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Development
BackPage Extra
THISDAY Saturday
THISDAY Sunday
ARCHIVE

Soldiers Kill 12 Militants, Recapture Oil Flow Station

From Segun James in Yenagoa, 06.22.2007

Men of the Nigerian Army yesterday recaptured the Ogboinbiri Flow Station in Southern Ijaw Local Government area of Bayelsa State taken over by militants since Sunday and killed 12 of the armed youths in the process.

Five other militants were captured alive during the early morning operation that lasted about four hours.

There were conflicting reports, however, on the casualties recorded by the military side as well the fate of the 12 Nigerian soldiers held by the militants.

THISDAY learnt that nine civilians and one soldier held hostage were rescued while four soldiers were wounded during the fierce battle.

According to information, a contingent of the Nigerian Armed Forces stormed Ogboin-biri Flow Station which belongs to the Italian oil giant, Agip Oil Company around 4am yesterday. They (military) had given the militants deadline to vacate the oil facility and hand over the soldiers and civilians held as Prisoners of War.

THISDAY checks revealed that the battle that led to the take-over of the facility was almost one-sided as heavy artillery bombardment was employed by the soldiers.

Despite this, however, the militants were said to have advanced towards the army location where direct confrontation soon took place resulting in huge casualties on both sides. But the superior fire power of the soldiers was said to have forced the militants to retreat leaving the location for the soldiers.

THISDAY gathered that the oil workers were "miraculously" found alive despite the bombardment of the area. Some other information have it that none of the soldiers held were seen nor the bodies of the killed militants found while Navy divers were said to be combing the creeks and surrounding forest in search of bodies.

When THISDAY contacted the Public Relations Officer of the Joint (military) Task Force (JTF) on Niger Delta, Major Omale Ochagwuba, he confirmed the killing of the 12 militants and those captured by the soldiers.

But Ochagwuba was silent on the casualties on the side of the military and on the fate of the soldiers held as prisoners of war by the militants.

It was gathered, however, that both the military casualties and the wounded were flown to Port Harcourt, Rivers State capital, in military helicopters.

Meanwhile, there were conflicting reports between the army and Agip as to the number of workers and soldiers aboard the facility when it was taken over by the militants on Sunday.

While Agip said 16 of its workers and 11 soldiers were held by the militants, JTF said only 11 workers were found at the location when they arrived the facility.

According to the Commander of JTF, Brig. Gen. Lawrence Ngubane, "we launched a dawn attack, took over the flow station intact and rescued some hostages. The militants sustained casualties, about 12 of them in all." Ngubane said his men were still "mopping" the area.

But uneasy tension enveloped Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital, as news of an impending attack on the Government House by aggrieved militants made the rounds.

And true to their words, the militants who were flushed out of the Ogboinbiri flow station at about 6.15pm stormed the state capital, Yenagoa through Imiringi, a community in Ogbia local government area of Bayelsa State where Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) Kolo Creek flow station is located.

The militants however met a stumbling block as the place had been heavily fortified by the army.

As at the time of this report, heavy fighting was said to be going on and it was not clear what the outcome would be.

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