

5 die in militants, Navy clash

By Jimitota Onoyume

PORT HARCOURT— NO fewer than five militants are feared dead while several others were injured in a gun duel yesterday with men of the Nigerian Navy at Soku community in Akukotoru local government area of Rivers State.

Vanguard gathered that the Naval men were on sea patrol in about four boats when they ran into some militants numbering over 20 who opened fire on the Naval men. In the ensuing gun battle, one of the boats used by the militants caught fire.

A top Naval officer who spoke with *Vanguard* could not confirm the casualty rate, but said on the part of the Navy no casualty was recorded.

Another source told *Vanguard* that the militants were carrying out bunkering operations in the area when the Naval men ran into them.

"Our men were just going on sea patrol when they ran into the boys. They opened fire and we retaliated. All our boats and men returned intact. I cannot say if any of them died because it was dark. But I am sure some would have died. Because some of our men concentrated on the boat they had in front, they shot the engine and it caught fire. It is an 18-seater boat, so it would certainly be carrying more than 10 persons. When the boat was on fire, I won't know if they all escaped or that some died in the water," the source said.