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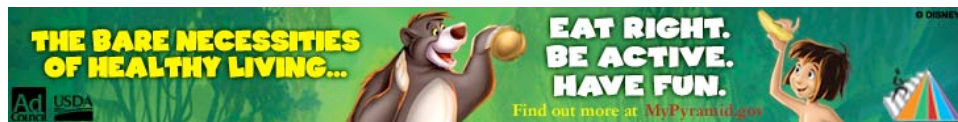
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Daily Trust (Abuja)
31 July 2008

Posted to the web 31 July 2008



Henry Omunu

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A soldier, two militants and a civilian have been confirmed dead in a gun fight between the military Joint Task Force (JTF) and suspected militants in Abonema, Akuku Toru local government area of Rivers State.

The JTF spokesman, Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, who confirmed the death toll, said the gun fight between the military and the militants occurred on Tuesday night.

He disclosed that the dead soldier was a sergeant, while the two militants were members of rival gangs fighting for control of the Abonema waterfront.

Lt. Col. Sagir added that the civilian was killed by a stray bullet during the gun fight between the warring militant groups and men of the JTF, who had responded to distress calls from residents of Abonema about the shoot-out by the rival gangs.

The JTF spokesman said the sergeant was killed when the patrol van used by the soldiers ran into an ambush by the militants, adding that the van was badly damaged in the attack.

The warring militant groups, our correspondent learnt, were members of the Egberipapa group and the group led by Soboma George.

Independent sources informed Daily Trust that while moving into the militants' fighting zone, the JTF patrol ran into the cross fire between the two warring groups leading to the death of the soldier while the patrol van was badly damaged.

The sources said a house was also razed during the confrontation.

According to the sources, the soldiers beat a hasty retreat and later reinforced to confront the militants during which two of the militants were gunned down while the civilian was caught in the crossfire.

Our correspondent could not confirm which of the warring militant groups the two dead militants belonged to or who burnt the house.

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Lt. Col. Sagir said the crisis in the community has been brought under control with heavily armed soldiers now patrolling the town.



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