

Soldiers Kill 21 Herdsmen, Arrest 60, Lose Colleague In Benue

By **Tor Vande-Acka** - August 21, 2018



Makurdi – 'Operation Whirl Stroke' (OPWS) said it has neutralised twenty-one herdsmen in an assault carried out on them and their camps on Saturday in Benue State.

Force Commander, OPWS, General Adeyemi Yekini, who confirmed the incident while briefing newsmen on its activities, also confirmed that the special force lost one soldier, while two others were wounded.

He explained that personnel of OPWS also arrested sixty suspects and recovered forty weapons.

According to Yekini, men under the operation may have killed Terwase Akwaza, aka Gana, during an air raid followed by a mop-up operation by ground troops.

He, however, noted that he would not be very certain that Gana, who had been declared wanted, was killed.

However, he said during the air strike by the Air Force, Gana's power bike was hit and badly damaged, giving the team a clue that he must have been hit during the exercise.

Yekini explained that the military came in contact with herdsmen militia in two separate encounters.

The Force Commander said: "The operation has to do with two different encounters OPWS troops had with armed herdsmen in Guma LGA.

"The first was on 4 August, 2018, when troops of Sector 2 with the HQ at Tom-atar (Guma LGA), supported by the Force Reserve, conducted a clearing operation along the Gbajimba-Akor axis in Guma LGA.

"Troops made contact with armed militiamen moving with large herds of cattle at about 0900hrs close to the boundary between Benue and Nasarawa states.

"Following a firefight, OPWS, troops dislodged the armed men from the camps with an unspecified number of them suspected to have been killed while others escaped into the surrounding bushes with gunshot wounds."

Yekini said in another encounter on Saturday, troops killed about six of the militiamen.

He said: "Although no specific figure of casualty was officially given, troops who participated in the operation were of the opinion that not less than six of the armed militiamen were killed during the fighting.

"Troops thereafter burnt down the herdsmen camp and recovered one AK 47 rifle, two AK 47 Mags, 60 rounds of 7.62mm special ammunition, and five motorcycles during the operation. Own troops did not sustain any casualty."

He added: "The second encounter occurred on 18 August, 2018 (same Saturday) when troops of the sector on routine fighting patrol along the same Gbajimba axis had another encounter with a large number of armed herdsmen at about 0900hrs.

"Troops and the armed herdsmen exchanged fire for about 2hrs while reinforcements were sent to support the troops.

"Casualty figure among the herdsmen during this initial encounter could not be ascertained.

"OPWS troops lost one soldier while two others sustained gunshot wounds. The two personnel are currently responding to treatment at the NAF Base Hospital, Makurdi."

The OPWS Commander continued: "As the fighting was going on, one Mi35 helicopter was scrambled to provide air support to the troops.

"During the firefight, the Mi35 spotted a group of twenty armed herdsmen riding on motorcycles moving along the axis towards Nasarawa State.

"Fifteen of the armed herdsmen on motorcycles were neutralised with rocket fire from the Mi35 while others escaped with varying degrees of injuries."

Yekini also explained that plans were in progress to conduct further clearing operations of the border areas between the two states.

According to him, "The OPWS recovered seven automatic weapons from armed militiamen in the past six weeks alone; four in Nasarawa and three in Benue State."

The General stated that, "In all, the OPWS has recovered a total of forty weapons, 1,100 rounds of ammunition, while sixty suspects have so far been arrested since the inception of the operation."

Comments

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