a stray bullet and died on the spot.

Our correspondent learnt that the assailants on Friday attacked the home of a businessman, identified as Chief Rafiu Daramola, where they reportedly carted away N4.7m.

They were said to have shot dead three residents while escaping from the scene.

A community leader, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the three policemen and one resident were killed in Odi Omi, a boundary community between Lagos and Ogun states.

He said, “Last week Thursday, the militants kidnapped a Chinese expatriate. As they were leaving with their victim, the operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad engaged them in a gun battle. The gunmen, however, shot dead three policemen and an indigene. The corpses were later removed and deposited in a morgue by the police.”

PUNCH Metro gathered that around 8pm on Friday, the militants attacked the home of the businessman in the Iwopin community.

A family member of the victim said the suspects entered the house through the bathroom and ceiling.

He said, “Our father had gone to turn on the generator when the men entered the house. Some of them entered through the bathroom and others came in through the ceiling.

“They gathered all his wives and children together and asked for our phones, which we surrendered to them. They asked for our father and searched everywhere for him.

“When they could not find him, they asked for where the safe was. They broke into the room where he kept the safe and damaged it. They took N4.7m and left.”

Our correspondent was told that the money were proceeds of sales from the bakery and filling station owned by the businessman.

It was gathered that there was no bank in the community due to the activities of the gunmen, who usually move around in groups in the day time.

PUNCH Metro learnt that as the men were driving back, their operational vehicle broke down and efforts to make it work were abortive.

A resident said the gunmen abandoned the bus and trekked back into the community.

He said, “The community is usually deserted from 8pm when most residents will be on bed. As a result, there was no vehicle for them to hijack as a getaway.

“They trekked back and started shooting continuously from around 1am till the early hours of Saturday. The three victims heard the gunshots and came out to know what was happening. But they fell into the hands of the gunmen who shot them dead.”

The victims were identified as a 25-year-old motorcycle rider, Yusuf Ogunse; a 68-year-old retired local government worker, Omotayo Onokoya; and a farmer from Edo State, one Ajapa.

A resident said when the police were alerted to the incident, they refused to respond, saying it was still dark.

“The militants, in a bid to guarantee their own safety, continued to shoot till 7am. They called their colleagues on the telephone and asked them to bring a speedboat, through which they eventually escaped,” he added.

A source said when community youths approached the abandoned vehicle, it was discovered that the number plate had been removed.

However, some documents were said to have been found, through which the owner was identified.

“We called the people at the motor park where the driver worked and they said he went for a business trip. When he finally returned, they apprehended him and handed him over to the police. The suspect, an Ijaw youth, was the insider who gave them the information,” he said.

The Ogun State police spokesperson, Abimbola Oyeyemi, confirmed the killing of the three residents, adding that the slain policemen were not from the state command.

He said, “They invaded the businessman’s house, but our policemen were able to repel them. At the end of the encounter, we arrested one of the suspects, while their operational vehicle was recovered.

“The suspect is helping with investigation. The state Commissioner of Police, Ahmad Iliyasu, has deployed some special units of the police, including men from the Federal SARS, Mobile Police Force, Anti-Kidnapping Unit, and other conventional policemen, in the scene to ensure security of lives and property.”

The Chairman, Ogun Waterside LGA, Femi Onanuga, confirmed the killing of the policemen, adding that they were from the Lagos State Police Command.

He said, “The three policemen and another man were killed during the shootout to free the Chinese expatriate. It was after that encounter that the militants attacked the businessman and stole the money.

“Earlier, they had kidnapped another settler, Mrs. Shittu. She was held in captivity for two weeks, until her husband paid a ransom of N1.4m.

“We are calling on the state and federal governments to come to our rescue. These militants must not overwhelm us.”

The Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, Olarinde Famous-Cole, said he would call back to react to the incident.

He had yet to do so as of press time.