

Pilot killed in helicopter crash

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TRAGEDY struck in Eket, Akwa Ibom State yesterday when a helicopter operated by Bristow Helicopters crashed, killing its pilot.

The late pilot, an expatriate identified as Capt. Brown, was said to be test-flying the helicopter few metres from the Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited (MNPU) in Ibeno area of the state at about 7.45 am in readiness for the days' work when the accident occurred.

The crash brings to three, the number of helicopter crashes the country has recorded in the last one year.

Saturday Champion recalls that an AOS helicopter crashed late last year in Delta State killing three people on board while a military helicopter conveying election materials during the April general election crashed near the Sam Mbakwe Airport, Owerri, killing three military personnel on board.

Director-General of the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Dr Harold Demuren, who confirmed the accident said that officials of the Accident Investigation Prevention Bureau (AIPB) of the authority have been dispatched to the scene of the crash to ascertain its cause.

Describing the accident as unfortunate, Dr Demuren said: "We recorded a crash this afternoon (yesterday) at Eket. One person, a foreign pilot lost his life in the accident.

It was unfortunate, accident investigators and personnel from the NCAA have already moved into the crash site."

The ill-fated helicopter, said to have provided offshore flight services to Mobil before its crash, an eye witness told *Saturday Champion*, however in the air for several minutes before crash landing in an open field few metres from the company's administrative block at QIT, in an attempt to avoid landing on nearby buildings.

Although there was no official statement by Bristow management owners of the helicopter Exxon-Mobil, operators of NNPC/MPN joint venture in Akwa Ibom State has commiserated with the family of the late pilot and Bristow on the unfortunate development.

Mobil also restated its commitment to safety as its priority to the protection of lives and property of its employees. A statement by the organisation which read in part, noted "We acknowledged that on the morning of Friday, August 3, 2007, a Bristow Bell 412 helicopter crashed within the company's QIT terminal.

"Unfortunately, the pilot who was alone during the flight, died from injuries while receiving medical attention. No other injury or damage resulted from the incident.

"Mobil places high priority on safety, and all aircraft providing service for Mobil are required to adhere strictly to company's standard as well as Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) requirement", the statement added.