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12 soldiers missing after attack by militants

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There was uncertainty on Monday over the fate of 12 members of the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta after they were shot by militants.



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Chief of Army Staff, Lt.-Gen. Andrew Azazi

The militants had attacked the soldiers in reprisal for the killing of nine people on Sunday at a flow station in the coastal Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

Although a source in the Nigerian Navy said that the soldiers were missing, an Ijaw leader said that they were killed by the militants.

The Nigerian Agip Oil Company, whose Ogbainbiri flow station was also seized by the militants, said 28 people, including 11 soldiers, were abducted during the attack.

The spokesman for the JTF, Major Omale Ochagwuba, could not confirm if the soldiers were killed or abducted.

He, however, said in a text message to one of our correspondents that, "Two soldiers were slightly wounded by barbed wire and nine Agip workers taken hostage."

Agip said in a statement, "It appears nobody was harmed or killed as a consequence of the attack."

It explained that 16 local workers and 11 soldiers had been abducted, while eight employees and 40 soldiers managed to escape.

The Commander of JTF, Brig.-Gen. Lawrence Ngubane, held a marathon meeting with his men on the development on Monday.

Ngubane later told our correspondent in Warri that, "Nine civilians and five soldiers were being held by the militants.

"The hostages are still with them (militants) and we are making efforts to ensure their early release from captivity."

He said the oil workers and troops had not been killed, adding that, "We only have the report that they are being held in the location."

The JTF men were on guard duty at the Agip flow station, following the evacuation of some of the workers by the Italian oil firm.

It was learnt that the militants, who were avenging last Tuesday's killing of nine people by the JTF operatives, were still occupying the Agip's facility as at 6pm on Monday.

An impeccable source, who travelled on the Ogbainbiri waterways on Monday afternoon, said that some troops and four gunboats had been deployed in the area.

The JTF operatives had last Tuesday killed nine people who were travelling in a speedboat from Ogbotobo in Delta State to a riverine community in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area.

On getting to Agip's Ogbainbiri flow station, there was an exchange of gunfire between the youths and the JTF men.

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Two of the 11 occupants of the boat jumped into the river with gunshot injuries, but swam to safety, while the remaining nine , including two elderly men, were shot dead.

Ochagwuba, in a reaction, maintained that the deceased were militants. He claimed that they were returning from Gbaran, where they went for fortification, in preparation for an attack on the flow station.

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