

20 soldiers, scores of bandits die in Niger clash



...We lost 17 men —Army
...Military to deploy 800 special forces to high-risk combat zones
By Kingsley Omonobi & Wole Mosadomi

Minna—No fewer than 20 soldiers were reportedly killed by bandits, who stormed two military camps in Mariga Local Government Area of Niger State on Tuesday while several others were injured.

However, an unspecified number of the bandits were gunned down by the soldiers during the gun battle that ensued.

But the army said 17 soldiers were killed in the encounter.

Seventeen corpses of the soldiers were, however, said to have been recovered from the bush while the search for the recovery of others continues.

This came as the Chief of Defence Staff, CDS, Gen. Christopher Musa, at a different event, said the military was set to deploy over 800 well-trained and combat-ready special forces into operational areas to tackle a myriad of security challenges facing the nation.

Vanguard gathered that the bandits numbering over 200 rode on motorcycles and invaded two military camps in Kwanan Duse and Gulbin Boka communities in Mariga council of the state in the morning.

According to a source from the area, the bandits' first point of call was the military camp at Kwanan Duse, where they engaged the security men in a fierce gun battle, which lasted for about four hours.

It was gathered that the chairman of the Mariga council, Abbas Adamu, immediately alerted the Military Cantonment in Kontagora for reinforcement, while the gun battle at Kwanan Duse was going on.

In a swift response, the soldiers from Kontagora took off but before their arrival at the Kwanan Dutse camp, the bandits had left for Gulbin Boka camp for another onslaught against the soldiers.

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However, the soldiers engaged the bandits in a fierce gun battle at Gulbin Boka camp where some of the bandits were felled by the bullets.

Adamu, who confirmed the incident said the gunmen were suspected to have invaded the state from Zamfara, through the Shadadi forest.

He said: “We got the information about their movement and we immediately alerted the Military but we did not actually know where they were heading to.

“Surprisingly, about 9:30a.m., on Tuesday, we learnt they were already attacking the soldiers at Kwanan Duse.

“The bandits did not kidnap anybody but lives were lost, shops looted at Gulbin Boka town while several cattle were rustled from the neighbouring communities.

“From all indications, the aim of the bandits was to dislodge the military from their camps and have unhindered access to some communities in the council because since the soldiers were stationed there, the bandits have been prevented from frequent attacks on the communities.”

Head of vigilante group in the area, Mallam Abubakar Sani also confirmed the incident but could not ascertain the casualty figure on the side of the bandits. Meanwhile, the military in conjunction with the local vigilante have mobilised to Gulbin Boka forest along Kontagora-Rijau road suspected to be the hideouts of the bandits.

At press time, no official statement has been issued by either the state government or the military.

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Lieutenant Colonel Apolonia Anele, Acting Director, Army Public Relations in a statement, said that the troops in collaboration with the Air Component of the Nigerian Air Force, engaged bandits numbering over 300 in Kwanar Dutse Forest. He said: “Sadly 17 brave and gallant soldiers paid the supreme price during the encounter, while 10 others sustained varying degrees of injury. “The wounded personnel have been evacuated to a military medical facility, where they are receiving treatment and are in stable condition.”