

Houses razed, as troops comb Bayelsa community over killing of soldiers

● *We didn't torch any house; working with community leaders—Army*

By Samuel Oyadongha

YENAGOA—SEVERAL houses were reportedly razed yesterday, as troops in search of suspected militants that killed two soldiers in the creeks of Azagbene in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, invaded the riverside town. The troops, backed by gunboats, were deployed to the community following Monday's attack on a military location by suspected militants, in which two personnel were killed with one other still missing.

Also, the service rifles of the killed operatives were reportedly carted away by the militants, who escaped into the maze of creeks.

A native, who pleaded anonymity, said: "There is serious tension in the community and many are fleeing their homes to take refuge in the bush and

neighbouring communities.

"Several homes have been torched by the troops. As I speak with you, there is tension in the community."

A security said: "The military has launched a manhunt for the militants, combing the community, creeks and waterways. We hope the hoodlums will be fished out."

A member of the state House of Assembly, Tari Porri, also confirmed the development in the area, but noted that government has intervened with a view to ensuring that the culprits are apprehended.

"But we heard gunboats have been deployed in the area in search of the perpetrators (militants) of heinous crime," he said.

Spokesman of the 16 Brigade of the Nigerian Army, Major Danjuma Jonah, confirmed the

attack and killing of two soldiers.

He, however, dismissed claims that troops razed houses in the community.

According to him, "our men did not burn down houses in Azagbene community. We are only combing the community and neighbouring towns in search of one soldier that is missing as a result of the attack that led to the death of two soldiers.

"And we are carrying out the search for the missing soldier in conjunction with leaders of the community.

"I am sure you are aware we lost two soldiers yesterday (Monday) to suspected militants' attack.

"As I speak, I am aware that troops are in active collaboration with some community leaders who are aiding us to search for one of our personnel missing during that attack."