

War moves to Bayelsa: High Chief, 3 militants killed in Bayelsa

Headlines Jan 12, 2009

YENAGOA — FOUR persons including a traditional chief of Letugbene community in Bayelsa West Senatorial district of Bayelsa State and three militants were shot dead, while several other villagers were injured in a brutal gun battle between troops of the Joint Task Force (JTF) on the Niger-Delta and militants in the creek community yesterday morning.

It was also gathered one of the soldiers was injured by the militants and rushed to an undisclosed hospital for treatment but a JTF source told Vanguard that five militants were killed. Saturday Vanguard confirmed three.



“The JTF is calling on all peace- loving communities in the Niger Delta to weed out the bad eggs among them for peace to reign in the region

Also, the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND) also confirmed an exclusive report by Vanguard on Friday regarding the killing of seven defenceless civilians, Tuesday, near Kangbene community in Delta state by the task force, saying the soldiers who carried out the killings were on drugs.

Chairman of Letugbene community, Prince Jude Biukeme confirmed the death of the high chief, whose name was given as M. Kurobo in an interview with Saturday Vanguard, yesterday, while the acting leader of the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), “General” Boyloaf admitted that three of his men were shot dead.

Coordinator of the Joint Media Campaign Centre (JMCC) of the task force, Colonel Rabe Abubakar in a statement yesterday evening said, “Troops of the Joint Task Force, Operation Restore Hope, were ambushed at about 12:09 today (yesterday) , 12 June 2009, by militants from Boyloaf Camp at Ogbotobo community in Bayelsa state.

This led to heavy exchange of gunfire between the troops and the militants and as a result five of them were killed while a soldier sustained gun injuries and has been evacuated to an undisclosed hospital for treatment”.

We contacted JTF, not militants – Community chairman

However, the community and the militant group differed on how the incident occurred. Prince Biukeme said that a group of sea pirates have been causing problem in the area for some time now and the community set up a vigilance team to track them down.

He said the vigilance team succeeded in arresting two of the sea pirates after they robbed a local

transport boat yesterday, and put a call to the troops of the JTF, stationed at the Ogbotobo flow station to pick them up, adding that the soldiers arrived the community, but, some militants also stormed the community, apparently to rescue the two pirates.

The community chairman said a High Chief in the community was shot dead in the ensuing battle at the waterfront by the militants in crossfire with the JTF. He said several people were injured.

We responded to a distress call from Letugbene – Boyloaf

“General” Boyloaf was fuming that his men were killed after he had declared his intention to accept amnesty from the Federal Government when he spoke to Saturday Vanguard.

He is suspecting that he was set up by the JTF and the community.

According to him, “I received a distress call from somebody from Letugbene community that they arrested two sea pirates that had been disturbing them and that we should come and pick them up, you know these are the people that are denting the Niger-Delta struggle, we have arrested some in the past, and contacted you (Vanguard), which I believe the whole would confirm because the reports were published”.

“In response to the distress call, I sent five of my men there with a speedboat to go and bring the pirates so that we will handle them in our own way, which has been our practice in the past, to punish them and let them understand that they should stop anything that will bring disrepute to the Niger-Delta struggle, but, they ran into an ambush by the JTF, and three of them were killed.

“Am suspecting that this is a set up against me, why should the community make a distress call to us and also call the JTF to ambush us, it is a plan and that is what I want to find out, because it is because they called us from the community, that we knew that two pirates were called.

I was called on this Glo line, 08058061338 from Letugbene community, you should find out whether it was not from Letugbene they called me with this number at about 8.00 am”, he said.

He said that other two persons in his team survived the onslaught of the JTF and managed to return to base with the three corpses of their fallen colleagues.

When contacted on the claims of “General” Boyloaf that he was contacted by somebody from the community, the chairman, Prince Biukeme said it was not to his knowledge, pointing out, however, that the people were literate enough to know that if criminals were arrested, the proper authority to call in the area was the JTF and not militants.

Militants waylaid JTF – Abubakar

Colonel Abubakar maintained, however that, “The men of the security outfit were attacked by the militants when we were returning from Ogbotobo Community to secure items recovered from suspected militants by vigilante group of the community.

The members of the community arrested the militants who invaded their community to foment trouble and to establish a base there, but they refused and arrested them”.

“The JTF is calling on all peace- loving communities in the Niger Delta to weed out the bad eggs among them for peace to reign in the region. They should be weary of those claiming to be fighting on their behalf as they are doing so for their selfish interest.

The JTF will defend any group and communities that assisted it in getting rid of the criminals, because we believe it is only when there is peace and security that development will come to any region or

nation”, he stated.

