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### **Pipeline Vandals Kill 3 Naval Personnel in Arepo**

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By Chiemelie Ezeobi

Barely three weeks after the anti-pipeline vandalism Joint Task Force (JTF) raided the Wawa area of Arepo and arrested some pipeline suspects, the vandals on Friday carried out a reprisal attack, allegedly killing five naval personnel.

Although three bodies of the personnel had been recovered, THISDAY gathered that the military was yet to recover the bodies of two others.

This is coming on the heels of the continued separate disappearance of seven and five operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS) and policemen respectively, after an ambush by the same vandals.

The JTF in an operation codenamed Operation Awatse, is tasked with the responsibility of protecting the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) pipelines from Atlas Cove to Mosimi Depot.

In line with that mandate, the JTF, comprising the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Army and the National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), had launched series of attacks at the pipeline vandalism syndicate at the Wawa area of Arepo.

THISDAY gathered that the JTF had on Wednesday successfully launched an attack on the pipeline vandals, only for the vandals to regroup a day later and attack back.

It was gathered that the daredevil criminals had launched a reprisal attack against the security agents as they stormed the area again on Thursday night to continue their raid.

The raid by the operatives on Wednesday was based on a tip off that vandals had caused a pipeline explosion while siphoning fuel.

After arriving the area, the operatives interrupted the vandals as they were loading a tanker as well as several kegs, with the siphoned products.

The vandals had engaged the operatives in a gun duel but were overpowered by the superior fire power of the operatives.

As a result of the exchange of gunfire, the tanker and other stolen products allegedly caught fire, while some of the vandals who survived were said to have retreated.

But the vandals were said to have regrouped on Thursday night, started a fire and while the operatives headed towards that direction to know the cause of the inferno, they were ambushed and killed.

All efforts to get official reaction from the security agencies failed as both the police and NSCDC vehemently declined commenting, directing all inquiries to the military.

When contacted, the navy and army also refused to comment, adding that all inquiries should be directed to the Defence Headquarters, seeing that the JTF was under them.

However, the Flag Officer Commanding (FOC), Western Naval Command (WNC), Rear Admiral Ralph Osondu said investigations were ongoing.

He said, "All I can tell you is that investigation is ongoing. I do not have the details and cannot tell you hearsay. I suggest you contact the DHQ because the operation is under them.

"All participating officers are personnel of the DHQ, they were drawn from other services and so, I cannot tell you whether it was navy, army, Airforce or police. Only the DHQ can authoritatively comment on this."

Meanwhile, it would be recalled that in the previous raid three weeks ago, the JTF had stormed the area and caught the vandals in the act as they tried to cart away the stolen products in three minivans and the waste disposal truck belonging to one Ganiu Ventures.

The security operatives were engaged in a gun duel by the vandals before they overpowered them and arrested five of the suspects, while others fled.

The suspects were identified as Afeez Isiaka, Nurudeen Fatai, Oladele Godfrey, Ogbonna Agbo and Kayode Ademola.

The JTF also recovered two Dane guns with 23 live ammunition, 23 vehicles and cars, and nine motorcycles, as well as recovered over 10, 000 gallons of 50-litres jerry cans.

The recovered cars were Toyota Camry, Honda Odyssey, Toyota Corolla, Peugeot Wagon, Ford bus, with registration numbers Ex487ABC, EX957GGE, CW477LND, DC556FST and FKJ396XP, respectively.

Others are Mercedes Benz bus, Toyota Avalon, Renault bus and Mercedes Benz bus with registration numbers YA39AKD, BD875AKD, EPE954XA and XC481ABC respectively. Also recovered were Toyota Hiace bus, Toyota Sienna, Honda Odyssey, Volkswagen Transporter, Toyota Camry, with registration numbers SMK615XC, MUS227DA, GGE546DP, XZ04GGE and KTU262DE.

A Vanagon bus, Peugeot Turbod, Nissan Quest and Mitsubishi SUV with registration numbers AAA625XL, SMK634BA, FKJ489XP, HW537AAA, CX2444LSR were also recovered. Other recovered vehicles were a red Ford bus and Volkswagen Transporter, Mercedes 108 CDI and an orange refuse disposal truck, but they had no registration numbers.

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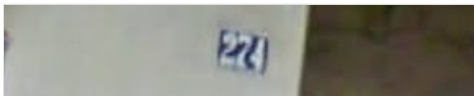
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