

Two soldiers, four others killed in Anambra during gunfight

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FOUR gunmen suspected to be members of the Eastern Security Network, the paramilitary arm of the Indigenous People of Biafra, have been killed by troops of the Nigerian Army in Ihiala town, Anambra State.

The troops were said to have engaged the ESN fighters in a gun duel after the latter allegedly invaded the community to enforce the sit-at-home order.

An officer and a soldier were also killed in the encounter, while two soldiers were reportedly injured.

A military source told one of our correspondents that one combat vehicle conveying the troops was involved in an accident during the operation.

The source said, "At 2.35pm, troops conducting stop and search operations at Obosi in the Idemili North LGA, received credible information on IPOB activities around Total Filing Station Junction at Ihiala. On reaching the scene, the troops noticed that the area was deserted.

"While making enquiries from residents, the IPOB militants fired sporadically into the air and marched through the streets before advancing towards the town.

"The troops went for them and engaged them in a gun duel along the expressway in Ihiala town. Four ESN members, including one of their commanders identified as Ejika, were neutralised.

"Items recovered included a vehicle, two pump-action double-barrelled guns, 12 live pump-action cartridges, a substance suspected to be Indian hemp, and a mobile phone. One officer and one soldier were killed and two sustained injuries.

"One combat vehicle conveying troops was involved in an accident during the operation following a technical fault."

The Director, Army Public Relations, Brigadier General Onyema Nwachukwu, confirmed the incident.

When one of our correspondents visited the Ihiala metropolis on Wednesday, he observed as most people did not open their shops for business.

An official of the Federal Road Safety Corps, who did not want

her name mentioned, said the gun battle between the soldiers and the gunmen happened on Tuesday.

It was gathered that there had been frequent attacks by gunmen at the Ihiala axis since Monday, with about four persons killed and set ablaze inside a vehicle along the road.

As of the time of filing this report, the unidentified corpses still littered the road.

The FRSC source said, "What happened was not an accident and it was not a case of a road crash. It happened during a gun battle between the soldiers and the gunmen.

"When the gun battle was going on, the soldiers' two armoured vehicles mistakenly collided and one of the vehicles somersaulted. In the process, the victims crashed. No one could go near the scene while the gun battle was on."

An eyewitness, who identified himself simply as Akachukwu, said five persons were involved in the collision and three died on the spot.

He said, "Travellers saw hell that day. I got to Ihiala Army checkpoint around 5pm from Owerri, where we started to hear gunshots. I got to my house in Ihiala by 15 minutes to 1am with the help of the military men who escorted motorists.

"During the gun battle, there was a total standstill; no vehicle was coming or going. Everybody ran helter-skelter. I hid in a corner and observed what was going on.

"More than 10 armoured vehicles were on the ground during the exchange of gunfire between the gunmen and the military. Ihiala was like a war zone within Ezego Junction."

The state police spokesman, Ikenga Tochukwu, said, "I don't have any information on this please; will get back to you."

As of the time of filing this report, he had yet to respond.

Killings

3 Chidiebube Okeoma, Owerri

THE Commissioner of Police in Imo State, Rabiul Hussaini, has ordered the Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department to go