

Black Friday As Army Chief, Others Die In Plane Crash

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By Our Reporters

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Tragedy struck on Friday when the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Ibrahim Attahiru, died in a plane crash on his way to Kaduna for an official function.

Credible sources said the incident happened about 6pm when a military Beachcraft 350 carrying him went down at the Kaduna International Airport.

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Ten other people, including his principal officers, personal aides and the crew, also died in the crash. They are Brigadier-General MI Abdulkadir; Brigadier-General Olayinka; Brigadier-General Kuliya; Major LA Hayat; Major Hamza; Sergeant Umar; Flt. Lt. TO Asaniyi; Flt. Lt. AA Olufade; Sergeant Adesina and ACM Oyedepo.

Confirming the incident in a statement last night, the Director of Information of the Nigerian Air Force, Air Commodore Edward Gabkwet, said, "An air crash involving a @NigAirForce aircraft occurred this evening near the Kaduna International Airport.

"The immediate cause of the crash is still being ascertained. More details to follow soon," the spokesman noted.

Attahiru was among the service chiefs appointed by President Muhammadu Buhari in January 2021.

A statement last night by the acting Director, Defence Information, Brigadier-General Onyema Nwachukwu reads, "It is with a heavy heart that the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) regrets to announce that this evening, about 1800 hours, the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru, in company of his entourage, who were on official trip from Abuja to Kaduna, were involved in air mishap.

"The unfortunate incident occurred after landing at the Kaduna International Airport due to inclement weather. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Lucky Irabor has, therefore, directed that an Accident Investigation Board be constituted to unravel the immediate and remote causes of the unfortunate accident.

"As we pray for the repose of the souls of our gallant and committed Chief of Army Staff and other personnel on board with him, the AFN solicits the support and understanding of all Nigerians in the face of this tragic incident.

"We wish to state that the Armed Forces of Nigeria remains resolute in combating the security challenges bedevilling our nation. The sacrifices of our dearly departed heroes will not be in vain.

"Meanwhile, the CDS urges all military personnel and their families to take heart and be consoled on this tragic loss. The CDS also reassures all Nigerians of the commitment and loyalty of the Armed Forces of Nigeria to the constitution and government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as it continues to carry out its responsibilities."

I'm shocked – Buhari

President Muhammadu Buhari has expressed shock and sadness over the air crash that claimed the top army general and others.

A statement issued on Friday by his spokesman, Femi Adesina, noted that the crash "is one mortal blow to our underbelly at a time our armed forces are poised to end the security challenges facing the country."

The president, who commiserated with families of the deceased, the military and Nigerians in general, described them as "heroes who paid the ultimate price for peace and security in the land."

Buhari, who prayed that God would receive the souls of the patriots, promised that they would not die in vain.

President briefed

President Buhari last night received briefing from the Minister of Defence, Major-General Bashir Magashi (retd), on the plane crash that occurred in Kaduna.

President Buhari's Personal Assistant on New Media, Bashir Ahmad, confirmed this Friday night on his official twitter handle @BashirAhmaad.

"The Minister of Defence has briefed President @MBuhari on the plane crash that took the life of the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru and others," he tweeted.

The Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Boss Mustapha and Chief of Staff to the President, Professor Ibrahim Gambari, were sighted in the pictures that accompanied the tweet, attending the briefing.

As at the time of filing this report, no statement had been issued on what transpired during the briefing on the ill-fated aircraft of the Nigerian Air Force.

'Ill-fated plane couldn't land at Kaduna Air Force Base'

It was not immediately clear what caused the crash, but an airport staff told one of our correspondents that bad weather, occasioned by heavy rain, which happened in Kaduna, could have contributed to the sad tragedy.

A military source who expressed shock about the incident also said the deceased army chief observed the Juma'at prayer before he hastily embarked on his journey.

"We prayed alongside him in the afternoon. We greeted him; he answered but moved on hastily," he said.

Findings by *Daily Trust* last night indicated that the military plane couldn't land at the Air Force Base in Kaduna, which is supposed to be their designated aerodrome.

However, it was not clear why the crew chose to use the Kaduna Airport runway.

Another source in Kaduna Airport told Daily Trust Saturday that the incident happened after the airport had already closed.

"The crash happened on approach at the Kaduna Airport. I really can't explain what happened and why the pilot chose to use Kaduna Airport runway instead of the Air Force Base. But the Kaduna Airport closes by 6pm. Besides, activities in the airport have not fully resumed due to the recent strike by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), but investigation would reveal what actually happened," the source, who pleaded anonymity, said.

An aviation expert, Captain Alex Nwuba, said the frequency of the crashes involving military plane called for increased collaboration between the military and civil aviation authorities.

