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Soldiers reclaim Agip's facility, kill 12 militants, free 27

By Samuel Oyadongha

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YENOGOA — SOLDIERS, yesterday, stormed the Ogboinbiri flowstation in Bayelsa State, killing 12 of the militants who seized the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) facility last Sunday.

Five others were captured alive, while 27 persons held hostage by the militants were freed. Some soldiers were reported dead in the three-hour shoot-out but their number could not be immediately ascertained.

The militants were dislodged from the facility at 8.50 a.m. yesterday. The dislodgement of the militants came soon after the expiration of the 48-hour ultimatum handed down by the Federal Government to the Bayelsa State Government to produce the 11 soldiers trapped at the facility since Sunday, dead of alive.

The ultimatum was passed to Governor Timipre Sylva by the Commander of the Joint Task Force (JTF), Brig. Gen. Lawrence Ndugbane, Tuesday afternoon.

Sources told Vanguard that the soldiers moved into the creek at about 3 a.m. and took position before launching a commando styled operation on the oil facility at exactly 5.45 a.m. and succeeded in dislodging the militants after nearly three hours of gunfight owing to the soldiers' superior fire backed by eight gunboats.

The bodies of 12 militants were recovered when the sound of gunfire ceased with five taken as prisoners of war while others were said to have beaten a retreat into the mangrove swamp with the security forces also recording an unspecified number of casualties who were flown to the Air Force Base in Port Harcourt.

Vanguard gathered that the trapped oil workers, all members of the production crew, were found alive despite the heavy barrage of artillery

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bombardment of the militants' position.

However, none of the soldiers held captive or their bodies had been found at press time while Navy divers were combing the waterways and surrounding mangrove swamp for their bodies.

Contacted, spokesman for the Joint Task Force on the Niger Delta, Major Omale Ochagwuba, confirmed that 12 militants were killed and five captured during the battle to dislodge the invaders. "There was fighting. We dislodged them. They have been flushed out of the place with 12 of the militants killed and five captured."

He was, however, silent on the fate of the soldiers earlier seized by the militants at the facility or the number of military casualties.

Meanwhile, there were conflicting reports about the number of persons trapped at the facility. While the Eni energy giant said only 16 Nigerian oil workers and 11 soldiers were held hostage at the flow station, the army said they found only 11 oil workers there.

"We launched a dawn attack, took over the flow station intact and rescued some hostages. The militants sustained casualties, about 12 of them," said Brigadier-General Lawrence Ngubane, commander of the JTF.

The JTF commander said the casualty figure was preliminary as troops were still "mopping up" the area, located deep in the swamps of Bayelsa State just as tension heightened in Yenagoa as news filtered into town that the dislodged militants were advancing towards the capital city to launch an attack on Government House.

According to the JTF commander, there were no soldiers there when his troops attacked and they found only 11 oil workers on the facility. He did not say how many were freed unharmed.

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