

# Boko Haram Kills 17 Soldiers, NEMA Staff

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At least 17 Nigerian soldiers have been killed in a fresh Boko Haram attack on a military base in Borno State, military sources said thursday, the third assault on three different bases in less than a month.

According to AFP, the attack occurred on Wednesday evening when heavily armed jihadists riding in trucks stormed and looted weapons and vehicles from a military base in Garunda village in Borno State, the epicentre of the Islamist insurgency that has been raging for nine years.

The attack is the latest of a series of bloody Boko Haram assaults on military bases in Nigeria, underscoring the continued threat the Islamists pose to the region and putting the spotlight on the Nigerian government's claim that Boko Haram is "decimated."

"Our troops came under attack from Boko Haram terrorists in Garunda last night," a military officer said.

"Unfortunately we lost 17 troops, 14 others were injured while an unspecified number is still unaccounted for," said the military source, who asked not to be identified because he was not authorised to speak on the incident.

The source added that the militants looted weapons and vehicles before fleeing.

The insurgents, whose activities have also been felt in Chad, Niger and Cameroon, have been packing punches regularly, hitting civilian targets and other soft spots in Nigeria's North-east.

In the past month, Boko Haram jihadists have launched two other major assaults on military bases in the remote northeast region.

On July 14, jihadists suspected to be loyal to Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi, who is affiliated with the Islamic State group, attacked a base in Jillli village, in neighbouring Yobe State.

Dozens of troops were killed, wounded or missing, according to several security sources.

The army conceded the base was attacked but did not give a death toll, saying that the “troops reorganised and successfully repelled the attack and normalcy has since returned to the area.”

On July 26, the Islamists stormed a base on the outskirts of Maiduguri, the state capital of Borno State.

The base attacked yesterday in Garunda village of Borno state had just been set up for troops from the 81 Brigade who had been stationed in Jilli village and forced to move after the July 14 assault.

“The truth of the matter is that the troops in Jilli were relocated to Garunda where a new base was established,” said the second military source, who gave a similar death toll.

“Troops were just setting up and the excavator operator was working to fortify the base with trenches against attack from the terrorists when the attack happened,” said the officer.

The Nigerian army did not respond to requests for comment. Nigeria’s National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) on Thursday confirmed in a statement that a staff member, an excavator operator attached to the military, “was killed by Boko Haram yesterday in Damasak, Borno State.”

Boko Haram no longer controls swathes of territory in northeast Nigeria as it did at the height of its insurgency in 2014, yet the Islamist militants still pose a threat to the impoverished region.

President Muhammadu Buhari has insisted that the Islamists are a spent force as he gears up for elections next year.

In an interview with Nigerian press published thursday, the Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, said "we promised to fight insecurity...despite what anybody says, we have decimated Boko Haram."

Six months away from presidential polls, Buhari is under pressure to defend his track record as he battles insecurity across Nigeria, Africa's most populous country.

In a related development, workers of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) have been thrown into mourning, following the killing of a colleague by Boko Haram insurgents.

Excavator Operator John Iliya was killed by Boko Haram jihadists on August 8 at Damasak in Borno, according to a statement by NEMA yesterday in Abuja.

Iliya is the latest victim of the Islamic insurgency that flared since 2009, killing more than 20,000 people and displacing up to 2.5 million residents of Nigeria's North-east.

Spokesman of NEMA, Sani Datti, said that the Director-General of NEMA, Mustapha Maihaja, had dispatched a team to Maiduguri to facilitate the return of Iliya's remains to the family.

Datti said that Iliya, who was working with troops on the front lines died in the line of duty.

The insurgents have been fighting at many fronts for almost a decade, in a bid to enforce a strict Islamic code in Northern Nigeria.