

Suspected herdsmen kill 3, injure 3 soldiers in Benue

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•Police arrest fake military officer, 4 suspected armed robbers, recover arms

From **Scholastica Onyeka**, Makurdi

Suspected herdsmen reportedly attacked the Ikobi community in Apa Local Government Area of Benue State, last Saturday, and killed three people.

Following the incident, troops of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS) were deployed to the area to prevent further attacks. A source, who didn't want to be named, said the troops gallantly repelled the invaders.

Other sources, however, said the OPWS troops were ambushed by the killer herders in Mbappa, Gwer West local government of the state, but the troops succeeded in overpowering the attackers even as three of the soldiers sustained injuries.

Armed herdsmen had killed the Divisional Police Officer of Gwer West local government area, Mamud Abubakar, a Superintendent of Police, with two other policemen, two children and three women in separate attacks.

The killer herders had laid siege to the area in the last couple of days, with some analysts linking the attacks to the utterances of the dethroned Emir of Kano, Lamido Sanusi and 51 others who accused the Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom, of using the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law with Livestock Guards to chase Fulani out of the state.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer, SP Catherine Anene, said she did not receive any information on the case.

Meanwhile, the Public Relations Officer (PRO), OPWS, Flight Lieutenant Audu Katty, said troops of Operation Whirl Stroke received information about an attack on Ikobi community last Saturday, at about 5pm, and responded immediately.

“The gallant troops moved to the area and cleared the community. The rampaging armed herders fled towards Nasarawa State on sighting the troops. The situation, though dicey, has been stabilised.

“The operation continued the next day, January 5, 2023, in adjoining communities. While the troops were moving towards Agagbe, they had contact with some bandits. The bandits fired at the troops and our troops engaged them with superior fire power that lasted for about 30 minutes. Three of our troops sustained various degrees of injuries. The injured troops are currently receiving treatment,” he said.

Reacting to the incident in Makurdi, the President, Tiv Youth Organisation, Timothy Hembraor, described the attack on the community and the military personnel in Gwer West as mindless and barbaric. He wondered why the herders would ambush security men whose role is peacekeeping.

Hembraor called on relevant security agencies to speedily commence the investigation of Sanusi and the other Fulani elders who recently made statements which, he said, spurred the herders to intensify their atrocities in Benue State.

“What the armed Fulani are now doing in Benue State is not a coincidence. They must have received briefings from the elders who recently wrote a petition to President Buhari against Governor Ortom.

“An investigation will certainly bring out the truth. We in Benue know who our attackers are. Sanusi and the others must be held responsible for the renewed wave of attacks on our people,” he said.

Hembraor said the ambush on the military in Gwer West is one in a series of such attacks that killer herders have carried out against security operatives within Benue State in the last few years.

Meanwhile, the Benue State Police Command said it has arrested a fake military officer and four other suspected armed robbers terrorising North Bank communities in Makurdi, the state capital.

The police also said it recovered firearms and operational accessories from the suspects. The Commissioner of Police in the State, CP Wale Abass, made the disclosure to newsmen in Makurdi, yesterday.

In a statement signed by the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Catherine Anene, the commissioner said: “On 30/1/2023, one Tyolumun Aver, also known as “Rugged” was arrested at North Bank Makurdi, dressed in military uniform at night.” He said during investigation, it was discovered that Aver was impersonating to carry out nefarious acts in the area, adding that four other people; Isaac Sefa, Saaier Tunaga, Iorpenda Nature and Tyolumun Boniface, were also arrested in connection with the case.

The commissioner said one dane gun, cartridges, military camouflage uniforms and accessories, black special forces uniforms, forged military identity cards and other operational materials were recovered from them.

He confirmed that Aver and the others were part of suspected criminals who engaged in heinous crimes, particularly armed robbery, around Makurdi-Lafia road. He said investigation was ongoing to unravel the sources of the items recovered from the suspects.