

late former Speaker of Rivers State House of Assembly, Tonye Harry, during his condolence visit to the family in Port Harcourt yesterday.

Ex-council boss, police corporal, 2 kidnappers killed in rescue operation

FROM JOE EFFIONG,
Uyo

An attempt by the military Joint Task Force to rescue the kidnapped former chairman of Ikot Ekpene Local Government Council of Akwa Ibom State, Mr Usen Ekene, has resulted in the death of the victim and three others including a police corporal.

Two of the kidnappers were however, killed in the rescue operation that lasted for hours while another member of the task force, an SSS officer, sustained life-threatening injury.

Daily Sun gathered that Ekene was abducted three weeks ago at Nyara Enyin Ntonguno, in Ikot Ekpene Council Area. The kidnappers were said to have

demanded N50million as ransom from his family members but they could not pay to rescue their breadwinner.

It was learnt that the family members were still negotiating with the kidnappers to reduce the ransom, when some villagers sighted the former council boss in the kidnappers' hideout and immediately informed the police, who mobilised to free him.

A native of the community, Mr. Richard Okon said what they could not establish was whether the kidnappers kept Ekene somewhere farther from where they were sighted.

"We did not know that the incident would result to loss of lives. The joint patrol team that tried to rescue Ekene from his abductors

did their best, though they could not save him," Okon said.

Confirming the incident, the Police Public Relations Officer, in the state, Mr. Etim Dickson (DSP), confirmed yesterday that Ekene, a police corporal and two kidnappers died in the process, while another member of the joint patrol team, identified as an SSS official, sustained serious injury.

"It is a big blow to the force. You see, these are some of the things we suffer during rescue operations. You know this issue of rescuing people in a joint operation is not all that simple. The story is true. One of our police operatives died and an officer from the joint patrol team sustained a serious injury in the process. Two

corpses of the kidnappers had been picked.

"The kidnappers had the boldness to fire at the police first. The police shot back and killed two of them. It was unfortunate that we were unable to rescue Ekene. But what I am not sure is whether Ekene died in the process of gun battle.

"What I was told is that Ekene is an old man. He was kidnapped for three weeks. Keeping him in that forest, the man might have developed some symptoms which might lead to his exhaustion.

"I understand from friends that they were demanding N50 million, which was too high. We got to know this through calls to some friends. The man died before he could be rushed to the hospital."

Mysterious fire razes building, shops