However, he said this would depend largely on order from above.

On the ill-fated plane, he said it could be as a result of weather on approach or a navigational problem at the airport.

"We don't know what happened at the moment until investigation is conducted and a preliminary report is released," he added.

Daily Trust Saturday reports that the Air Force operates independently of the civil aviation authorities. It also has its separate radar, distinct from the one operated by the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA).

This is why investigation reports into military plane crashes is never made public.

Tributes

The Nigerian Senate, through the chairman, Senate Committee on Air Force, Senator Bala Ibn Na'Allah, in his condolence message, described the tragedy as "unfortunate."

He said, "While it is saddening and unfortunate, I am greatly diminished by the sad news of the death of a perfect gentleman, Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru and other officers who paid the supreme price in the service of our great country."

The Northern Governors Forum (NGF) also expressed deep shock over the air crash.

The chairman of the Forum and governor of Plateau State, Simon Bako Lalong, in a statement noted that they were distressed over the sad incident, which claimed the lives of the army chief and other officers and men of the Nigerian armed forces who were on an official assignment in the cause of advancing the security and peace of the country.

Lalong said this was another sad day in the history of the country as it had lost patriotic Nigerians who gave their lives to the defence of its territorial integrity, as well as ensuring that its citizens live in peace and security.

He said, "Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru was a committed soldier whose passion for defending Nigeria was very clear throughout his military career even before his appointment as the Chief of Army Staff.

"Since his appointment, we have engaged him as Northern Governors Forum and individually as governors towards enhancing the security and safety of our states, region and the nation at large. Within the few months he held sway, we saw improvements and high resolve to bringing an end to insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and other criminal activities. We had been working on consolidating this before this tragic incident that took his life and that of others working with him. We are highly shocked and pained."

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabiamila, has described as shocking and sad, the death of the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Ibrahim Attahiru and others.

Gbajabiamila said the death of the army chief was unfortunate, especially coming at a time the Nigerian military was finding solutions to the security challenges in

the country.

He said having taken over from the immediate past Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Tukur Buratai a couple of months ago, Attahiru had shown a lot of commitment in tackling the security situation in the country.

Gbajabiamila, who said he had few meetings with Attahiru in search of solutions to the challenges, noted that the late army chief was a core professional officer.

Governor Nasir el-Rufai of Kaduna State said he received with immense sadness, the news of the death of General Attahiru and other senior military officers.

Governor El-Rufai said Lt.Gen. Attahiru was a shining star whose sudden death had robbed Nigeria of an officer striving to bring new drive to secure the country against terrorists and other threats to national security.

The governor said the news of General Attahiru's death left him deeply shaken, with a sense of great personal loss, coming so soon after his appointment had brought immense pride and a sense of hope to the people of Kaduna State.

He prayed to Allah to forgive their shortcomings and grant them eternal rest, and comfort their families.

He was a fine gentleman – Kukasheka

Brigadier-General Usman Kukasheka (retd), who had worked under Lieutenant-General Attahiru said, "I became blank and confused, not wanting to believe that it was true. But as a Muslim, one cannot question Allah's will. I have taken solace in the injunction that Inna lil lah wa Inna ilaihirrajiun (From Allah we came and unto Him, we will go back).

"Words may not suffice to express the heartfelt sorrow for the Chief of Army Staff's passing and these gallant and promising senior military officers.

"I was so devastated because I knew General Attahiru and all the victims of the plane crash. The Chief of Army Staff was once a Director of Army Public Relations. At the same time, I was assistant director and later deputy director, Army Public Relations from 2012-2014. As a matter of fact, he was determined to work with me. He posted me as his chief of staff at the Directorate of Army Public Relations when he was appointed commander, 13 Brigade Nigerian Army. We maintained a cordial relationship till the unfortunate incident.

"There is no doubt that Nigeria has lost one of the best and finest officers in General Attahiru and those principal staff officers, personal staff, the pilots, crew and the gallant soldiers on board," he said.

A former defence correspondent and member of the Daily Trust Editorial Board, Madu Onuorah, said, "I first met Lieutenant- General Attahiru on Monday, February 4, 2013 when, as a newly promoted Brigadier-General, he was posted to the Directorate of Army Public Relations (DAPR) as director.

"He had assumed office, and in his ringing broadcaster's voice, made it clear to defence correspondents thus, "I have an assignment to do here and will "do my best at all times as required by my superiors. With your cooperation, my mandate will be delivered."

Onuorah continued, "It was a new terrain for him, an Infantry Corps Officer deployed to head DAPR. But in a short time, he assembled a crack team of officers and men of the directorate that made immediate difference in how things used to be.

