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 THE GUARDIAN

Task force denies losing 12 soldiers in clash with militants

From Chido Okafor, Warri

CONTRARY to media reports, only three soldiers and two members of staff of Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) were killed during a recent clash between troops and some militants at the company's flow-station in Ogboinbiri, Bayelsa State, Brig-Gen. Lawrence Ngubane has said.

Ngubane, who is the commander of the Niger Delta Joint Task Force, said the bloody attack also led to the death of 15 militants.

He denied media reports that 12 soldiers were killed in the attack. He said 11 Agip workers and two soldiers were held hostage and that one of the soldiers was killed before the rescue operation.

His words: "In all, we lost three soldiers, two civilian staff of Agip and 15 militants during the dawn operation."

Ngubane gave detailed account of how the militants invaded the Agip flow-station before they were repelled by the soldiers.

According to Ngubane, "on June 12, 2007, our troops deployed to Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) Flow-Station in Southern Ijaw Local Council of Bayelsa State were attacked by some criminals (militants).

"In the fire-fight that ensued, some lives were lost on the part of the criminals and reasonable quantity of arms and ammunition were recovered from them.

"Again, on June 16, 2007, the criminals launched what I may term a probing attack on the same flow-station, using two speed boats. The attack was repelled by our troops. On Sunday June 17, 2007, they attacked and forcibly took over the Ogboinbiri flow-station."

The task force commander said it was in response to the criminal acts of aggression against the troops that made the task force took the action of flushing out the "criminal elements who forcibly occupied the Agip Flow station."

Ngubane said the reckless behaviour of the militants led to needless loss of lives.

He assured all who do business in the area that the task force is there to sustain a conducive environment for "you to do just that," adding that the task force would create the enabling environment for all to do their business without fear.

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