

As Nigerian Troops Approached, Girls Were Stoned to Death by Boko Haram

● *Freed females get food, medical care*

● *Videos depict troops' dexterity at dislodging terrorists*

Senator Iroegbu in Abuja with agency reports

Theft.

The Boko Haram fighters stoned some of their captives to death as Nigeria's military approached to rescue the women, survivors told *The Associated Press (AP)* yesterday.

Several women also died when they were crushed mistakenly by a Nigerian military armoured vehicle while three were blown up by a land mine as they were walking to freedom.

These tragic stories came from girls and women brought to a refugee camp in Yola, Adamawa State, still finding it hard to believe they were safe, some after more than a year in the hands of Nigeria's homegrown Islamic extremists.

"We just have to give praise to God that we are alive, those of us who have survived," said Lami Musa, 27, as she cradled her five-day-old baby girl.

She was among the 275 children, girls and women, many bewildered and traumatised, who were getting medical care and being registered yesterday on their first day out of Sambisa forest, the last known enclave of the terrorists.

Musa was in the first group to be transported by road over three days to the safety of Malkohi refugee camp, a dust-blown deserted school set among baobab trees in the outskirts of Yola.

Musa had just given birth to her yet-to-be-named baby last week when the crackle of gunfire hinted rescuers might be nearby.

"Boko Haram came and

told us they were moving out and said that we should run away with them. But we said no," she explained from a bed in the camp clinic.

"Then they started stoning us. I held my baby to my stomach and doubled over to protect her."

She and another survivor of the stoning, Salamatu Bulama, said several girls and women were killed, but they do not know exactly how many.

The horrors did not end once the military arrived. A group of women were hiding under some bushes. They could not be seen by the soldiers in an armoured personnel carrier who drove right over them.

"I think those killed there were about 10," said Bulama.

Other women died from stray bullets, she said, naming three she knew.

Bulama shielded her face with her veil and cried when she thought about another death in the camp: Her only son, a toddler of two who died of an illness she said was aggravated by malnutrition two months ago.

"What will I tell my husband?" she sobbed. She heard yesterday from other survivors using borrowed cell phones to try and trace relatives that her husband was alive and in Kaduna.

Musa said her husband, the father of the new baby, was killed by Boko Haram when they abducted her from her village of Lassa in December. She doesn't know the fate of their three other children.

At the camp, 21 girls and women with bullet wounds and fractured limbs were taken to the city hospital after they arrived Saturday

evening while yesterday, officials collated details of the rescued 61 women and 214 children, almost all girls.

Health workers put critically malnourished babies on intravenous drips, babies whose rib cages and shoulder blades protruded like skeletons were given packs of therapeutic food to suck from.

Through interviews, officials have determined that almost all those rescued are from Gumsuri, a village near the town of Chibok. It does not appear that any of those released are from the group of over 200 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram a year ago in a mass abduction that outraged many around the world.

"Based on the registration we have carried out so far, none of them is from Chibok," said Zakari Abubakar, Malkohi camp team leader for the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

More than 677 women and girls were freed when soldiers destroyed more than a dozen insurgent camps in the forest, Nigeria's military said.

Many said they had been taken captive in the past nine months, when Boko Haram had seized a large swath of northeastern Nigeria and declared it an Islamic caliphate.

It was also revealed that Boko Haram fighters killed older boys and men in front of their families before taking women and children into the forest where many died of hunger and disease, freed captives revealed yesterday after they were brought to the camp in Yola.

"They didn't allow us to move an inch," said one of the freed women, Asabe Umaru, describing her captivity in the forest. "If you needed the toilet, they followed you. We were kept in one place. We were under bondage."

"We thank God to be alive today. We thank the Nigerian army for saving our lives," she added.

"When we saw the soldiers, we raised our hands and shouted for help. Boko Haram who were guarding us started stoning us so we would follow them to another hideout, but we refused because we were sure the soldiers would rescue us," Umaru, a 24-year-old mother of two, told *Reuters*.

The prisoners suffered constant malnutrition and disease, she said. "Every day we witnessed the death of one of us and waited for our turn."

Another freed captive, Cecilia Abel, said her husband and first son had been killed in her presence before the militia forced her and her remaining eight children into the forest. For two weeks before the military arrived she had barely eaten.

"We were fed only ground dry maize in the afternoons. It was not good for human consumption," she said. "Many of us that were captured died in Sambisa forest. Even after our rescue about 10 died on our way to this place."

The prisoners were fed bread and mugs of tea as soon as they arrived at the government camp. Nineteen were in hospital for special attention, Dr. Mohammed Aminu Sulieman of the

Adamawa State Emergency Management Agency told *Reuters*.

Amnesty International estimates the insurgents, who are intent on bringing West Africa under Islamist rule, have taken more than 2,000 women and girls captive since the start of 2014. Many have been used as cooks, sex slaves or human shields.

Umaru said her group of prisoners never came in contact with the missing Chibok girls.

As they arrived the camp in Yola, the girls and women, many bewildered and traumatised, were registered, fed and given medical care in their first day out of Sambisa forest.

They appeared exhausted and too distressed to realise they were safe, or to be questioned about their experiences under Boko Haram. They lined up for tea, water and a stew of baobab leaves.

Meanwhile, operational videos on how Nigerian troops battled and dislodged terrorists inside Sambisa forest have shown the dexterity of Nigerian Air Force pilots as masters of their trade.

In some exclusive videos obtained by PRNigeria, a media advisory for government security agencies, pilots were shown taunting the terrorists with hundreds of the latter running helter skelter and fleeing in different directions.

The videos showed the dislodged and disorganised terrorists in flight in different directions in the expansive forest.

In another footage, the video depicted how

vulnerable women and children were cautiously and deliberately guided to safety by the Nigerian pilots.

An officer involved in the operation said: "Since the essence of the operation is not to kill everybody in sight, the air force pilots deployed their skills in herding both terrorists and their captives in different directions so that those conscripted and abducted were guided to a safe zone while the armed terrorists met their Waterloo."

Since they invaded the notorious forest, Nigerian troops have rescued over 500 females. In the first daring and precise operation, the troops rescued about 293 women and girls while many terrorists' camps including Tokumbere were destroyed.

In another operation that involved Special Forces, another set of 234 women and children were rescued through the Kawuri and Konduga end of Sambisa forest.

Military sources told PRNigeria that the sustained operations deep into the Sambisa forest is being spearheaded by the Air Force through what an officer called "tactical aerial bombardments and guided reconnaissance" with the main objective of decimating and clearing the terrorists from the forest which is their last bastion.

Since this particular operation commenced, several field commanders and foot soldiers of the terrorist group have lost their lives with some armoured personnel carriers, vehicles mounted with anti-aircraft guns, and several trucks also destroyed by the military.

Nigerian Witch Doctor Sentenced to 14 Years Imprisonment in the US