Glo line, 08058061338 belongs to a business centre

Saturday Vanguard put a call through to the Glo line, 08058061338, which Boyloaf said was used to call him and the person who answered, obviously unaware of the matter at stake, said he was based in Letugbene and the line is being used in his business centre.

Asked if he was the person that made a call to Boyloaf that sea pirates were arrested at Letugbene and that his men should come to pick them up, he said he was not the one and would not know the person that made such a call.

Frame up!

But an angry Boyloaf said, “The community leadership cannot claim ignorance of what happened because I was called from that community, I still believe that there is an ulterior plan and I want to be sure that some people are not trying to play on my intelligence after I have agreed to accept amnesty with my boys”.

He wondered why the soldiers came in mufti and in a transport boat instead of gunboat, saying he smelt a plot between the community and the JTF, except if the people were divided and one faction had to call the JTF, while the other called him.

Community maintains stand

Prince Biukeme , nevertheless, said the community had no sinister agenda , as it only called the JTF to come and take over the two arrested pirates for appropriate action.

A source in the community who gave his own account of the incident to Saturday Vanguard said the chief that was shot dead was accompanying the soldiers and the apprehended pirates to the JTF boat at the waterfront when they came under surprise attack by the militants, suspected to have come from Boyloaf camp at Ezetu in the Southern Ijaw council area of the state.

According to the source that preferred anonymity, the community youths mobilized and stormed the scene of crime and succeeded in apprehending the bandits after giving them a hot chase to a narrow creek making their escape impossible.

“Having succeeded in apprehending the hoodlums, the community contacted the soldiers guarding the Ogbotobo flow station about the development and pleaded with the security operatives to come and take away the captured pirates”, he said.

According to him, “Unknown to the soldiers who came to take away the subdued pirates, some armed gunmen suspected to be militants were on the prowl in the area ostensibly on rescue mission and they attacked the soldiers”.

The JTF according to a security source is reviewing the situation in the area with a view to reinforcing its presence on the border area between Bayelsa West and Southern Ijaw flank said to have the largest concentration of militant camps.

A community leader from neighbouring Bilabiri, who also spoke anonymously to Saturday Vanguard on phone said they heard of the sad news yesterday morning and expressed sadness about the development, especially at a time the community was collaborating with government to bring about the desired peace in the area.

Communities along the coast al fringe of the Dodo River, including Letugbene were, penultimate

week, gripped with fear and the natives fled their homes following alleged plan by the Joint Task Force to attack the community in search of militants.

The fear of the natives is understandable given the recent loss of several innocent lives and the destruction of Ijaw communities of Gbaramatu Kingdom in the neighbouring Delta in the wake of the bloody face-off between the JTF and militants.

Though, it could not be confirmed if indeed the planned attack was true but it reliably gathered that the security outfit has been lounging for an opportunity to invade the militant camps in the state.

The JTF, the source explained, “is only interested in dislodging the militants masquerading as freedom fighters in the troubled Niger Delta for their selfish interest”.

MEND confirms Vanguard's story

MEND spokesman, Jomo Gbomo in a statement, yesterday, confirming our Friday story on the killing of seven persons in Delta state said, “The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) can confirm that seven more civilians were killed in cold blood on Tuesday, June 9, 2009 by the soldiers of the military Joint Task Force”.

“The seven comprising 4 children, 1 woman, an elderly man, and the boat driver were shot without warning as they approached the JTF checkpoint mounted in the inland waterway at Kangbene community in Delta state.

“These individuals had been living inside the bush and only got help to move them to Warri refugee camps when they were killed.

“This is one of several killings going on inside the creeks on a weekly basis. The area has been closed to humanitarian bodies, journalists and international observers to hide the atrocities. The soldiers that carry out such indiscriminate killings happen to come mainly from Northern Nigeria”, he asserted.

“Most of the soldiers are on drugs, which continue to alter their mental status. They are showing signs of panic attacks, frustration, hatred and depression”, the group added.

JTF counters MEND

But Colonel Abubakar countered the claim, saying, “The JTF wishes to debunk the claim by MEND that JTF killed seven persons in Kangbene Community in Delta State. This is yet another attempt to attract underserved sympathy from those who don't know MEND.

We, therefore, urge all well meaning citizens or Nigerians home and abroad to disregard this and any other allegations by these criminals, because they have run out of ideas”.

Independent finding

A relation of two of the deceased persons who spoke to Saturday Vanguard in Warri on Thursday gave the names of the elderly man as Pa Idumubinaie Okoro, the woman as Mrs. Beauty Amaokosu and the boat driver was identified as Aaron Ebimor.



19 Responses for “War moves to Bayelsa: High Chief, 3 militants killed in Bayelsa”