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Nigeria: JTF Kills 4 Militants

This Day (Lagos)
25 March 2008

Posted to the web 25 March 2008

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Ahamefula Ogbu
 Port Harcourt

The Joint Task Force in Rivers State yesterday hit a faction of the Niger Delta militants hard when both sides engaged in a combat-like shootout. Four of the militants were gunned down in the process.

The intervention by the JTF was intended to recover a seized barge loaded with suspected stolen crude oil.

Spokesman of the Task Force, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, who confirmed the incident, and the number of casualties also said another militant who was injured was taken captive by the JTF.

The two speed boats that the militants used in the operation were destroyed.

Newsman covering the beat gathered that trouble started when the oil thieves seized a loaded barge last weekend, which they later tried to move from Alakin River where they kept it, to safer zone around the Dawes Island, Okirika. The Dawes Island area is said to be a safe haven for the oil thieves. It also serves as their hideaway in case they were intercepted or pursued.

There are different versions of how the altercation began and what the mission of the JTF personnel that was on patrol that day was. We gathered, from one of our dependable sources, that the JTF officials were on regular patrol, with a mission to see if they could locate the missing barge. But another source, which also serves as an inside informant to the JTF disclosed that the JTF accidentally ran into the militants near Isaka, about five kilometers from the Nigerian Ports Authority, Port Harcourt.

On sighting the patrol team the illegal bunkerers suddenly opened fire. But unknown to them, the military men were armed with intelligence reports which reveal that they were in enemy territory. They were already combat ready, the source added.

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The source also disclosed that the first shot was fired around 9.30 am, but the bandits did not expect the type of resistance that the JTF put up, which apparently was stiff and decisive. The JTF later overwhelmed the militants in the battle which resulted in the death of four militants while a fifth who tried to escape while nursing bullet wounds was later captured.

The fishermen in the area said the shoot-out caught the entire water-side

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unawares. This led to a stampede in the area as people ran helter-skelter for dear life. Many were injured in the process though no single villager sustained bullet wounds as they fled in the stampede.

However, the military spokesman said that efforts are on to possibly recover more bodies from the scene. "Our gunboat which was patrolling Isaka area based on intelligence report ran into the militants this morning. They opened fire on our men but we retaliated with heavy gunfire resulting in the death of four of their men. One of them was seriously injured and was arrested by our men. As I speak, we are trying to recover the bodies of more slain militants and their sunken boats from the sea," Musa said.

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