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14 Militants Killed

•Naval Rating dies as task force sinks speedboats

From Segun James in Yenagoba, 04.14.2009

A confrontation on Sun-day night between militants and soldiers of the Joint Task Force (JTF) along the Okilo Creek near Igbomatoru River, Tebideba Route, Bayelsa State, has left 14 suspected militants dead.

The casualty figure on the side of the military was unknown as at press time.

THISDAY gathered that at the end of the battle, the militant boats sank with all the occupants while the surviving two managed to escape.

An elated Col. Rabe Abubakar, the Coordinator, Joint Media Campaign Centre, in a statement, said one soldier was injured after the battle and is currently receiving treatment.

Abubakar said the militants, numbering 20, came in six speedboats but were caught in an ambush laid by the soldiers. According to him, the militants who were led by their leader, Ogunbos, were "coming from their hideout in the creek, after they had carried out armed robbery and rapes."

He disclosed that the militants were closing in on JTF location when they ran into the ambush.

Unknown to them, the JTF troops, following a tip-off, were ready to do battle.

The same militant leader, Ogunbos, was believed to be responsible for attacks and destruction of houseboats belonging to Daewoo Nigerian Limited stationed at Igbomatoru area of Southern Ijaw, working for Italian oil giant AGIP Nig Ltd.

Said Abubakar: "This and other heinous crimes committed by this militant leader and his unpatriotic men made the JTF being a custodian of security of life and property in Niger Delta pledge to trail him and apprehend him for the criminality he has committed so as to serve as deterrent to others. However, our actions are not retaliatory but for enforcing peace and order in the region."

In a related development, there was another unprovoked attack on JTF troops at Nembe Shell Petroleum Development Company location in Bayelsa State yesterday at about 1.45am.

Confirming the attack, Abubakar said it might have been done in retaliation over the earlier sinking of four militant boats on Sunday.

"The (Monday) attack was jointly carried out by Kitikata and Fara Dagogo. It was however foiled, regrettably and in the process of defending the facility, one naval rating was killed, two sustained minor injuries and four Shell speedboats were carted away by the miscreants. However, the JTF has launched a manhunt for perpetrators of this attack and in just a matter of time we would get them.

"The JTF also warns that the armed hoodlums would pay dearly in the event of any other attack on its locations and economic facilities, as we have resolved to carry out a decisive and appropriate response within the provision of its mandate. The security outfit is calling on the militants to seize the opportunity of the 'olive branch' being handed them by the Federal Government and disarm honourably for the overall interest of the region and the nation, as security and peace are panacea for any development and investment," he said.

Two weeks ago, in what was seen as a major shift in the attitude of the Federal Government towards the militants, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua had promised amnesty to those who were willing to lay down their arms and be integrated into the lawful society.

Speaking at the 47th meeting of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Yar'Adua had said: "We are working on the terms for the granting of amnesty to all those who are prepared to lay down their arms in the Niger Delta and this amnesty will include not only laying down their arms, but reintegrating and rehabilitating them into the Nigerian society."

His government had previously vowed to treat militancy as criminality, but the President's latest pronouncements could signal a shift in approach as the country continues to lose

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significant investments and incomes in the oil-producing region owing to militant activities. "We are working on the holistic development and implementation of the Niger Delta Master Plan," he had said. "We have created the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs to champion the overall and holistic development of oil-producing areas. This administration has been releasing full funds to the Niger Delta Development Commission."

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