"He led by example. There was no doubting where you stood with him. There were no court jesters telling stories around him or his office. His meetings were businesslike.

"But just a year later, Tuesday, January 7, 2014, General Attahiru was gone. He continued on the journey that brought him to the exalted position as the 21st COAS on January 25, 2021. He moved on, first to be the commanding officer, 146

Battalion in the Bakassi Peninsula; commander, 13 Brigade (Pulo Shield) in the Niger Delta; and General Officer Commanding, 82nd Division, Enugu.

“He then moved to Operation Lafiya Dole as commander, redeployed to Army Headquarters as Deputy Chief of Policy and Plans, then, Chief of Defence Transformation and Innovation, and Chief of Logistics, Defence Headquarters Abuja, before moving to the Army’s perceived pre-retirement base, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) as deputy commander.

“With his appointment as the Chief of Army Staff on January 25, 2021, he moved to make impact on the 17 Corps Training Schools and an NA College of Logistics (NACOL), plus the Nine Divisions of the Nigerian Army, including the leadership of Operation Lafiya Dole and the Brigade commanders.

20 officers died in military crashes in three months

Twenty military personnel have died from crashes involving Nigerian Air Force planes in months. The latest incident involved the Chief of Army Staff, six army officers, and four crew members.

In February, seven people died in a Beechcraft King Air B350i aircraft that crashed near the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja while two crew members were in the NAF Alpha fighter jet that went missing in the North-East Borno State where there was an ongoing counter-insurgency operation in April.

A short stint as army chief

Daily Trust reports that the late Attahiru was appointed Chief of Army Staff on January 26, alongside General Lucky Irabor as Chief of Defence Staff; Air Marshal Oladayo Amao as Chief of Air Staff and Vice Admiral Awwal Zubairu Gambo as Chief of Naval Staff.

General Attahiru was born on August 10, 1966 in Doka, Kaduna North Local Government Area, Kaduna State.

He was the 25th Chief of Army Staff and a graduate of the Nigerian Defence Academy, Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Jaji and Nigerian Army School of Infantry. He commenced cadets training in January 1984 and was commissioned into the rank of Second Lieutenant in December 1986 as an Infantry Officer. He held a masters degree in Strategic Management and Policy Studies from the Nigerian Defence Academy.

Others include Masters of Science in Human Resources Management and Development from Salford University in the United Kingdom and Graduate Diploma in International Studies from the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

General Attahiru has held several appointments on the staff, instructional and in command during his military career. He had a tour of duty with the United Nations in Sierra Leone as a military observer, where he facilitated United Kingdom military engagement, Operation BARASS in September 2000. He was an Operation Officer and later Company Commander in NIBATT 19 ECOMOG Operations in Liberia. Also, he had the unique privilege of having commanded with distinction all through the chain of command in the Nigerian Army.

Prominent among these appointments are Commanding Officer, 146 Battalion, Nigerian Army (Operation HARMONY IV) in the Bakassi Peninsula, Commander 13 Brigade Nigerian Army (Operation PULO SHIELD), General Officer Commanding 82 Division, Nigerian Army. He was a onetime Theatre Commander, Operation Lafiya Dole (the counter terrorism and counter insurgency outfit in northeastern Nigeria). It is on record that he brought relative stability to the region with the surrender of several Boko Haram combatants.

As a staff officer, he was a unit Adjutant, 7 Battalion Nigerian Army, Serti, Chief of Staff, 1 Brigade Nigerian Army Sokoto, General Staff Officer Grade 1 Training/Operations, as well as Staff Duties/Plans at Headquarters 1, 2 and 81 Divisions of the Nigerian Army. He was Deputy Director, Military Secretary 2 at the AHQ MS (A) and onetime Director Army Public Relations and spokesperson of the Nigerian Army. He was later Director Staff Duties and Deputy Chief of Policy and Plans at the Army Headquarters. He was equally privileged to serve as Chief of Defence Transformation and Innovation and Chief of Defence, Logistics at the apex

organ of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, Defence Headquarters, Abuja. In that position, he worked with the US Defence Logistics Agency on the Vertically Integrated Logistics Approach (VILA) Programme towards enhancing the operational readiness in the Armed Forces of Nigeria.

He was an instructor at the Depot Nigerian Army, Nigerian Defence Academy and the Nigerian Army School of Infantry. He was later a Directing Staff and Chief Instructor at the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Jaji, Kaduna.

Idowu Isamotu, Abdullateef Salau, Muideen Olaniyi, Taiwo Adeniyi, Clement Adeyi (Abuja), Abdullateef Aliyu (Lagos), Maryam Ahmadu-Suka & Lami Sadiq (Kaduna)