

Cotonou. She ran away from her master with her family.

How we abducted expatriates, killed soldiers in Bayelsa, Rivers –Suspects

Afeez Hanafi

Two members of a sea pirate syndicate, Kelvin Dikuro, aka General Small Voice and Erememi Captain, alias Nwalanta, have recounted their criminal escapades within the Niger Delta region, including Bayelsa and Rivers states.

They revealed how the gang kidnapped 14 foreign sailors, collected ransoms running into N15m and killed military men frustrating their operations.

The suspects were tracked down in their hideouts by operatives of the Inspector-General of Police Intelligence Response Team led by DCP Abba Kyari, relying on intelligence reports by the Nigerian Navy.

They reportedly took part in several operations, where they hijacked foreign vessels and kidnapped crews, who were released after ransom payment.

In an interview with *City Round* during the week, Dikuro, 24, said he inherited five of the AK-47 rifles they used for operations from his late elder brother arrested in 2017 for kidnapping.

He said, "After my brother's death, I inherited his guns and I formed a five-man gang. We ventured into kidnapping. We kidnapped nine foreign sailors from their vessel in January 2019 on the sea in Bayelsa State and took them to New Jerusalem Island in the Buguma Local Government Area of Rivers State.

"We kept them for 14 days and fed them with noodles. One of my brother's friends known as Commander Sunday was communicating with relatives of the victims. The sum of N5m was eventually paid as a ransom for the release of the sailors. I was given N200,000 as my



•The suspects

share and other gang members got their own share."

Dikuro stated that N400,000 of the ransom was used to buy ammunition, adding that in their second operation in Bayelsa, five foreign seafarers were abducted.

He said the victims were taken to New Jerusalem Island where they spent days and were released after N10m ransom was paid.

He added, "I got N1m as my share of the ransom. We also carried out two operations on the sea where two persons were killed. I wasn't in town when the kidnapping of the father of the Sagbama Local Government (in Bayelsa) Chairman took place. I got a call from one Preye, who informed me that my gang members were behind the kidnapping.

"He wanted me to negotiate the release of the man and he gave me N1.3m to give the boys. I fled with the money. I was arrested in my house in Omoku (Rivers State) one week after I collected the money."

Captain explained that he used to be

a fisherman before he was introduced to sea piracy and oil pipeline vandalism by a fleeing member of the gang identified as Owei.

He said, "I have gone on several kidnapping operations. The leader of our gang is known as Moriekeme from Southern Ijaw. I participated in the kidnapping of some oil workers and a military officer at Ayama in Yenagoa. We were 10 that went for that operation and all of us were armed with AK-47 rifles.

"The second kidnapping was at Dodo North Oil Rig belonging to Shell Petroleum Development. We kidnapped one of the workers on the rig at Ekeremor Local Government area of Bayelsa State. It was Moriekeme who usually negotiated with the company. I don't know how much was paid as ransom. I bought cocaine and built a house with my share of the ransom."

He said the gang also destroyed a navy houseboat at Ekremor with dynamites and killed the military men onboard because the personnel stormed their camps where they kept kidnapped victims and illegally refined petroleum products.

He stated, "Our gang also ambushed and killed four soldiers in June 2020 and took away their rifles. All our rifles are kept by Moriekeme. We attacked a merchant vessel named Ambica in Dodo River. We killed four military officers attached to the vessel and went away with their rifles.

"I have also gone for kidnapping in Rivers State where the police engaged my gang and in the process I was hit by a bullet on my right hand but we managed to escape. I also belong to a cult group called Green Lander. Moriekeme initiated me into the cult."