

Many feared dead as military, bandits exchange gunfire in Niger

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From **John Adams**, Minna

Troops of the Nigerian Army and gunmen were engaged in a heavy gunfire on Friday night at Pandogari community in Rafi Local Government area of Niger State.

A source at Pandogari community told Sunday Sun that about 100 heavily armed men, three each on motorcycles attempted to storm the town to kill and rustle cattle when they met stiff resistance from the soldiers and members of the local vigilantes.

The gunmen suspected to be fleeing Zamfara and Katsina states due to the military operations going on there, invaded the town at about 6:00 pm on Friday, and made their way straight to the military base in an attempt to first of all sack the soldiers, but met fully prepared Nigerian soldiers who engaged them in a fierce gun battle.

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According to our source, the soldiers engaged the gunmen for several hours and later called for reinforcement, which promptly arrived.

Our source further disclosed that in less than one hour, no fewer than 20 trucks from Kagara loaded with armed soldiers and another 10 trucks from Birnin Gwari arrived Pandogari, and overwhelmed the gunmen who quickly retreated to the Allawa forest.

It was learnt that the gunmen suffered heavy casualties as there were bloodstains and some of their belongings seen everywhere in the bush on Saturday morning. They, however, managed to evacuate the dead and the injured ones.

A top local vigilante official, who spoke to Sunday Sun on condition of anonymity, described the battle as “very intense and serious.”

He praised the gallantry displayed by the soldiers, and equally commended the military authority for the quick response to the troops. He said that despite the reinforcement, the soldiers later resulted in the use of rocket-propelled grenades and other sophisticated weapons due to a large number of gunmen. The strategy devastated the gunmen and made them retreat into the forest.

The vigilante official said from the look of the gunmen “they were Fulani who are very young but not from Nigeria because of their mode of dressing and their intonation,” which he pointed out was completely different from the Fulani in Nigeria.

He further hinted that the gunmen might likely come back to engage the soldiers because the presence of the military and the local vigilantes had blocked all their routes and were finding it difficult to operate in the area.

“The bandits were equally looking for a base in the state because of the military operations in Zamfara and Katsina states. They have been dislodged there so they are desperately looking for a base in Niger state,” he added.

The Secretary to the State Government Alhaji Ahmed Ibrahim Matane confirmed the story, adding “what the security men did was to repel the attack.”