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.....CRIME AND NATIONAL SECURITY

BOKO HARAM: The tough battle to reclaim captured towns

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ON Monday, September 1, hundreds of Boko Haram operatives invaded Bama, the second largest city in Borno State.

The attack, coming days after a similar attack on Baga, the headquarters of the multinational Joint Task Force, was rebuffed and the terrorists heavily dealt with by the military as investigations revealed that Boko Haram attack was aimed at making Bama, about 50 kilometres from Maiduguri, the base of its ultimate dream of hoisting its caliphate flag in Borno.

The Defence Headquarters said security forces were repelling the attack and that everything was being done to contain the terrorists, noting: "Bama attack is being repelled. We cannot state casualty situation/figures now. Everything necessary will be done to contain the terrorists".

Investigations by *Sunday Vanguard* showed that during confrontation, which lasted for days, aerial bombardment of the terrorists by the air force scuttled their plot to take over Bama as many of them fled into nearby bush while soldiers carried out mop up operations.

While this was the scenario on the first day, the insurgents, who escaped into the bush, re-grouped and came back the next day in large numbers, but this time using the panicky situation that had enveloped the city and the pandemonium to try to infiltrate the military barracks in Bama. This was what led to the air strike at the military barracks and the death of many of the insurgents, some soldiers and civilians.

As the battle to liberate Bama was going on, the military received intelligence that another community, located 15 kilometres from Bama (Kawuri), was the base from where the insurgents mobilized and attacked Bama. There was a report also they had an armoury in the community.

The military subsequently swung into action and launched a surprise attack at Kawuri. The result was that

troops killed over 50 of the insurgents while scores of others fled the town.

So when stories started making the rounds that the insurgents had overrun Bama and some people started condemning the military for allowing that to happen without reading between the lines of the Boko Haram propaganda, there was outcry in military circles.

This was aptly captured by retired Air Vice Marshall Christopher Marizu, who said the media had not be fair to the Nigeria soldier who was out there in the sun, heat, rain, terrible environmental conditions shedding his blood to ensure that terrorists did not take an inch of the Nigerian territory.

Rather, the media was awash with reports that Boko Haram had over-run Bama and taken over the city whereas the reverse was the case.

Noting that "we (senior officers) have friends,

“Military sources told Sunday Vanguard that the insurgents, basking in the euphoria of panic and pandemonium caused in the Michika and Gulak communities as well as the injury inflicted on some officers including Lt. Colonel Adeboye Obasanjo, made for Bintim

relations and our boys on ground there and are in touch on a daily basis", the former AOC, Logistics Command, Lagos, said, "The truth is that as at Tuesday, our soldiers had killed over 700 Boko Haram insurgents during the battle.

"The following day, another 500 terrorists were killed. What is happening is not what is being reported in newspapers and sometimes I wonder if the media are wishing that the terrorists bring this nation down or what do they seek to gain by running our soldiers down?"

On Thursday, the Defence Headquarters dismissed the allegation by some stakeholders in Borno that Boko Haram insurgents had surrounded Maiduguri preparatory to invading the

Borno capital using Bama and other communities as launching pad, saying the alarm was meant to cause panic and unsettle the city and the nation.

The DHQ also said that all members of the armed forces deployed to the North-east had been put on high alert, meaning they were ready for immediate action should the need arise.

This came even as the DHQ admitted that Nigerian air force jets and helicopter gunships were carrying out bombardments on terrorist hideouts and movements of remnants of Boko Haram in Bama, Gwoza, Gamboru Ngala and other parts of the North-east to reclaim the communities, adding that the situation in the areas was being stabilized.

"Highly coordinated air & land operations are ongoing and the efforts are yielding impressive results in the overall move to rid the area of terrorists," it said.

Some tweets in this regard read, "Alarmist reports on foreign & online media on Maiduguri are clearly intended to cause panic in the city and the nation.

"All facets of security arrangements for the defence of Maiduguri has been upgraded to handle any planned attack or attempt to disrupt the city's prevailing peace.

"The alarmist reports are uncalled for in view of the efforts & alertness.

"Situation in Mubi, Michika, Bazza, Gulak, Gwoza, Bama, Gamboru Ngala & other parts of the North-east are being stabilized.

"Citizens are nevertheless enjoined to remain vigilant as they go about their lawful business as highly coordinated air and land OPs are ongoing.

"The efforts are yielding impressive results in the overall move to rid the area of terrorists".

This also explains why attempt by the terrorists to infiltrate Mubi through Madagali, Michika and Gulak in Adamawa State to try to cut off the military's push to decimate their base in Gwoza received a heavy blow last week following their attack on Bimtim, the home town of the Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshall Alex Badeh.

During the encounter, about 40 of the insurgents were killed while many others ran for their lives.

Military sources told Sunday

Vanguard that the insurgents, basking in the euphoria of panic and pandemonium caused in the Michika and Gulak communities as well as the injury inflicted on some officers including Lt. Colonel Adeboye Obasanjo, made for Bintim but were routed by a combination of troops on ground and reinforcements from the 1 Division, Kaduna, 3 Division, Jos and TRADOC, Makurdi.

Giving details of what transpired at Bintim, the sources said the terrorists cornered the troops from all angles as the troops mobilized in the city center and a gun battle ensued. Unknown to them, a set of newly deployed soldiers arrived and joined the battle taking them from behind leading to the wiping out of 40 of the insurgents while others fled.

At the end of the battle, the military recovered 17 Hilux vehicles and several anti-aircraft guns (AA weapons) and surface to air missiles which were destroyed while some were taken away by the troops.

Other recoveries made by troops include general purpose machine guns mounted on their Hilux vehicles, which were discovered to be powered by generators.

The sources added that after the gun battle troops moved forward successfully pursuing and routing out the insurgents from Michika, Uba and Gulak.



• The military offensive against terrorists